

A tribute to a physics genius inspired by Mozart

By Steve Siegel

Special to The Morning Call

Folklore tells us that the seeds of Albert Einstein's genius were planted early.

At age 5, while ill in bed, his father gave him a pocket compass. A year later he was given a violin, and started music lessons. The compass provided the intellectual stimulus that would revolutionize scientific thought; through the violin, he discovered the beauty of Mozart.

Einstein's love of Mozart, and the inspiration it provided him, is the theme behind "Einstein's Mozart: Two Geniuses" by Kate Light. The composition — an integration of two of Mozart's great string works with the narration of Light's original poetry and prose — will be performed today at the Zoellner Arts Center by the Serafin String Quartet, with Light as narrator.

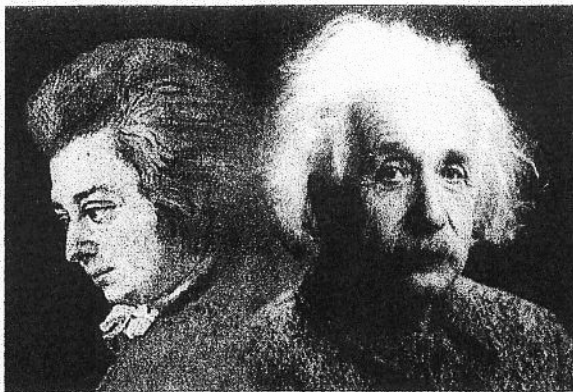
"Einstein's Mozart" was commissioned by the Colorado Chamber Players in 2006 to celebrate the convergence of the centenary of Einstein's "Miracle Year" of 1905 and Mozart's 250th birthday.

Light is the author of three volumes of poetry and has been featured on Garrison Keillor's "Writer's Almanac."

Paul Salerni, chairman of the Lehigh University music department, first met Light at a poetry convention in West Chester, where some of his compositions were performed. Light subsequently sent Salerni some of her recordings, one of which was "Einstein's Mozart."

"One of Lehigh's mantras of existence is to be interdisciplinary, and I thought here is a wonderful example of how music and science can be one together — I thought it was a wonderful idea," Salerni says.

While a link between Einstein and Mozart may not be immediately obvious, Light's skill as a researcher confirms that the lives and creative spirits of these men have much in common. The fact that Light is also a



Contributed photo

EINSTEIN, right, discovered the mathematical nature of music through Mozart, calling it 'the inner beauty of the universe.'

professional violinist, and has been a member of the New York City Opera Orchestra for 25 years, provided insight into the sensibility of a musical connection between the two geniuses.

"I knew very little about Einstein when I started to work on the piece," says Light. "But so much has been written about him these last few years, that we know more about him than ever before. I became fascinated with his creativity, his humor. There were so many angles — if I became overwhelmed with one aspect of his life, I could take a break and read about another."

Light discovered that both Mozart and Einstein shared uneasy relationships with fame, seemed incapable in their early years to get or keep jobs, and spent much of their lives in a social vacuum. Einstein worked entirely on his own before 1905, having few links to the contemporary body of physics.

For years Mozart's reluctant employer, the Archbishop of Salzburg, kept him socially isolated from his courtiers, treating him as a menial and forcing him to eat with the servants.

Yet both tapped into personal wells of creativity far beyond their times, and left us with something both miraculous and human. "He viewed science as a creative act," says Light of Einstein.

Through Mozart, Einstein discovered the mathe-

matical nature of music, calling it "the inner beauty of the universe." In later years the violin not only became something of a personal hallmark, but a tool for inspiration, and psychological safety valve.

The text of Light's poetry focuses on five monumental papers Einstein published in 1905, his "annus mirabilis." Any one of the five — three of which were published in the single famous Volume 17 of "Annalen der Physik" — would have won him a place in the textbooks. The topics include an explanation of the photoelectric effect, a discussion of Brownian motion, the nature of time and space, and the dynamics of individual moving bodies.

The last two form the basis for the Special Theory of Relativity. Light's genius is her ability to present in clear verse a subject considered perverse in its time, and one that remains formidable: "Though Newton's mechanics til now have been fine;/ there are several old laws that I must redefine./ You see, time is subjective,/ and space needs perspective;/ not even a measure of length stays in line."

"Einstein's Mozart" may be viewed as a double portrait, where Einstein's genius is expressed through the text, and Mozart's through the music itself.

While the text never changes, the musical selections do. "It was always my

'EINSTEIN'S MOZART: TWO GENIUSES'

■ **What:** An integration of two of Mozart's great string works with narration of original poetry and prose by poet Kate Light

■ **When:** 3 p.m. today

■ **Where:** **Kate Light**
Zoellner Arts Center, Lehigh University, 420 E. Packer Ave., Bethlehem

■ **Tickets:** \$9

■ **What else:** Light will give a pre-concert talk at 2 p.m.

■ **Parking:** Free in attached parking deck

■ **Info:** 610-758-2787, www.zoellnerartscenter.org



idea that the piece could be done with any Mozart repertoire," says Light. "It's great for the ensembles, since they can decide what to play."

For this performance, the Serafin String Quartet, Lehigh University's ensemble-in-residence, has selected the Mozart works. The piece alternates text with movements of the music in two parts. The first part comprises a poetic recasting of Einstein's early creative life and his "miracle year," interwoven with a performance of the String Quartet No. 14, K 387.

Following intermission, the text focuses on Einstein as philosopher and Mozart both as a young prodigy and mature artist, interwoven with the String Quartet No. 16, K 428. Both quartets are from a set of six composed in honor of Joseph Haydn. They are considered to contain some of Mozart's most memorable writing and refined compositional thought.

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