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The premiere of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* in Bonn (22 Jun 1783)

Dexter Edge

***Theater-Journal für Deutschland*, no. 22, 1784**

[64]

6.

Zweyte Fortsetzung
derer aufgeführten Stücke, und was sich sonst bey
der Kur=Köllnischen Hofschauspielergesell=
schaft zugetragen, nebst Beylagen.

[...]

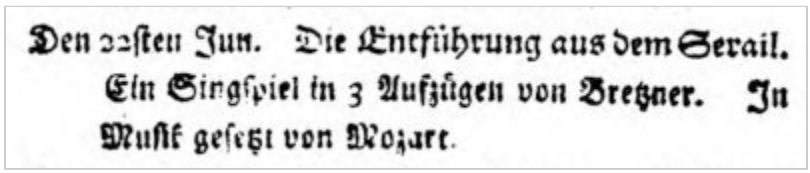

6.

Zweyte Fortſetzung
derer aufgeführten Stücke, und was ſich ſonſt bey
der Kur-Köllniſchen Hofſchauſpielergeſell-
ſchaft zugetragen, nebſt Beylagen.

[76]

Den 22sten Jun. [1783] Die Entführung aus dem Serail.
Ein Singspiel in 3 Aufzügen von Bretzner. In
Musik gesetzt von Mozart.

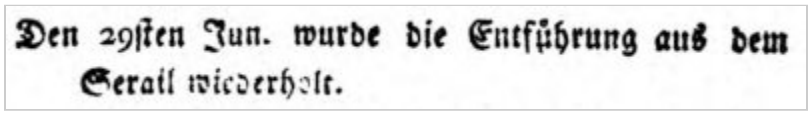
[...]


Den 22ſten Jun. Die Entführung aus dem Serail.
Ein Singſpiel in 3 Aufzügen von Bretzner. In
Muſik geſetzt von Mozart.

Den 29sten Jun. wurde die Entführung aus dem
Serail wiederholt.

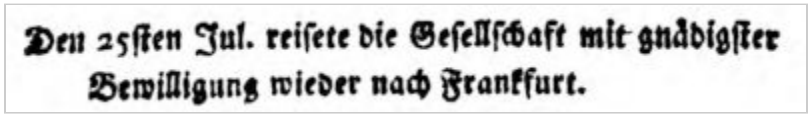
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[...]


Den 29ſten Jun. wurde die Entführung aus dem Serail wiederholt.

[80]

Den 25sten Jul. reisete die Gesellschaft mit gnädigster Bewilligung wieder nach Frankfurt.


Den 25ſten Jul. reiſete die Geſellſchaft mit gnädigſter Bewilligung wieder nach Frankfurt.

Commentary

On page 193 of *Dokumente*, Otto Erich Deutsch writes: "Im Juni [1783] wird die *Entführung* in Bonn aufgeführt. Der Tag ist nicht bekannt" ("In June [1783] *Entführung* was performed in Bonn. The day is unknown"). The items transcribed above, from the *Theater-Journal für Deutschland*, place the premiere of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* in Bonn on 22 Jun 1783, with a second performance on 29 Jun. The performances were given by the company of Gustav Friedrich Wilhelm Großmann (1743–1796), which was at that time resident at the court of the Elector of Cologne and performed in his palace theater in Bonn as the "Kur-Köllnische Hofschauspielergesellschaft." The performance of Entführung on 22 Jun 1783 was the company's first of that opera; it went on to give the Frankfurt premiere of *Entführung* just under six weeks later, on 2 Aug (see our entry for that date). The performance in Bonn is the third documented local premiere of *Entführung* outside Vienna, following those in Strasbourg on 24 Jan 1783, and Warsaw on 8 May 1783.



Christian Gottlieb Geyser (after Coentgen), Portrait of Großmann, *Theater-Kalender* 1783, frontispiece (photo deutsche fotothek)

This reference to the Bonn premiere of *Entführung* comes from a comprehensive diary of performances by the Großmann company from 3 Nov 1782 to 23 Jul 1783 (*Theater-Journal*, no. 22, 64–85); the company was in Bonn throughout the period except from 22 Apr to 10 May, when it performed in Frankfurt during the Easter trade fair (Ostermesse). The diary and report in issue 22 of the *Theater-Journal* is the continuation of a series of articles on the company that began in the *Dramaturgische Nachrichten*, a short-lived almanac published in Bonn in 1779 and 1780. The series continued in three successive issues of the *Theater-Journal*: no. 20 (12–66), covering the company's performances from 20 Feb 1780 to 21 Mar 1782; no. 21 (62–78), covering its performances from 2 Apr to 20 Aug 1782; and no. 22, which includes two installments—the one cited here, and another printed just before it (51–63), covering the company's performances from 3 Sep to 27 Oct 1782, when it was in Frankfurt for the autumn trade fair. The reports in both the *Dramaturgische Nachrichten* and the *Theater-Journal* are generally believed to have been written by Großmann himself, and are likely to be reliable regarding dates and titles. Because the installments in the *Theater-Journal* give a comprehensive list of the company's performances from 20 Feb 1780 to 23 Jul 1783, we can be certain that the performance of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* in Bonn on 22 Jun 1783 was the company's first of that opera and the first in Bonn.

Bonn was at that time the residence of the Elector of Cologne, Prince Archbishop Maximilian Friedrich (1708–1784). Max Friedrich had established a resident theater company at his court in 1778, initially under the joint direction of Großmann and Johann Friedrich Hellmuth, then

under Großmann's sole direction after he and Hellmuth parted ways in 1781 (on the early years of the Bonn court theater under Max Friedrich, see Rüppel 2010, 179ff; also Wolter 1901, 21ff). Großmann's music director was Christian Gottlob Neefe (1748–1798), himself a composer of some repute and a teacher of the young Beethoven.



Johann Heinrich Fischer, Portrait of Maximilian Friedrich von Königsegg-Röhtenfels,
Prince Archbishop of Cologne.
Brühl Kreis Köln, Schloß, Schloß Augustusburg
(image Wikimedia Commons)

The theater was in the Electoral palace (Kurfürstliches Schloß), in the eastern wing near the so-called Koblenzer Tor (since 1818, the palace has been the seat of the Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn; for more on the theater, which does not survive in its original form, see the entry for 13 Oct 1789). The orchestra for performances in the theater consisted of members of the electoral Hofkapelle. Around Easter 1783, the Elector negotiated a new contract with Großmann, whereby the Elector granted him free use of the theater, provided for the orchestra and lighting, and paid Großmann a substantial sum annually for the maintenance of his company, with the understanding that admission to all performances in Bonn would henceforth be free; Großmann's company was also given leave to perform elsewhere during the summer, which the Elector ordinarily spent in Münster (Wolter 1901, 43–44; *Theater-Kalender* 1784, 326)



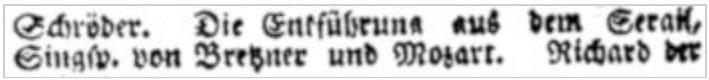
Kurfürstliches Schloß (Electoral Palace), Bonn (photo Thomas Wolf,)

On 26 April 1783, the Hofkapellmeister in Bonn, Andrea Lucchesi (1741–1801), was granted extended leave to travel to Italy to attend to family matters (Thayer 1917, 157–58); Neefe acted as his deputy during his absence. It has been said that during Lucchesi's leave, Neefe's responsibilities became so heavy—he took on the duties of Hofkapellmeister in addition to those of his posts as electoral court organist and music director of Großmann's company—that he may sometimes have relied on his 12-year-old student Beethoven to fill in for him at the keyboard in rehearsals and perhaps even performances in the theater (Thayer 1917, 158). There seems to be no known direct documentary evidence that Beethoven did this; but we know that he was already deputizing for Neefe as organist by this time, so it seems plausible that he might also have deputized in the theater. If so, Beethoven may have had his first direct exposure to Mozart's dramatic music in rehearsals for the premiere of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* on 22 Jun 1783. In any case, given that admission to the theater was free at the time of the premiere, it seems safe to assume that Beethoven at least heard the opera.

Großmann's company had spent the three previous summers performing elsewhere: in Cologne in summer 1780, in Bad Pyrmont and Kassel in 1781, and in Münster, Max Friedrich's usual summer residence, in 1782. However, the company remained in Bonn during the early summer of 1783, leaving only on 25 Jul for Frankfurt. The longer than usual season in Bonn (3 Nov 1782 to 23 Jul 1783, with a one-month break for the Ostermesse in Frankfurt and a short Christmas holiday) is reflected in the number of new works that the company performed there that season. A long report on the "Großmannische Gesellschaft" in the *Theater-Kalender* for 1784 lists a total of 57 "neueinstudirte Stücke" (pp. 323–25; five new ballets are also named in a separate list). A comparison of this list with the diaries for Großmann's company in the *Theater-Journal für Deutschland* shows that the list in the *Theater-Kalender* covers the period 11 Oct 1782 to 16 Sep 1783. (The comparison also shows that the list of "neueinstudirte Stücke" in the *Theater-Kalender*, although lacking dates, is chronological by first performance.) During that period, the company gave first performances of 48 new works in Bonn, including 16 singspiels and one "Schauspiel mit Gesang" (in contrast, it gave no new works during its brief engagement in Frankfurt from 22 Apr to 10 May 1783 during the Ostermesse). The company gave seven premieres in Bonn in Jun 1783 alone, including (in addition to *Entführung*) *Das gute Mädchen* (a German singspiel adaptation of Piccinni's *La buona figliuola*) on 1 Jun, *König Lear* on 4 Jun,

and *Richard der Zweyte* (in Gemmingen's translation) on 25 Jun, just three days after the premiere of *Entführung*. The following month, on 20 Jul 1783, Großmann's company gave the world premiere of Schiller's *Die Verschwörung des Fiesko zu Genua*. The reference to *Entführung* in this long list of "neueinstudirte Stücke" in the *Theater-Kalender* for 1784 (324) reads:

> Die Entführung aus dem Serail
> Singsp. von Bretzner und Mozart.



The cast for Großmann's performance of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* in Bonn in Jun 1783 remains unknown, but it is possible to make informed guesses. The roster of the company's personnel in the *Theater-Kalender* for 1784 (320–21) suggests that his actors were less rigidly specialized than was the norm for many German theatrical companies at that time (on this point, see also Rüppel 2010, 185ff). For example, the roster names four women who could take roles as "Liebhaberinnen im Singspiel":

> Mad. Bekenkam, Liebhaberinnen im Singspiel [...]
> Mams. Friederika Großmann, erste Liebhaberinnen im Singspiel,
> verkleidete Rollen [...]
> Mad. Huber, Liebhaberinnen im Trauer= Lust= und Singspiel [...]
> Mams. Josephi, Liebhaberinnen im Sing= und Schauspiel.

Of these, Friederike Großmann is named as "first," and may seem the most likely candidate to have taken on the role of Konstanze in *Entführung*; but she is not the only possibility. (Friederike Großmann, or Friederike Flittner, was the daughter of Großmann's wife Karoline from her first marriage. Under her later married names of Friederike Unzelmann and Friederike Bethmann, she became one of the leading singing-actresses in Germany. Konstanze was later among her well-known roles.) As it happens, the cast for a performance of *Entführung* by the Großmann company in Frankfurt in May 1784 is known from a poster (cited in Mohr 1968, 63ff). The cast given there is:

Role	Performer
Konstanze	[Anna Christiane] Josephi
Blonde	[Eleonora] Bösenberg
Belmonte	Friedrich Karl Lippert
Osmin	[Heinrich Christian] Pleissner
Pedrillo	Carl David Stegmann
Bassa Selim	Herr Nuth

All of these performers except for Lippert are listed among Großmann's personnel in the *Theater-Kalender* for 1784, and would presumably have been available for *Entführung* in Bonn in Jun

1783. Assuming that Lippert was not yet available to play Belmonte, one possibility for that role is Herr Pfeiffer (Tobias Friedrich?), described in the *Theater-Kalender* for 1784 as playing "Liebhaber im Singspiel." Pleissner, who took the role of Osmin in Frankfurt in 1784 and would have been available to play it in Bonn in 1783, was apparently a tenor, an odd choice for that deep bass role; but Großmann seems not to have had an obvious choice for a comic bass at that time. At present, we do not know whether the cast from May 1784 recapitulates that of 1783, but the 1784 cast at least provides a starting place for further research. (The first names given here for Mlle. Josephi, Herr Pleissner, and Herr Pfeiffer are taken from Wolter, Beilage 6, and should be used with caution; Wolter's work is unusually unreliable.)

In Oct 1782 Großmann divided his company in two: he remained with one contingent in Frankfurt, while the second returned to Bonn under the leadership of his wife Karoline. Karoline's portion of the company gave its first performance in Bonn on 12 Oct 1783. This arrangement did not last long: Großmann's theatrical enterprise in Bonn came to an abrupt and sad end in the spring of 1784. Karoline was heavily pregnant during the initial period of her directorship in Bonn. Although the birth (apparently in Dec) seems to have gone well, the mother's health was affected; she declined rapidly in the new year and died on 29 Mar 1784. The Elector Max Friedrich died just over two weeks later on 15 Apr 1784, and the theater in Bonn was closed during the subsequent six-month mourning period. Großmann's company was dismissed, and forced to seek its fortune elsewhere. The theater in Bonn did not open again under the auspices of the electoral court until 3 Jan 1789.

For Großmann's premiere of *Entführung* in Frankfurt, see the entry for 2 Aug 1783. For the subsequent history of Mozart's operas in Bonn, see the entry for 13 Oct 1789.

Notes (⇧)

On the *Theater-Journal für Deutschland*, edited by Heinrich August Ottokar Reichard and published in 22 issues from 1777 to 1783, see the *Notes* to the entry for 1 May 1780.

The Großmann company's performance of *Entführung* in Bonn on 22 Jun 1783 is listed in Wolter's *Spielplan* (1901, Beilage 2, xix), but Wolter does not directly name his source. Although the *Theater-Journal für Deutschland* is included in his bibliography, Wolter's *Spielplan* does not list the second performance of *Entführung* in Bonn on 29 Jun 1783. Loewenberg (1978, col. 393) gives 22 Jun 1783 as the date of the premiere of *Entführung* in Bonn, but cites no source. The date is likewise given without a source by Bauman (1987, Table 5, 103), who plausibly writes (104): "The production must have been young Beethoven's earliest experience of Mozart's dramatic music." Rüppel (2010, 214) also gives 22 Jun 1783 as the premiere of *Entführung* in Bonn, but cites no source. Maurer & Maurer (1990, 58) transcribe the entry from issue 22 of the *Theater-Journal* for the second performance of *Entführung* in Bonn on 29 Jun 1783, but unaccountably omit the entry for the premiere on the very same page.

Deutsch's statement in *Dokumente* that the date of the Bonn premiere was unknown was not corrected in *Addenda*; the date had been known to theater historians at least since the publication of Wolter's dissertation in 1901. The *Theater-Journal für Deutschland* was not consulted by Deutsch (*Dokumente*), Eibl (*Addenda*), or Eisen (*Neue Folge*).

The entry on Großmann's company in the *Theater-Kalender* (Gotha) for 1784 is partly transcribed in Maurer & Maurer (1990, 40–42); their transcription includes the company's personnel roster, and the paragraph on Großmann's new contract with the Elector, but not the lists of debuts by actors, new ballets, or "neueinstudirte Stücke."

We would like to express our sincere thanks to Steven Whiting for his advice and guidance in this and other entries having to do with Bonn and Großmann.

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