Citation:

Printed: Fri, 30 Oct 2026

Edge, Dexter. 2014. "A report on the limitation of operatic encores in the court theaters (10 May 1786)." In: *Mozart: New Documents*, edited by Dexter Edge and David Black. First published 12 Jun 2014; updated 16 Jun 2022. [direct link]

A report on the limitation of operatic encores in the court theaters (10 May 1786)

Dexter Edge

***Mannheimer Zeitung*, no. 61, Mon, 22 May 1786**

[253]

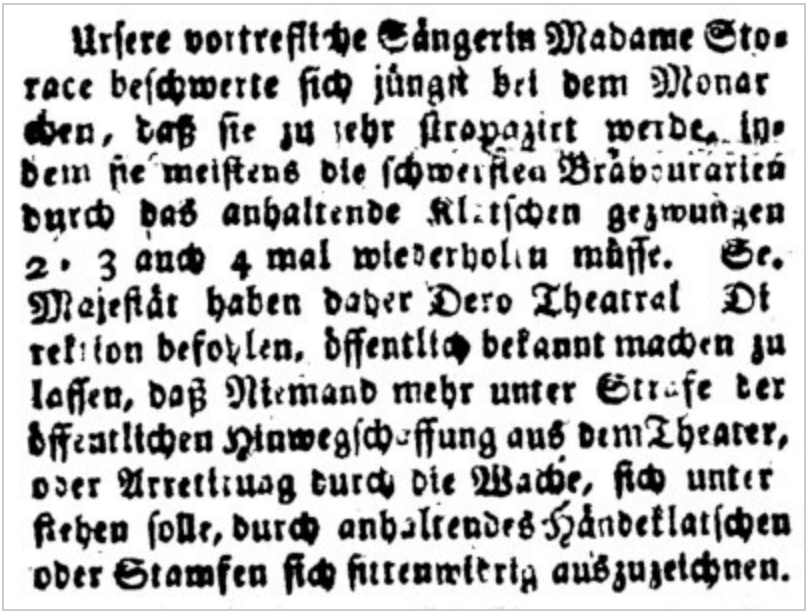
Wien, den 10. Wonnem.

[...]



Unsere vortrefliche Sängerin Madame Sto=
race beschwerte sich jüngst bei dem Monar
chen, daß sie zu sehr strapazirt werde, in=
dem sie meistens die schwersten Bravourarien
durch das anhaltende Klatschen gezwungen
2, 3 auch 4 mal wiederholen müsse. Sr.
Majestät haben daher Dero Theatral Di
rektion befohlen, öffentlich bekannt machen zu
lassen, daß Niemand mehr unter Strafe der
öffentlichen Hinwegschaffung aus dem Theater,
oder Arretiru[ng] durch die Wache, sich unter
stehen solle, durch anhaltendes Händeklatschen
oder Stamfen sich sittenwidrig auszuzeichnen.

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Unſere vortrefliche Sängerin Madame Storace beſchwerte ſich jüngſt bei dem Monarchen, daß ſie zu ſehr ſtrapazirt werde, indem ſie meiſtens die ſchwerſten Bravourarien durch das anhaltende Klatſchen gezwungen 2. 3 auch 4 mal wiederholen müſſe. Se. Majeſtät haben daher Dero Theatral Direktion befohlen, öffentlich bekannt machen zu laſſen, daß Niemand mehr unter Strafe der öffentlichen Hinwegſchaffung aus dem Theater, oder Arretirung durch die Wache, ſich unterſtehen ſolle, durch anhaltendes Händeklatſchen oder Stampfen ſich ſitrenwidrig auszuzeichnen.

[translation:]

Vienna, 10 May.

[...]

Our excellent singer Madame Storace recently complained to the Monarch that she was overtaxed, in that she was usually forced by persistent applause to have to repeat the most difficult bravura arias 2, 3, even 4 times. His Majesty therefore ordered the Directorate of the Theater to make publicly known that no one, under punishment of public removal from the theater or arrest by the watch, shall dare to make themselves improperly conspicuous by persistent hand-clapping or stamping.

Commentary

It has long been known that in May 1786 Emperor Joseph II declared a ban on encores of operatic ensembles in the court theaters. On 9 May 1786 he wrote to the director of the court theaters Count Orsini-Rosenberg:

> Um die Dauerzeit der Opern nicht allzuweit erstrecken, dennoch aber den von den Opernsängern in der Wiederholung der Singstücken offt suchenden Ruhm nicht kränken zu lassen, find ich nebengehende Nachricht an das Publicum (daß kein aus mehr als einer Singstimme bestehendes Stück widerholt werden soll) das schicksamste Mittel zu seyn. Sie werden daher solche einigen Anschlagszetteln beydrucken lassen. Das nemliche ist auch

> nachher bey den deutschen Singspielen zu beobachten, und daher auch dort bekannt zu machen. [*Dokumente*, 241]
>
> In order that the duration of operas not be overly extended, and yet so as not to disturb the adulation that the opera singers often seek in the encores of vocal numbers, I find the accompanying public announcement (that no number with more than a single voice shall be repeated) to be the most appropriate means. You will therefore have this printed on some playbills. The same is henceforth also to be observed by the German singspiel, and also to be made known there.

Such a notice appeared, for example, on a playbill for a performance of Cimarosa’s *L’italiana in Londra* on 12 May 1786:

> NB. Es wird Jedermann zu wissen gemacht, daß von nun an, um die für die Singspiele bestimmte Dauerzeit nicht zu überschreiten, kein aus mehr als einer Singstimme bestehendes Stück mehr wird wiederholt werden. [*Dokumente*, 241]
>
> NB. To everyone is made known that from now on, in order that the specified duration of the singspiel not be exceeded, no number for more than a single voice will be repeated.

It has generally been assumed that this policy was promulgated in reaction to an excessive number of encores in *Figaro*; in fact, the writer of the review of *Figaro* published in the *Realzeitung* on 11 Jul 1786 makes precisely this point (*Dokumente*, 244; for the original of this passage in that review and a translation, see the entry for 3 May 1786).

Le nozze di Figaro was premiered on 1 May 1786, and performed again on 3 May and 8 May (the evening before Joseph’s memo to Rosenberg). The only other opera that had been performed since *Figaro*’s premiere was Martín y Soler’s *Il burbero di buon cuore* on 5 May. In fact, the July review in the *Realzeitung* specifies that the new policy was a direct response to the encores at the third performance of *Figaro* on 8 May. Thus it seems nearly certain that Joseph’s memo was written in reaction to *Figaro* (which was, if performed uncut, already a relatively long opera for the time).

This newly uncovered report from the *Mannheimer Zeitung* is dated the day after Joseph’s memo, 10 May. The report adds the detail that soprano Nancy Storace (who created the role of Susanna in the first production of *Figaro*) had complained to Joseph ("the monarch”) that she was quite overtaxed (“stropazirt” = strapaziert) by having to repeat the most difficult bravura arias 2, 3, or 4 times because of persistent applause. The report also specifies the penalties for anyone in the audience who applauds persistently or stamps their feet: that they will be ejected from the theater or arrested by the watch.

“Wonnemonat” in the dateline of this item is an obsolete name for the month of May.

Notes (⇧)

This document does not refer directly to Mozart or *Le nozze di Figaro*, and cannot be found on Google Books with a search on "Mozart" (in any spelling) or any of the words in the title, nor can it be found with a search on "Storace" (probably because the name is split across a line break in the original). The document was found by paging through the scan of the volume "by hand."

Credit: DE

Author: Dexter Edge

Link(s): Google Books; BSB

Search Term: NA [item found by inspection]

Source Library: BSB, 4 Eph.pol. 65-1786

Categories: Reception

First Published: Thu, 12 Jun 2014

Updated: Thu, 16 Jun 2022

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