Citation:

Printed: Fri, 30 Oct 2026

Edge, Dexter. 2014. “A report on the premiere of *Le nozze di Figaro* (3 May 1786).” In: *Mozart: New Documents*, edited by Dexter Edge and David Black. First published 12 Jun 2014; updated 20 Oct 2019. [direct link]

A report on the premiere of *Le nozze di Figaro* (3 May 1786)

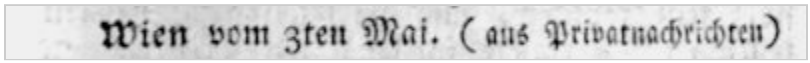
Dexter Edge

***Münchner Staats=gelehrte und vermischte Nachrichten aus Journalen, Zeitungen, und Correspondenzen* (= *Münchner Zeitung*), no. 73, Tue, 9 May 1786**

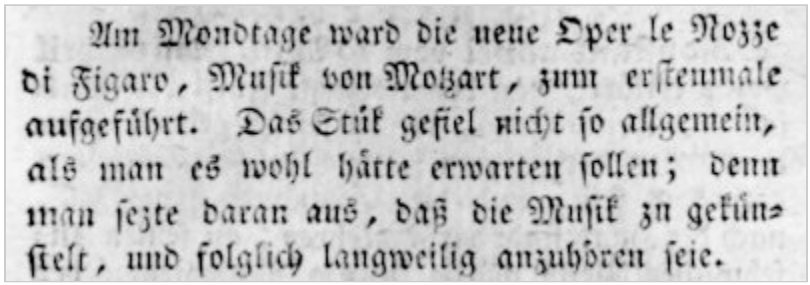
[291]

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[translation:]

Vienna, 3 May (from a private report)
[...]

On Monday the new opera *Le nozze di Figaro,* music by Mozart, was performed for the first time. The piece did not please as generally as one probably would have expected; this was attributed to the music

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being too contrived, and consequently being
boring to listen to.

Commentary

Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* was premiered in the Burgtheater in Vienna on Monday, 1 May 1786. Up to now, the earliest known report on the first production has been a review in the *Realzeitung* on 11 Jul 1786, more than two months after the premiere (*Dokumente*, 243–44). The last paragraph of that review reports:

> Einige Zeitungsschreiber beliebten zu erzählen, Herrn Mozarts Oper habe ganz und gar nicht gefallen. Es läßt sich errathen, von welcher Art Korrespondenten seyn müssen, die dergleichen offenbare Lügen in den Tag hineinschreiben. Ich glaube es ist genugsam bekannt, daß eben die dritte Vorstellung dieser Oper und die in selber so häufig anverlangten Wiederholung die Ursache waren, warum einige Tage darauf auf *allerhöchsten Befehl* öffentlich bekannt wurde, *es sey in Hinkunft verbothen, in den Singspielen kein Stück mehr, das aus mehr als einer Stimme besteht, wiederholen zu lassen*.
>
> Some newspaper writers have liked to claim that Herr Mozart's opera did not please at all. One can only imagine what sort of correspondents these must be, who could let such outright lies see the light of day. I believe it is sufficiently well known that it was the third performance of this opera and the encores that were so frequently demanded in it that were the reason why, on the following day, by *highest decree*, it was made publicly known that *it would henceforth be forbidden in the opera to encore any piece that included more than one voice*. [Translation from Edge 2001, 1448–49]

We are able to add three previously unknown reports relating to the earliest performances of *Figaro* in May 1786: the above report on the premiere, from the *Münchner Zeitung*, dated 3 May; a report from the *Gazzetta universale*, dated Sunday, 7 May, but referring to the premiere on the previous Monday; and a report in the *Mannheimer Zeitung* dated 10 May on the limiting of encores in the Viennese court theaters (see also our addendum on a report in the *Bayreuther Zeitung*, dated 16 May, regarding the general reception of the opera).

The reports in the *Münchner Zeitung* and the *Bayreuther Zeitung* claim that the opera's reception was mixed. The former claims that the opera "did not please as generally as one probably would have expected" because the music was too "contrived" ("gekünstelt"), and thus boring; the latter claims that the opera "pleased only halfway," and that connoisseurs ("Kenner") had made suggestions to Mozart for improving the opera, which he had taken. The report in the *Gazzetta universale*, in contrast, claims that the opera received "universal approval" ("universale approvazione"). Thus the reports in the *Münchner Zeitung* and the *Bayreuther Zeitung* corroborate the claim by the reviewer in the *Realzeitung* in July. They also shed light on that reviewer's reference to "correspondents," since both reports appear in newspapers outside of Vienna, and were very likely based on reports submitted by correspondents in Vienna (note that the report in the *Münchner Zeitung* states explicitly that the report is from a "private report").

The third performance of *Figaro,* the one mentioned in the *Realzeitung* as the immediate cause for the policy limiting encores, took place on 8 May. The following day, Emperor Joseph II wrote a memo to Count Orsini-Rosenberg, the director of the court theaters, directing him to announce the new policy; see the entry for 10 May 1786.

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Source Library: BSB, 4 Eph.pol. 68-1786

Categories: Biography, Reception

First Published: Thu, 12 Jun 2014

Updated: Sun, 20 Oct 2019

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