The stories behind the names

You might see a Picasso painting printed on a T-shirt or hear Mozart’s Piano Sonata music played as a ringtone on a phone, but how much do you know about these artists? Picasso and Mozart were both child geniuses, but with very different stories …

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973)

When Picasso was born in Malaga, Spain in 1881, the midwife thought he was stillborn. Luckily the doctor, who was smoking a cigar, blew some smoke into the baby’s face and Pablo started screaming. Picasso was alive and well, to everyone’s relief!

Pablo Picasso was a born artist and to prove it, his first word was piz, short for lápiz (pencil in Spanish). His father Ruiz, who was an art professor, recognized his son’s talent and taught him from the age of seven. Picasso completed his first painting when he was nine (Le Picador).

Between 1892 and 1897, Picasso studied art in Madrid and Barcelona. His work showed a brilliance and maturity that was years ahead of his classmates, but Picasso was not a good student. He was sick and tired of school, so he didn’t listen to his teachers. As punishment he was put in a room on his own. ‘I took along a sketch pad and drew … ,’ said Picasso later. ‘I could have stayed there forever, drawing without stopping.’
Eventually Picasso left art school and went to Paris, where he met a painter and sculptor called Georges Braque. Picasso began to experiment and through trial and error produced many different styles. One of these styles was Cubism, which grew into an art movement founded by Picasso and Braque. Braque and Picasso used squares and triangles in their paintings and showed the front and side view of people at the same time. Picasso used this technique in his most famous works, such as Les Demoiselles d’Avignon (1907) and Guernica (1937). Many people found the style shocking and controversial, but others recognized his genius.

While he was in Paris, Picasso also made friends with the poet Apollinaire, who sometimes bought stolen paintings. In 1911, when the Mona Lisa was stolen from the Louvre, the police arrested Apollinaire and questioned Picasso. Fortunately, both were released, and the Mona Lisa turned up in Italy two years later.

Picasso enjoyed much success in his life and could pick and choose what he painted, but he never stopped experimenting. That’s why he is known as El Maestro (or the master) of Modern Art.

**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)**

Like Picasso, Mozart was a child genius – he wrote musical notes before he could write words and began composing music when he was only four years old. One day, his father came home from church and found Wolfgang at his desk. There were bits and pieces of paper everywhere and at first his father was angry. Then he realized that the child had written a sonata for the piano. When he commented that it was difficult to play, little Wolfgang replied, ‘not with some practice,’ and began to play the piece himself. Mozart went on to write his first symphony at the age of nine.
The Mozart family were very talented and his sister, Maria Anna, was also a brilliant musician. The family lived in Austria, but the two children and their father toured Europe several times, travelling far and wide. Unfortunately, the children often fell ill. But thanks to his travels, Mozart learned fifteen different languages.

During Mozart’s life, many people admired the beauty and originality of his music. Young Mozart could compose anything, anywhere – during meals, while talking to friends, or while travelling on a coach. He composed very quickly and wrote huge amounts of music – more than 600 pieces in all, including symphonies, piano concertos and Eine Kleine Nachtmusik. He also gave music lessons and played at concerts. But despite this hard work and dedication his life had many ups and downs. Mozart spent money faster than he made it. He loved the high life, including fancy clothes and servants and was often anxious about his finances.

In July 1791, a stranger wearing dark clothes and a hood came to Mozart’s house, asking him to compose a Requiem or a Mass for the Dead. Mozart was ill, but needed the money, so he agreed to do the work. As Mozart composed the piece, he had a vision that he was writing music for his own funeral. In fact, he died before the Requiem was finished. Mozart was 35 years old and had so little money that he was buried in an unmarked grave.