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In this image released by Mozarthaus Vienna, is a painting by an unknown artist showing Austrian composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in 1803. (AP / Mozarthaus Vienna)

Mozart rules on 250th anniversary of birthday

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Associated Press

SALZBURG, Austria — This cobblestoned and turreted city of his birth is pulling out all the stops to celebrate Mozart's 250th birthday Friday, but Austria isn't the only place that has been seized with Mozart madness.

Symphony orchestras and opera houses worldwide are going through final

rehearsals while radio program directors line up their Mozart CDs. Piano students are polishing pieces for Mozart marathons and puppeteers are preparing for jubilee performances as hundreds of cities across five continents prepare to pay their respects to the musical genius.

For many, Mozart Central will be Salzburg, where he was born on Jan. 27, 1756.

Always a treasure trove for Mozart souvenirs, Salzburg has outdone itself this year. Store shelves are stocked with Mozart beer and wine, Mozart baby bottles, Mozart milkshakes, Mozart knickers and Mozart jigsaw puzzles - along with the usual T-shirts, calendars and coffee mugs.

But on Friday, the music's the thing. Among the most interesting Salzburg offerings: Nikolaus Harnoncourt and the Vienna Philharmonic play Mozart's Piano Concert No. 18, before Riccardo Muti takes to the podium and leads the orchestra - and renowned signers - through their paces in a collage of his works.

Vienna, which claims Mozart in his later years, is staging a new production of his *Idomeneo* in one of the city's three opera houses and reviving *The Magic Flute* in another.

Both cities are offering either musical or culinary tours built around Mozart's works, his favourite restaurants, his friends and enemies, and his approach to art and love.

The immortal Mozart will rule elsewhere as well.

He'll be the focus of a 12-hour Swedish documentary, his works will be performed by orchestras or opera houses in Moscow, Washington, Prague, London, Paris, New York, Tokyo, Caracas, Quito, Havana, Mexico City, Taipei, Budapest and scores of other cities worldwide.

Even Nashville, more famous for country music than Mozart, will tip its hat to Amadeus, with the city's symphony orchestra performing his Piano Concerto No. 21.

And there are hundreds of other offerings.

Many classical radio stations are reprogramming for the day to play only Mozart. Hundreds of marionettes will take to the stage in excerpts of his operas in the German city of Augsburg, where his father was born.

Vienna has set up 50 bright red "Calling Mozart" booths to allow visitors to listen to his works and information about his life and times. It will formally reopen the restored house where he wrote *The Marriage of Figaro*.

Salzburg visitors are advised to watch the calories. Bakers were putting the icing Thursday on a gargantuan birthday cake - about 135 kilograms.

Too much hoopla? Consider this: Mozart wrote his first symphonies before turning 10 and his first significant opera at 12. He was instrumental in changing opera into the form we know and enjoy today.

He was prolific like few others, creating nearly two dozen operas and other stage works and hundreds of solo and orchestral pieces before his death at 35. Other greats like Beethoven and Wagner publicly recognized their debt to him.

There is some comfort, however, for those who feel Mozart mania is out of control - he had his detractors.

Some history books depict his tenure in Salzburg as ending ingloriously in 1781 with a kick in the bottom from a servant of Mozart's patron, the city's imperious archbishop, after Mozart refused to follow orders on how to compose.

But for mezzo-soprano Angelika Kirchschlager, Mozart is "a gift from God" and "the light I orient my life around."

Others describe him in more down-to-earth terms (and his letters certainly reveal an exuberant personality and scatological sense of humour) as they explain why he can reach out even to those normally immune to classical music.

Introduction to Mozart's music

By Martin Steinberg

Mozart composed his first work three days before turning five and wrote his last notes as he lay dying only 30 years later. In all, he wrote at least 626 works, including some of the most beautiful music ever imagined.

His music, written during the days of powdered wigs and ruffled shirts, generally adheres to the highly structured classical style, a musical version of the triangles, rectangles and columns of a Greek temple. Despite the rigid architecture, in which a theme is stated over four measures and then answered during the next four measures, Mozart's music offers great variety and unsurpassed melodies.

A guide to some top selections from Mozart's vast output (the K. numbers are designated by musicologist Ludwig von Koechel's catalogue of Mozart's work):

SOLO PIANO:

-Ah vous dirais-je, Maman, (variations on Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star) K. 265: The piano variations just swirl around the melody, like a time-lapse camera capturing the planets orbiting the sun at rapid clip. So simple, yet so brilliant - like a diamond in the sky. Composed 1781-82 in Vienna at age 25-26.

-Sonata in A, K. 331, 1781-83. A gentle theme breaks into variations, complete with Mozart's inventive embellishments. The Allegretto movement is the famous Alla Turca, a whirling Dervish march that puts you in awe.

-Sonata in C (For Beginners), K. 545, 1788. Its simple first theme seems so elementary, but the sonata is complex. The joyful theme is quickly followed by breathless runs. Then comes a slightly agitated second melody with harp-like runs that flow up and down and lead to a sad minor section before returning to the original melody. But there's so much more.

SYMPHONIES:

-Symphony No. 1 in E flat, K. 16: Composed in 1764 while the eight-year-old boy wonder and his 11-year-old sister were in London with their domineering father and their mother. An amazingly sophisticated composition from someone so young. The harmonic progression of the chords played by the violas and winds in the first movement are quite imaginative.

-Symphony No. 31 in D major, K. 297: Composed in Paris, premiered July 3, 1778, the day his mother died while she was travelling with him. Considered the link between early and late Mozart symphonies.

-Symphony No. 40 in G minor, K. 550: Composed in 1788 in Vienna, this is Mozart's penultimate and perhaps most beloved symphony. The first movement's sadly sweet, rolling melody is passed around the orchestra, its contrasting dynamics vary the degree of angst.

CONCERTOS:

-Concerto in A for Clarinet, K. 622: Composed in Mozart's last year, 1791, in Vienna for fellow Freemason Anton Stadler, a clarinetist. Mozart didn't write for the instrument until late in his life. The concerto contains one of Mozart's most beautiful slow movements. The clarinet melody pours directly out from the heart. Used in the Oscar-winning movie *Out of Africa*.

-Concerto in C for Piano, No. 21, K. 467, 1785, Vienna. That sensuous slow movement provided the theme from the movie *Elvira Madigan*.

CHAMBER MUSIC:

-Eine Kleine Nachtmusik, K. 525, composed in 1787 around the time he was writing his great opera *Don Giovanni*. The serenade was a composition that's not supposed to last. Thankfully, this one did. It's one of Mozart's most popular pieces.

-Quartet in B flat for Strings, Hunt, K. 458, 1784. One of six he dedicated to composer Franz Josef Haydn. During a performance for Haydn, the father of the string quartet declared Mozart "the greatest composer." The quartet's nickname, not Mozart's idea, came from the violins' resemblance to hunting horns in the first movement. The jaunty first theme also conjures the image of a huntsman riding on a cantering horse.

OPERA:

-Voi, che sapete, aria from *Le Nozze di Figaro*, (*The Marriage of Figaro*) K. 492, 1786: The character Cherubino, torn by desire, sings

"what is this yearning burning in me?" in this tale of love and infidelity.

-Deh, vieni alla finestra from "Don Giovanni," K. 527, 1787. The insatiable lover Don Juan serenades his next victim, singing: "Please, come to the window, oh my treasure." What a catchy mandolin accompaniment!

-Der Hoelle Rache aria from Die Zauberfloete (The Magic Flute) K. 620, 1791. In this comedy pitting the forces of light against darkness, the Queen of the Night sings of "the vengeance Hell raging in my heart." Mozart has her reaching stratospheric high Fs.

SACRED:

-Motet in F for Soprano, Exsultate Jubilate, K. 165, 1772: Mozart's Alleluia chorus, a joyous conversation between orchestra and soprano. The soprano sings one word - "Alleluia," high, low; loud, soft; circular, straight; tender, brash.

-Requiem, K. 626: 1791, Vienna: Mozart's final piece, commissioned by a mysterious benefactor. Last three movements completed by Mozart's pupil Franz Xaver Süssmayr. According to the 1808 biography by Franz Xaver Niemetschek, cited by mozartproject.org., Mozart had the uncompleted score brought to him on Dec. 4-5, 1791, and said, "Did I not say I was writing this Requiem for myself?" He died that day.