

Music to your eyes

GEORGE BARANY MIXES MUSIC AND CHEMISTRY IN *NEW YORK TIMES* CROSSWORD

By Deane Morrison

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Warning: This article reveals answers to the *New York Times* Sunday crossword that will be reprinted this weekend in the *Star Tribune* and *Pioneer Press*, among other newspapers.

Just before Thanksgiving, George Barany got an urgent message from his young friend Michael Shteyman. Mozart's 250th birthday was coming up January 27, 2006, and Shteyman urged Barany to collaborate on a *New York Times* crossword puzzle to commemorate the occasion. Barany, a University chemistry professor and classical music buff, had worked on puzzles before with Shteyman, a recent graduate of Johns Hopkins University and already an author of some 30 *Times* crosswords.



George Barany and his *New York Times* crossword puzzle.

Photo by Patrick O'Leary

Intrigued by the idea, Barany accepted. In consultation with puzzle editor Will Shortz, the pair scrambled to create a Mozart-themed Sunday puzzle in time for the big birthday. They succeeded, and the *Times* ran the puzzle, titled "The Sound of Music," January 22. It will appear in the *Star Tribune* and *Pioneer Press*, among other newspapers, this Sunday (January 29).

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If you're a puzzle-doer, you know that the theme to the Sunday *Times* crossword must be embedded in at least six clues. But Barany and Shteyman were not content to give ordinary clues about well-known Mozart facts. Instead, they researched the composer's life in order to craft clues whose answers would inform even knowledgeable music fans and puzzle-doers. Also, Barany and Shteyman never named Mozart; instead, they referred to him throughout as "Mystery Person" and spelled out "Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart" in 21 circled answer spaces. It was an intense undertaking, but, according to Barany, well worth the effort.

"We included some fun facts that will make people smile," Barany says. "It was a real joy to do, but nerve-wracking because we could have ended up in a corner where the words just didn't work out. When you put in this much work, you don't want to risk wasting your time."

Besides the obvious constraints of getting answers to interconnect and working in the theme, puzzle creators must not use any cross words.

"You can't put in things with strongly unpleasant connotations that will depress people," Barany explains. References to chemistry are fine, though, and the Barany-Shteyman puzzle includes several clues to chemistry-related words. Also, one answer happens to be the first name of Shteyman's sister, and Shortz--fortuitously--rewrote one clue to contain the first name of Barany's brother.

But the main event is Mozart, so without further ado, here are the six Mozart-themed clues. Answers appear at the bottom of this article. All require 21 letters.

1. As a toddler visiting a farm, Mystery Person heard a pig squeal and ...
2. After a single hearing of a sacred piece in the Sistine Chapel, Mystery Person ...

3. Mystery Person once composed a piano piece that, to be performed correctly, required the ...
4. Mystery Person would sometimes compose symphonies ...
5. Scholars believe that "A Musical Joke" by Mystery Person was ...
6. Mystery Person once wrote a waltz in which the choice of measures played was determined ...

Response to the puzzle has been enthusiastic. Many people logging into a puzzle commentary site have praised it for its cleverness and its choice of interesting tidbits that illuminate Mozart's character and abilities. Others have taken issue with the validity of some clues, but, says Barany, he was able to refute the critics. Praise from friends is pouring in, including a kudos from University chemistry department chair and crossword whiz Jeffrey Roberts. One fan even produced an [animation](#) of the puzzle: be warned that it also contains all the answers.

This triumph doesn't spell the end of Barany's puzzle-writing. He and Shteyman already have another one ready for a Thursday *New York Times*. In puzzle tradition, the crosswords appearing on Sunday and Thursday are roughly equivalent in difficulty, but the Thursday editions are shorter-15 squares to a side versus 21 on Sundays. Of course, the equivalence in the difficulty is on the part of the solver, not the creator. With 441 instead of 225 squares to deal with, the Sunday crossword presents the granddaddy of challenges to construct.

OK, ready or not, here are the answers to the clues:

1. Identified it as a G sharp
2. Wrote it down from memory
3. Use of two hands and a nose
4. While playing billiards
5. A requiem for his pet bird
6. By the rolling of two dice