Citation:

Printed: Fri, 13 Nov 2026

Edge, Dexter. 2015. "*Figaro* in Lübeck (spurious document) (18 May 1788)." In: *Mozart: New Documents*, edited by Dexter Edge and David Black. First published 21 Jul 2015; updated 10 Sep 2022. [direct link]

Figaro in Lübeck (spurious document) (18 May 1788)

Dexter Edge

Christian August Bertram, *Annalen des Theaters*. Fünftes Heft

[18]

III.
Nachrichten
von der Großmannischen Gesellschaft. *[...]*

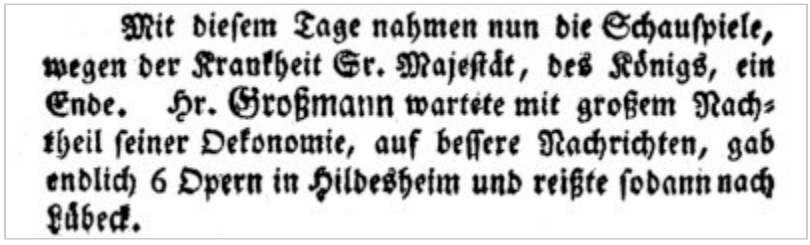
[...]



III.
Nachrichten
von der Großmannischen Gesellschaft. *)

[26, following the listing for 19 Nov 1788]

Mit diesem Tage nahmen nun die Schauspiele, wegen der Krankheit Sr. Majestät, des Königs, ein Ende. Hr. Großmann wartete mit großem Nach= theil seiner Oekonomie, auf bessere Nachrichten, gab endlich 6 Opern in Hildesheim und reißte sodann nach Lübeck.



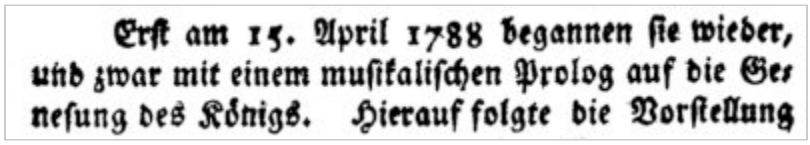
Mit dieſem Tage nahmen nun die Schauſpiele, wegen der Krankheit Sr. Majeſtät, des Königs, ein Ende. Hr. Großmann wartete mit großem Nach= theil ſeiner Oekonomie, auf beſſere Nachrichten, gab endlich 6 Opern in Hildesheim und reißte ſodann nach Lübeck.

[27]

Erst am 15. April 1788 [*sic*] begannen sie wieder,

Mozart: New Documents by Dexter Edge & David Black
is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

und zwar mit einem musikalischen Prolog auf die Ge=
nesung des Königs. *[...]*


Erſt am 15. April 1788 begannen ſie wieder,
und zwar mit einem muſikaliſchen Prolog auf die Ge=
neſung des Königs. Hierauf folgte die Vorſtellung

[29] [...]

Den 18. [May] Figa=


ſine. Den 15. König Theodor, O. Den 18. Figa:

[30]

ro, O. vom Fräulein von Knigge überſetzt. *[...]*


ro, O. vom Fräulein von Knigge überſetzt. Den

[translation:]

III.
News
of the Großmann Company *[...]*

On this day the plays came to an end, on account of the illness of His Majesty the King. Herr Großmann waited for better news, to the great disadvantage of his finances, finally gave 6 operas in Hildesheim and thereupon traveled to Lübeck.

Only on 15 April 1788 *[sic]* did they begin again, and indeed with a musical prologue on the recovery of the King. *[...]*

[...] 18 [May] *Figaro*,
Opera, translated by Fräulein von Knigge.

Commentary

On page 277 of *Dokumente*, in the section devoted to 1788, Otto Erich Deutsch writes:

> Am 18. Mai wird der *Figaro* von der Truppe Großmann in Lübeck deutsch aufgeführt.
>
> On 18 May, *Figaro* was performed in German in Lübeck by the Großmann troupe.

Rather uncharacteristically (for he often gives the dates for local premieres of Mozart's operas without citing a source), Deutsch provides a detailed reference: *Annalen des Theaters*, Berlin 1790, Heft 5, 29f. He also notes that the German translation used in the performance is attributed in the *Annalen* to the daughter of Adolph Freiherr Knigge (1752–1796), editor of the *Dramaturgische Blätter*, published in Hannover; and he cites Knigge's long article on *Figaro* in the *Dramaturgische Blätter* on the occasion of the opera's Hannover premiere in 1789, in which Knigge clarifies that his daughter had translated the opera's dialogue directly from Beaumarchais' original play, but that Knigge himself had translated the aria texts.

The alleged premiere of Mozart's *Figaro* in Lübeck on 18 May 1788 has subsequently been cited many times in the secondary literature on Mozart and in other reference works. For example, Tim Carter, in his Cambridge Opera Handbook on *Figaro*, writes: "The first recorded performance of Knigge's translation is at Lübeck on 18 May 1788" (Carter 1987, 158, note 9). And Ulrich Konrad, in his commentary to the copy of Knigge's *Dramaturgische Blätter* described in the catalog of the 1991 exhibition on Mozart's library, writes that the report in the *Dramaturgische Blätter* refers to the "Aufführung der *Hochzeit des Figaro* in Lübeck am 18. Mai d. J." ("the performance of *Die Hochzeit des Figaro* in Lübeck on 18 May of that year", Konrad & Staehelin 1991, 114; "that year" refers in this context to 1789; as we shall see, Konrad's year is correct but the city is wrong).

However, the Lübeck premiere of *Figaro* on 18 May 1788 is a phantom: no such performance took place. The notion of a Lübeck premiere on that date arose from a typographical error in the *Annalen* ("1788" for "1789") and Deutsch's misreading of the surrounding context. The performance referred to in the *Annalen* is actually the premiere of *Figaro* in **Hannover** by the Großmann troupe on 18 May **1789**, using the translation by Knigge and his daughter.

The passage referring to *Figaro* comes in the middle of a long article on the Großmann troupe, covering pages 18 to 45 of Heft 5 of the *Annalen* (the article is signed "Friedr. Müller"); this article is, in turn, the continuation of a report on Großmann's troupe in Heft 2. The portion of the report in Heft 5 covers the activities of the Großmann troupe from Jul 1788 to 30 Dec 1789.

When one reads the article from the beginning, it is clear from the context that the performance on 19 Nov 1788 mentioned on page 26, just prior to the first paragraph transcribed above, took place in Hannover (it was a performance of the opera *Die Schule der Eifersucht*, a translation of Salieri's *La scuola de' gelosi*). The article continues:

> On this day [19 Nov] the plays came to an end, on account of the illnes of His Majesty the King. Herr Großmann waited for better news, to the great disadvantage of his finances, finally gave 6 operas in Hildesheim and thereupon traveled to Lübeck

The reference here is to the British King George III. Though born in London and raised entirely in England, George was also by birth Elector of Hannover, and thus titular if non-resident ruler. King George fell ill toward the end of Oct 1788, and in early November became agitated and often incoherent. This was the first acute attack of what became known as the "King's Malady"—formerly thought (incorrectly) to be porphyria, but more likely to have been bipolar disorder. (On the "King's Malady," see Roberts 2022, Chapter 22 and *passim*; see also the *Notes* below.) Throughout December and January he alternated between brief moments of lucidity and episodes of agitation and even violence during which he was sometimes straightjacketed. The King's condition began to improve in February, and he soon appeared to be recovered. Although he seems never to have visited Hannover, his severe illness was seen as sufficient reason to halt theatrical performances there, which resumed only in Apr 1789 after the king's recovery.

The history of Großmann's company during this period is given only partially in the *Annalen*; it is given in more detail in Knigge's *Dramaturgische Blätter*, likely based on information received directly from Großmann himself or members of his company. At the end of issue 11 of the *Dramaturgische Blätter*, published on 13 Dec 1788, we read:

> Nachricht.
> Da die Schauspiele hier noch immer einge=
> stellt bleiben; so ist Herr Großmann mit seiner
> Gesellschaft den 6ten dieses Monaths nach Hil=
> desheim gereist, und wird drey Wochen hindurch
> dort Vorstellungen von Singespielen geben.
> [*Dramaturgische Blätter* (Knigge), 11. Stück, 176]
>
> Announcement.
> Because the theater here [meaning Hannover] still
> remains closed, Herr Großmann has traveled with
> his company to Hildesheim on the 6th of this month
> [i.e. 6 Dec 1788], and will give performances of
> Singspiels there for three weeks.

A follow-up announcement is printed in issue 13 (10 Jan 1789, 207–8):

> Nachricht.
> **Herr Großmann** hat sich mit seiner Ge=
> sellschaft bis zum 17ten December in Hildesheim
> aufgehalten, und da sich hier in Hannover noch
> keine sichre [*sic*] Aufsicht zu Wieder=Eröfnung der
> Bühne zeigte; so ist er den 23sten mit den sämt=
> lichen Mitgliedern seines Theaters nach Lübeck
> gereist.
>
> Announcement.
> **Herr Großmann** and his company stayed
> in Hildesheim until 17 December, and because

> here in Hannover there was no clear prospect of a reopening of the stage, he therefore traveled with all the members of his theater to Lübeck on the 23rd.

From a "Tagebuch" (diary) for the Großmann company printed in issue 15 of the *Dramaturgische Blätter* (24 Jan 1789, 225), we learn that Großmann decided to leave Hildesheim after his fifth performance on 15 Dec 1788 because of the severe cold weather:

> Bey diesen Vorstellungen ist nichts zu be= merken, als daß die reichsstädtischen Musici den kalten Feldzug nicht aushalten konnten, bey der zweyten Probe schon das Gewehr streckten, nach ihren Häusern und Oefen eilten, und man sich also genöthigt sah, die Opern mit fünf Instru= menten aufzuführen.
>
> Of these performances nothing needs to be said except that the musicians of the imperial city [Hildesheim] could not sustain the cold campaign, surrendered their arms already at the second rehearsal, hurried to their houses and ovens, and it was found necessary to perform the operas with five instruments.

Thus on his return to Hannover from frigid Hildesheim, Großmann found no encouraging news from London regarding the king's health, so he decided to take his company to Lübeck, where they arrived at the end of December.

It was his company's first engagement in that city. They opened on 7 Jan 1789 with Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, the Lübeck premiere of that opera. The diary of the Großmann company printed in the *Dramaturgische Blätter* continues with a long report on *Entführung*, which is said not to have been a great success in Lübeck because the orchestra—with some notable exceptions (including two of Großmann's actors helping out in the orchestra)—was not up to the challenges of Mozart's difficult score. Deutsch gives this report from the *Dramaturgische Blätter* complete (*Dokumente*, 292).

Yet another theater periodical, the *Neues Theater-Journal für Deutschland* (Heft 2, 1789, 90–95), gives the complete *Spielplan* for Großmann's company from 23 Jul 1788 to 30 Dec 1789. There we see that Großmann gave a second performance of *Entführung* in Lübeck on 3 Apr 1789. The company gave its final performance in Lübeck on 10 Apr (Good Friday), Carl Heinrich Graun's oratorio *Der Tod Jesu*. They arrived back in Hannover on 13 Apr, and opened their season there on 15 Apr with a musical prologue celebrating the king's recovery, followed the next day by a performance of *Im Trüben ist gut fischen*, a German version of Sarti's *Fra i due litiganti il terzo gode*. The company performed Mozart's *Figaro* on 18 May 1789, in the German translation by

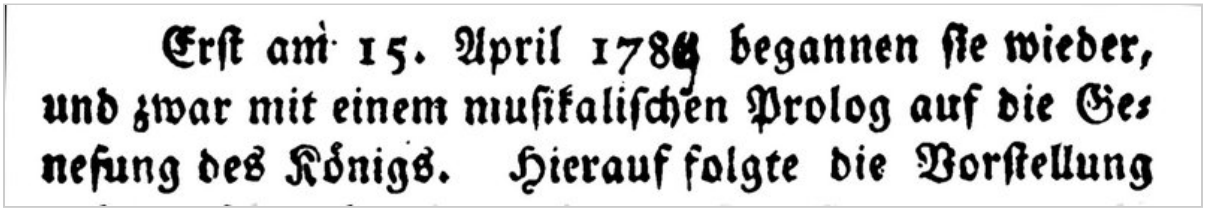
Knigge and his daughter. It was the Hannover premiere of the opera, its first performance by Großmann's company, and almost certainly the first performance of the Knigges' translation. The opera was given a very long write-up across two issues of Knigge's own *Dramaturgische Blätter* (issues 31 and 32), including a detailed discussion by Knigge of the drama and translation, and a discussion of the music, signed by "W." (probably Bernhard Anselm Weber). This long report on *Figaro* in Knigge's journal is given essentially complete by Deutsch (*Dokumente*, 301–3).

It is easy to misunderstand the relevant passage referring to the Hannover performance of *Figaro* in the *Annalen des Theaters*, particularly if it is not read in the wider context of the article as a whole and in the context of other reports on the Großmann company at that time. Großmann's performances in Hildesheim and Lübeck are not listed in the *Annalen*, and the narrative of the report resumes at the top of page 27 of that issue with the company's return to Hannover—although (crucially for the history of the error in the Mozart literature) the name of the city is not repeated (it had last been mentioned on page 25). It was assumed that the reader would gather it from the context:

> Erst am 15. April 1788 [*sic*] begannen sie wieder, und zwar mit einem musikalischen Prolog auf die Genesung des Königs. [...]
>
> Only on 15 April 1788 [*sic*, *recte* 1789] did they [namely, the "Schauspiele" in Hannover] begin again, and indeed with a musical prologue on the recovery of the king [...]

All of the subsequent performances listed on page 27 and subsequent pages of the *Annalen* took place in Hannover in 1789, including the performance of Mozart's *Figaro* on 18 May, mentioned at the bottom of page 29 and the top of page 30.

That the "1788" printed at the top of page 27 in the *Annalen* was a typographical error was recognized already by a reader of the exemplar (now in SBB) that was used for the facsimile edition published in the series *Das deutsche Theater des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Kraus Reprint), edited by Reinhart Meyer, and available digitally through the Hathi Trust. In that exemplar, the final "8" in "1788" is corrected by hand to "9."


Erſt am 15. April 1789 begannen ſie wieder,
und zwar mit einem muſikaliſchen Prolog auf die Ge-
neſung des Königs. Hierauf folgte die Vorſtellung

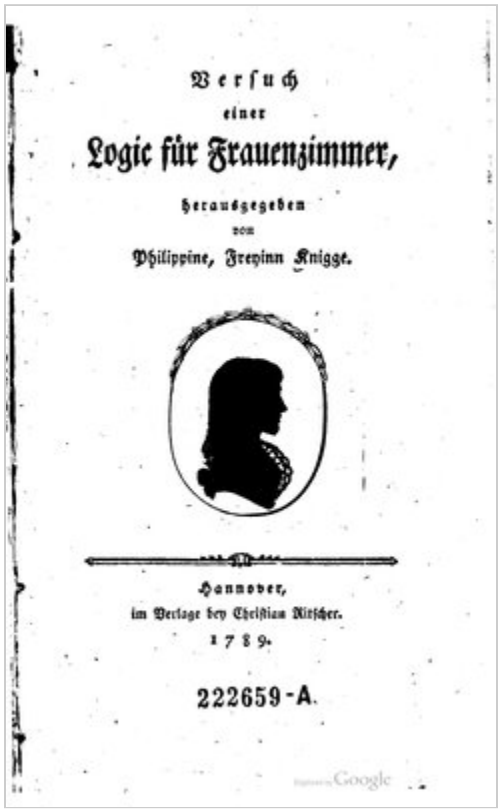
Notes (⇧)

Although the name of the German city and state is sometimes spelled "Hanover" in English-language contexts (and the "House of Hanover" is always spelled thus), we have retained the standard German

spelling here, "Hannover." The best recent discussion of the "King's Malady" is Roberts (2022). In an Appendix, "The Misdiagnosis of 'The King's Malady' as Porphyria" (677–80), Roberts demolishes the case put forward in the 1960s by Ida Macalpine and Richard Hunter that King George suffered from porphyria, an inherited illness not known to have occurred elsewhere in George's family. The King's symptoms, which were recorded in great detail at the time by doctors and members of the court (including Fanny Burney), seem consistent with bipolar disorder.

The *Annalen des Theaters* was one of several theater journals edited by Christian August Bertram (1751–1830, from 1790 "von Bertram"). There is little biographical information on Bertram; he is described in the name authority file for the Kalliope-Verbund as "Journalist, Sekretär, Geheimrat, 1790 in den Freiherrnstand erhoben." Other journals edited by Bertram include the *Litteratur und Theaterzeitung*, a weekly that appeared from 1778 to 1784, and the *Ephemeriden der Litteratur und des Theaters*, a weekly that appeared from 1785 to 1787. The *Annalen des Theaters* appeared biannually in 20 "Hefte" (books) between 1788 and 1797.

Adolph Franz Friedrich Ludwig Freiherr Knigge (1752-1796; en.wikipedia, de.wikipedia) was a writer, journalist, critic, and sometime composer, remembered today as a significant figure in the German Enlightenment. (The current consensus seems to be that his name should not include "von," which he himself did not use; his title was hereditary.) His daughter Philippine Auguste Amalie von Reden, née Freiin Knigge (1775–1841), was also an author, whose works include *Versuch einer Logic für Frauenzimmer* (1789). (Her name is given, apparently incorrectly, in *Dokumente*, 277, as "Philippine Eregine v. Knigge.")


Versuch
einer
Logic für Frauenzimmer,
herausgegeben
von
Philippine, Freyinn Knigge.
Hannover,
im Verlage bey Christian Ritscher.
1789.
222659-A.
Digitized by Google

Philippine Freiin Knigge, *Versuch einer Logic für Frauenzimmer*, title page.

Deutsch's principal source (often uncredited) for the dates of local premieres of Mozart's operas seems to have been Loewenberg's *Annals of Opera* (Deutsch used the original 1943 edition). On page 277 of *Dokumente*, Deutsch notes that Loewenberg does not list the premiere of *Figaro* in Lübeck, which Deutsch may have believed was his own "discovery" (he cites no other secondary source for it). Loewenberg (1978, col. 425) correctly lists the Hannover premiere of *Figaro* on 18 May 1789, and quotes a short passage from Knigge's long article in *Dramaturgische Blätter* clarifying the division of labor in the translation between Knigge and his daughter. He does not list a Lübeck premiere of *Figaro* on 18 May 1788 because no such performance took place.

Although Joseph Wolter's book on Großmann is unusually faulty in many respects (including many errors in his comprehensive *Spielplan* for Großmann's company), his chronology of Großmann's life gives reasonably correct locations and dates for Großmann's company during the period of interest here, 1788 and 1789 (Wolter 1901, first appendix, iii–iv). Wolter's chronology shows that Großmann's engagement in Lübeck in the first months of 1789 was the company's first in that city. Wolter's work on Großmann has been thoroughly superseded by Rüppel (2010), a much better researched and more reliable source, although unfortunately it does not include a corrected *Spielplan* for Großmann's company. Rüppel's discussion of the illness of King George, the closing of the theater in Hannover, and the company's sojourn in Hildesheim is on pp. 407–9; his discussion of the engagement in Lübeck is on pp. 410–17.

The error regarding the phantom Lübeck premiere of *Figaro* was uncovered through a systematic page-by-page survey of the digitized copies of the *Annalen des Theaters*, not through the use of search terms.

In his commentary to his statement on the alleged Lübeck premiere of *Figaro* (*Dokumente*, 277), Deutsch incorrectly gives the date of the Hannover premiere as 19 May 1789; it was actually 18 May 1789. Deutsch gives the correct date later on, in his entry for Knigge's report in the *Dramaturgische Blätter* on the Hannover *Figaro* (*Dokumente*, 301–3).

There are two other errors among Deutsch's eight references to the *Annalen des Theaters*. On p. 342 of *Dokumente* Deutsch transcribes a short passage from Heft 8 of the *Annalen* regarding a performance of *Don Juan* (a German translation of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*). He places the passage under the transcribed heading: "Verzeichniß der in Mainz von den Nationalschauspielern aufgeführten Stücke vom November 1790 an bis zum April 1791 mit einigen Bemerkungen." This heading is followed in *Dokumente* by an ellipsis, followed by a passage that begins: "Den 26ten Brachmonats [März] sahen wir endlich nach langer Zeit das Singspiel Don Juan wieder [...]" Deutsch is thus placing the performance in Mainz on 26 Mar 1791.

This is doubly wrong. The heading that Deutsch transcribes is from page 38 of Heft 8 of the *Annalen*, and marks the beginning of the previous article, on theatrical events in Mainz. The passage regarding the performance of *Don Juan* comes from the next article, regarding theater in Mannheim; that article begins on page 50, under the heading "VI. / Mannheimer Schaubühne. / 1791." Deutsch also mistakes the date: the old German name "Brachmonat" referred to June, not March. Thus the passage (on pages 72–73 of Heft 8) refers to a performance of *Don Juan* in Mannheim on 26 Jun 1791, not to a performance in Mainz on 26 Mar 1791. Both errors are corrected (but not explained) in *Addenda* (66).

On p. 346 of *Dokumente*, Deutsch quotes a brief passage from *Annalen des Theaters* noting a performance of *Liebe und Versuchung* (a German translation of *Così fan tutte*) in Frankfurt on 1 May 1791. He gives the reference as "Heft 5, S. 46," but the passage actually appears on p. 46 of Heft 8.

Bibliography (⇧)

Carter, Tim. 1987. *W. A. Mozart: Le nozze di Figaro*. Cambridge Opera Handbooks. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Konrad, Ulrich, and Martin Staehelin. 1991. *allzeit ein Buch: Die Bibliothek Wolfgang Amadeus Mozarts*. Weinheim: VCH Acta humaniora.

Loewenberg, Alfred. 1978. *Annals of Opera, 1597–1940.* 3rd ed., revised and corrected. Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield.

Roberts, Andrew. *The Last King of America: The Misunderstood Reign of George III*. London: Viking, 2022.

Rüppel, Michael. 2010. *Gustav Friedrich Wilhelm Großmann, 1743-1796. Eine Epoche deutscher Theater- und Kulturgeschichte*. [Hannover]: Wehrhahn Verlag.

Wolter, Joseph. 1901. *Gustav Friedrich Wilhelm Grossmann, ein Beitrag zur deutschen Litteratur- und Theatergeschichte des 18. Jahrhunderts*. Ph.D. diss., Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, Bonn [Cologne: Wilhelm Hoster].

Credit: DE

Author: Dexter Edge

Link(s): ÖNB (Heft 1–6; the report on Großmann's company begins on 508)Hathi (Kraus reprint)

Search Term: NA

Source Library: ÖNB; Harvard (Kraus reprint of exemplar in SBB)

Categories: Addenda, Corrigenda

First Published: Tue, 21 Jul 2015

Updated: Sat, 10 Sep 2022

Citation:

Edge, Dexter. 2015. "*Figaro* in Lübeck (spurious document) (18 May 1788)." In: *Mozart: New Documents*, edited by Dexter Edge and David Black. First published 21 Jul 2015; updated 10 Sep 2022. [direct link]