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Bernhard Wessely, subscription for *Mozarts Urne* (23 Jun 1792)

Dexter Edge and David Black

Intelligenzblatt der Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung, no. 76, Sat, 23 Jun 1792

[col. 610]

II. Ankündigungen neuer Bücher.

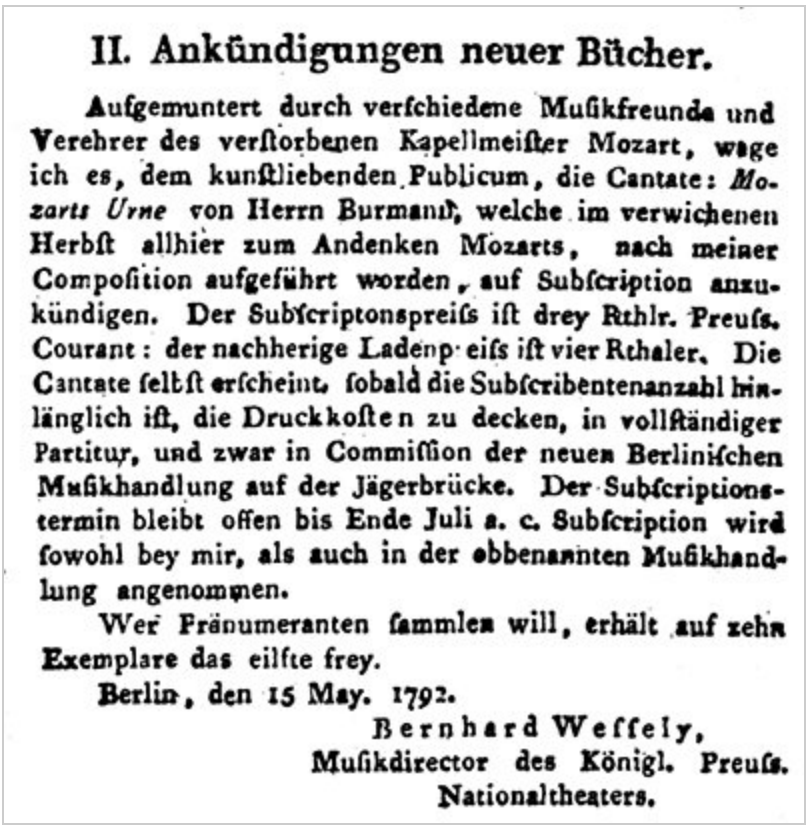
Aufgemuntert durch verschiedene Musikfreunde und Verehrer des verstorbenen Kapellmeister Mozart, wage ich es, dem kunstliebenden Publicum, die Cantata: *Mozarts Urne* von Herrn Burmann, welche im verwichenen Herbst allhier zum Andenken Mozarts, nach meiner Composition aufgeführt worden, auf Subscription anzukündigen. Der Subscriptionspreiss ist drey Rthlr. Preuss. Courant: der nachherige Ladenpreiss ist vier Rthaler. Die Cantata selbst erscheint, sobald die Subscribentenanzahl hinlänglich ist, die Druckkosten zu decken, in vollständiger Partitur, und zwar in Commission der neuen Berlinischen Musikhandlung auf der Jägerbrücke. Der Subscriptionstermin bleibt offen bis Ende Julii a. c. Subscription wird sowohl bey mir, als auch in der obbenannten Musikhandlung angenommen.

Wer Pränumeranten sammlen will, erhält auf zehn Exemplare das eilfte frey.

Berlin, den 15 May. 1792.

Bernhard Wessely,
Musikdirector des Königl. Preuss.
Nationaltheaters.

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Wer Pränumeranten ſammlen will, erhält auf zehn Exemplare das eilfte frey.

Berlin, den 15 May. 1792.

Bernhard Weſſely,
Muſikdirector des Königl. Preuſs. Nationaltheaters.

[translation:]

II. Announcements of New Books.

Encouraged by various friends of music and admirers of the late Kapellmeister Mozart, I am venturing to announce to the art-loving public a subscription for the cantata *Mozarts Urne* by Herr Burmann, which was performed last fall in memory of Mozart in my composition. The subscription price is three Reichsthaler, Prussian currency; the shop price afterwards will be four Reichsthaler. The Cantata itself will appear in full score as soon as the number of subscribers is sufficient to cover the printing costs, in commission from the new Berlin Music Shop on the Jägerbrücke. The subscription remains open through the end of July this year. Subscriptions will be taken at my residence as well as in the aforementioned music shop.

Whoever wishes to collect subscribers will receive, for each ten exemplars, an eleventh one free.

Berlin, 15 May 1792.

Bernhard Wessely,

Music Director of the Royal Prussian
National Theater.

Commentary

Mozart's untimely death inspired the composition of several commemorative cantatas in the composer's memory. The earliest, if the composer's autograph is to be believed, is Anton Eberl's *Bey Mozarts Grabe* (1791). This was followed by Bernhard Wessely's *Mozarts Urne* (1792), an anonymous *Trauerode* performed in Prague (1794), Carl Cannabich's *Mozarts Gedächtnisfeier* (c. 1795), Johann Joseph Rösler's *Cantate auf Mozart's Tod* (1798), and Franz Danzi's *Cantate am Jahrestag von Mozarts Tod* (1808).

Bernhard Wessely (1768–1826), the composer of *Mozarts Urne,* the work advertised here, was born into a Jewish family in Berlin; he was the son of Copenhagen-born textile manufacturer Aron Behrend Wessely and nephew of the Hamburg writer Naphtali Herz Wessely (Gerhard 1999, 13). Bernhard's family had close ties to philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, a key figure in the Jewish enlightenment (Haskalah); Mendelssohn, in his *Morgenstunden* (1785), modeled one of his three interlocutors on Bernhard, whom Mendelssohn describes as ". . . W, der Sohn einer Familie, mit der ich seit vielen Jahren in freundschaftlicher Verbindung stehe" ("W., the son of a family with whom I have had friendly relations for many years"; *Morgenstunden*, v; see also Gerhard 1999, 13 and n. 50). In the mid 1790s, Wessely was in the inner circle of writers Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder and Ludwig Tieck (Gerhard 1999, 14–15).

Wessely studied music with Johann Abraham Peter Schulz, and gained notoriety as a composer as early as 1786 with his memorial cantata on the death of Moses Mendelssohn, *Sulamith und Eusebia*, on a text by Karl Wilhelm Ramler. (On the significance for the Haskalah movement of a third performance of this cantata in Königsberg in 1787, see Sela-Teichler 2013.) On 31 Jan 1787, Wessely's cantata celebrating the coronation of King Friedrich Wilhelm II was performed in Berlin; in May of that year Wessely is said to have become the first Jewish composer to have his music publicly performed in Hamburg, when he directed the cantata in that city (Spalding 2005, 273).

Wessely was appointed second music director of the Nationaltheater in Berlin in 1788, on the recommendation of Ramler and Johann Jakob Engel (Brachvogel 1878, 149–50), and he became sole music director after the death of Johann Christian Frischmuth on 31 Jul 1790 (see our entry for Sep 1792). In 1792, Wessely had a serious falling out with Engel, who in a letter dated 7 Dec described him as a liar, immoderately proud, and negligent in his duties. In an attempt to force Wessely to shape up or resign, Engel engineered the appointment of Bernhard Anselm Weber as second music director, who was henceforth to be responsible for the rehearsal and direction of all new operas, leaving to Wessely only those that he had previously directed. (Oddly, Bauman [1985, 265] reads Engel's scathing letter as demonstrating that Engel "had remained a firm supporter" of Wessely.) Wessely did not allow himself to be forced out, however, and the

competition between the two music directors eventually led to the formation of parties in the orchestra, then at court and among the public (Brachvogel 1878, 422ff). It was recognized that one of the music directors would have to go; when the position of Kapellmeister to the King's uncle Prince Heinrich of Prussia came open, Wessely, in spite of continuing support from Ramler, resigned from the Nationaltheater in Feb 1796 and took up the position with the Prince in Rheinsberg. After the death of the prince in 1802, Wessely abandoned his professional musical career, assuming a position as a government clerk in Berlin. He was co-founder in 1814 of the *Verein für klassische Musik*, which he directed until his death.

Wessely composed several stage works, two of which were performed in 1789 in the Nationaltheater in Berlin: the opera *Psyche* and the "ländliches Vorspiel" *Die Freunde des Herbstes*. His other compositions include incidental music for the theater, ballets, several cantatas, numerous lieder, two string quartets, and at least two sets of keyboard variations. Little of Wessely's work is known to survive. The RISM online catalog of musical sources currently (as of 9 Oct 2022) includes records for 24 items attributed to Wessely, mainly lieder and secular choral works (including several Masonic choruses), but also a source for the first act of his opera *Psyche* in SBB (Mus. ms. 23020). The libretto for *Psyche*, by Karl Friedrich Müchler, also survives. (On *Psyche*, see Bauman, 229–30, who notes that the opera was given only three times in the Nationaltheater in Berlin in 1789 and then fell from the repertoire.) Wessely was apparently also a capable pianist: according to Gerber (GerberNL, part 4, col. 553), he performed "eines der schwierigsten Mozartischen Konzerte (aus G dur)" ("one of the most difficult Mozart concertos, in G Major" [probably K. 453]) at one of the Fließ concerts in Berlin in 1793. (For more on Fließ, see our entry for 18 Mar 1792.)

The earliest known printing of Wessely's advertisement for a subscription to *Mozarts Urne* is the one reproduced here, from 23 Jun 1792; however, the date in the advertisement itself is 15 May 1792, so there may be earlier printings that have not yet been found. The advertisement was reprinted in essentially identical form in *Der Anzeiger* on 1 Aug 1792, this time with no date in the body of the advertisement, and with the spelling "Mozard" throughout. No copy of *Mozarts Urne* is known to survive, and it may be that Wessely's subscription was unsuccessful and the work was never printed; Gerber believed that it had not been (GerberNL, col. 554).

Wessely's reference to *Mozarts Urne* having been performed in "Herbst" (autumn) is evidently an error. Mozart died on 5 Dec 1791, technically still in autumn of that year, but only just. The earliest known performance of Wessely's cantata was on 18 Mar 1792 in Berlin.

Wessely also wrote frequently about music; several articles and reviews that are almost certainly by him appeared in the *Musikalisches Wochenblatt* and its successor the *Musikaliche Monathsschrift* in 1791 and 1792 (on these journals and the attributions to Wessely, see the *Source notes* to the entry for 10 Oct 1791; see also Gerhard 1999, 15, note 58). Three of Wessely's contributions to these journals refer to Mozart and are included on this site: 12 Oct 1791 (a substantial review of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in German translation, given in curtailed form in *Dokumente*, 359–60, and in full on this site); 5 Dec 1791 (on the use of wind instruments); and

Nov 1792 (a substantial review of *Così fan tutte* in German translation). Wessely is also mentioned in a contribution to the *Monathsschrift* by Johann Friedrich Reichardt; see our entry for Sep 1792. In 1795 Wessely published the essay "Gluck und Mozart" in the *Berlinisches Archiv der Zeit und ihres Geschmacks* (vol. 1, 435–40); the essay is reprinted in Ottenberg (1984, 334–38).

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