

Baby Mozart Plays 2nd Violin

One of my favorite Mozart stories is one that took place when he was four or five years old.

Leopold Mozart, Wolfy's father, was one of the most famous musicians in Europe, and associated with many other distinguished musicians of the time including Joseph Haydn, and Luigi Boccherini. One night Leopold and three of his friends assembled for a string quartet evening. In those days, instead of television, people entertained themselves with music; and, in those days, an evening of string quartets, far from being thought of as a taxing intellectual chore, would have been considered the height of luxurious relaxation—you know, four guys sitting around a table, beer steins on the floor at their feet, smoke in the air, gossip galore, and pretty music.

Little Wolfy was fascinated, and desperately wanted to play with the big kids.

"Daddy, can I play? Can I play? Can I play?"

Leopold said, "No, Wolfy this is just for grownups, time for you to go to bed."

"Daddy, I wanna play, I wanna play!"

"No, Wolfy, time for bed."

"Daddy, I wanna play, I wanna play! Waaaaaaah!"

Boccherini leaned over and muttered in Leopold's ear, "Come on, let the kid play. He'll be asleep in 20 minutes and we can get really drunk!"

So, thoroughly dominated by the persistence of youth, Leopold set up a chair behind the second violinist. Wolfy was very, very happy sitting there, his feet dangling, his little quarter-size Suzuki violin (ha ha) under his chin at the ready. His smile was so bright. He was playing the violin just like Daddy!

The quartet began to rehearse a new quartet by Haydn, and practiced uneventfully for 15 or 20 minutes. Then, at one point in the fourth movement, the adult second violin player got lost; but, instead of the expected silence, what should they hear in the background, but Wolfy playing away on his teeny tiny violin, in perfect tune, in perfect rhythm. The guys in the quartet were so impressed by this precocious display they stopped in amazement, and

exclaimed, "Wolfy, this is unbelievable! How can you play so well, so young, and never practiced this music before?"

To which Wolfy replied, "Surely Daddy, you don't have to practice to play second violin!"

Any time we start to get too impressed by our own talent we need to think of Mozart and be humbled.