



by Kimberly Davis

Off the Beaten path

Walking in the Footsteps of Mozart, Brahms and Wagner

Most people know the basics about their favorite composers. Mozart was a genius, Beethoven was deaf, and so on. But not many people get to travel to the offbeat places that made these people who they were.

I recently traveled to Augsburg and Wiesbaden, Germany, to journey in the footsteps of Mozart, Brahms and Wagner. Here, I've shared excerpts from my journal with the hopes that you will someday have the opportunity to travel to these magical places.

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Here we are in Augsburg, Germany, hometown to the original Mozart family. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was not born here, but his father, Leopold, and all known prior family were. Wolfgang did visit here several times, and it is where the Mozart story begins.

The Mozart family can be traced back in Augsburg to 1331. They were uneducated working-class farmers and tradesmen. Wolfgang's grandfather, Johann Georg Mozart, worked here as a bookbinder.

The local Jesuit community began building a new church and college and asked Johann to be the official bookbinder. This was a large, ongoing, well-paying job, which eventually helped to elevate the Mozart family's social status. Johann Mozart read all the schoolbooks as he bound them. As a result, he became the first scholar in the family. His son, Leopold Mozart, was born in 1719.

The child was an exceptional talent and was accepted into the Jesuit school at the age of 5. The Mozart family moved into a home related to the school in

1721. Leopold spent his childhood here studying music, philosophy, science, languages, acting and singing.

When he was 18, Leopold asked to study in Salzburg. It is believed he made the request to avoid having to become a priest.

He was granted the leave, but shortly after he arrived in Salzburg, the bookbinder's son was kicked out of college and went to work for the archbishop as the court composer. He married and had two children: a daughter, Nannerl, and his famous son, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. The rest is history.

Many of the original historic Mozart buildings still exist. You can visit Leopold's birthplace and home, the Jesuit College, performance halls, and the churches that all the family ancestors built, were baptized and married in. Additionally, you can visit many of the performance halls, homes and locations that Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart later visited, performed in and wrote about.

Diehard fans will also recognize Augsburg as the place where Wolfgang's favorite cousin and first love, Basle, lived. Their love letters to each other have made a scandalous mark in the Mozart history.

When Wolfgang was 19, a new archbishop came to Salzburg. He viewed court composers as servants, and therefore would not allow Leopold to travel with his prodigal son anymore. As a result, Leopold was forced to send Wolfgang on tour alone or with his mother.

During my tour, I was read some of the letters between father and son as we stood in the places referred to in the writings. When you read these letters in books, they seem like far-off places, but when you can see everything in front of you, it's completely magical.

It is clear that Leopold was not the mean, demanding father some think, but rather a caring father, friend, teacher and manager. 🎵

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