

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.

[...]

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Unsere vortrefliche Sangerin Madame Sto= race beschwerte sich jungst bei dem Monar chen, da sie zu sehr strapazirt werde, in= dem sie meistens die schwersten Bravourarien durch das anhaltende Klatschen gezwungen 2, 3 auch 4 mal wiederholen musse. Sr. Majestat haben daher Dero Theatral Di rektion befohlen, offentlich bekannt machen zu lassen, da Niemand mehr unter Strafe der offentlichen Hinwegschaftung aus dem Theater, oder Arretiru[ng] durch die Wache, sich unter stehen solle, durch anhaltendes Handeklatschen oder Stamfen sich sittenwidrig auszuzeichnen.



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ce beschwerte sich jüngst bei dem Monar-
chen, daß sie zu sehr strapazirt werde, in-
dem sie meistens die schwersten Bravourarien
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lassen, daß Niemand mehr unter Strafe der
öffentlichen Hinwegschaffung aus dem Theater,
oder Arrestirung durch die Wache, sich unter-
stehen solle, durch anhaltendes Händeklatschen
oder Stampfen sich fitzenmüßig auszuzeichnen.

[translation:]

Vienna, 10 May.

[...]

Our excellent singer Madame Stora-
ce 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 oft suchenden Ruhm nicht kränken
zu lassen, find ich nebensgehende Nachricht an das Publicum (daß kein aus mehr als einer
Singstimme bestehendes Stück wiederholt werden soll) das schicksamste Mittel zu seyn. Sie
werden daher solche einigen Anschlagzetteln 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](#)

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

Categories: Reception

First Published: Thu, 12 Jun 2014

Updated: Thu, 16 Jun 2022

Citation:

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