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The premiere of *Die Hochzeit des Figaro* in Mannheim (24 Oct 1790)

Dexter Edge and Martin Nedbal

Christian August von Bertram, ed., *Annalen des Theaters*, Siebentes Heft, Berlin, bei Friedrich Maurer, 1791

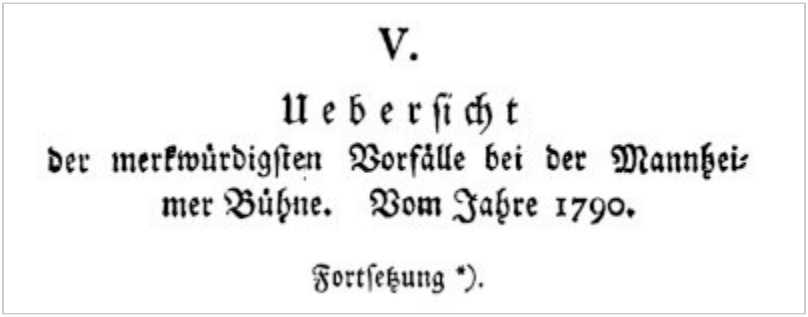
[42]

V.

Uebersicht

der merkwürdigsten Vorfälle bei der Mannhei=
mer Bühne. Vom Jahre 1790.

Fortsetzung. *[...]*



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Uebersicht
der merkwürdigſten Vorfälle bei der Mannhei-
mer Bühne. Vom Jahre 1790.

Fortſetzung *).

[47]

24ten Oktober, zum erstenmale: **Die Hoch=
zeit des Figaro**. Eine Operette in vier Aufzügen.
Die Musik von **Mozart**. Auch nur Mozarts Musik
vermag es, diesen kombabisirten Figaro erträglich zu
machen, so sehr hat er unter dieser Verstümmelung
gelitten; sie ist für Ohr und Herz, angepaßt den Cha=
raktern und Empfindungen der singenden Personen,
voll Ausdruck und Wahrheit. Diese Eigenschaften
charakterisiren Mozarts Arbeiten und ihn, als den=
kenden Künstler. Mlle. **Keilholz d. ä**. hatte bei aller
Güte ihres Gesanges nicht die Lebhaftigkeit, welche
Susannen eigen seyn muß, so wie **Herrn Gern**
die Gewandheit und Leichtigkeit des Figaro fehlte.
An Mlle. **Keilholz d. j**. als Cherubin, vermißte man

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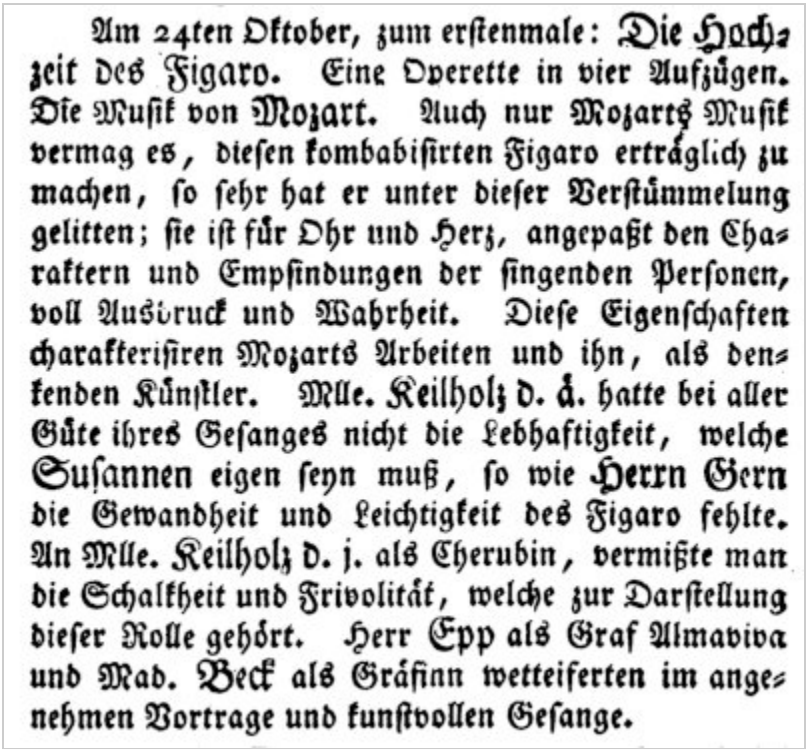
die Schalkheit und Frivolität, welche zur Darstellung
dieser Rolle gehört. Herr **Epp** als Graf Almaviva
und Mad. **Beck** als Gräfinn wetteiferten im ange=
nehmen Vortrage und kunstvollen Gesange.



Am 24ten Oktober, zum erstenmale: Die Hoch=
zeit des Figaro. Eine Operette in vier Aufzügen.
Die Musik von Mozart. Auch nur Mozarts Musik
vermag es, diesen kombabisirten Figaro erträglich zu
machen, so sehr hat er unter dieser Verstümmelung
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die Gewandheit und Leichtigkeit des Figaro fehlte.
An Mlle. Keilholz d. j. als Cherubin, vermißte man
die Schalkheit und Frivolität, welche zur Darstellung
dieser Rolle gehört. Herr Epp als Graf Almaviva
und Mad. Beck als Gräfinn wetteiferten im ange=
nehmen Vortrage und kunstvollen Gesange.

[translation:]

V.
Overview
of the most notable events on the Mannheim
stage. In the year 1790.
Continuation. *[...]*

24 October, for the first time: **Die Hochzeit des Figaro**. An operetta in four acts. The music by **Mozart**. And only Mozart's music can make this combabitized Figaro bearable, so greatly has he suffered under this mutilation; it is, for ear and heart (adapted to the characters and feelings of the people singing) full of expression and truth. These qualities characterize Mozart's work and him as a thinking artist. Mlle. **Keilholz** the elder, for all the good qualities of her singing, does not have the liveliness that **Susanna** must have, just as **Herr Gern** lacks the dexterity and lightness of Figaro. In Mlle. **Keilholz** the younger as Cherubin,

one misses the archness and frivolity that the interpretation of this role requires. Herr **Epp** as Count Almaviva and Mad. **Beck** as the Countess compete in pleasant delivery and artful singing.

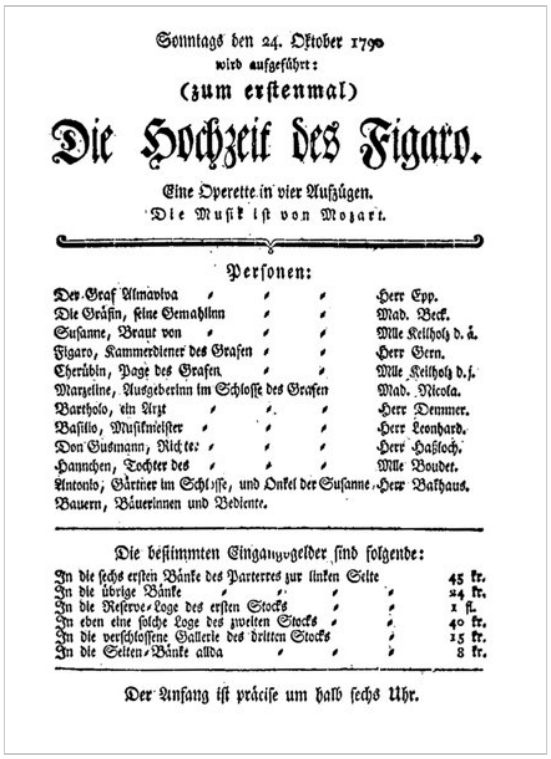
Commentary

This review of the Mannheim premiere of Mozart's *Figaro* on 24 Oct 1790 is given in truncated form by Deutsch, who omits the passage in blue about the singers (*Dokumente*, 331–32).

Le nozze di Figaro was the third of Mozart's operas to enter the repertory of the Nationaltheater in Mannheim. *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* was first performed by the company on 18 Apr 1784 and had been given 21 times by this point; *Don Giovanni* (in German as *Don Juan*) had its Mannheim premiere on 27 Sep 1789 and had been given 5 times. *Figaro* was performed in Mannheim in German under the title *Die Hochzeit des Figaro*.

In the second half of Oct 1790, Mozart was on his return journey to Vienna from the coronation of Leopold II in Frankfurt, and he reached Mannheim just in time for the final rehearsals and premiere of *Figaro*. In a letter to Constanze on 23 Oct 1790, the day before the premiere, Mozart mentions that he is about to attend the dress rehearsal ("Hauptprobe"; *Briefe*, iv:119). We now know from the travel diary of Count Franz Joseph von Zierotin that Mozart also led a rehearsal of *Figaro* in Mannheim the previous day, on 22 Oct (see our entry for that date). The composer may also have directed the music at the premiere. In his letter of 23 Oct, he writes that he plans to leave Mannheim "übermorgen" (the day after tomorrow), so he evidently intended to stay for the first performance of the opera on 24 Oct. There is also evidence (albeit uncorroborated and of uncertain provenance) that he directed the music at that performance. According to an annotation made in the nineteenth century by Stephan Grua on a manuscript copy of the poster for the Mannheim premiere: "Motzardt dirigirte selbst und reißte den folgenden Tag von hier ab" (Mozart himself directed and departed from here the following day; see *Neue Folge*, 66–67, and the facsimile in Homering & von Welck 1991, 27).

Mannheim was largely obliterated by Allied bombing in the Second World War, and the materials in the archive and library of the Nationaltheater were largely destroyed. However, the original poster for the Figaro premiere has been reproduced in at least two publications:



Sonntags den 24. Oktober 1790
wird aufgeführt:
(zum erstenmal)

Die Hochzeit des Figaro.

Eine Operette in vier Aufzügen.
Die Musik is von Mozart.

Personen:

Der Graf Almaviva	Herr Epp.
Die Gräfin, seine Gemahlinn	Mad. Beck.
Susanne, Braut von	Mlle Keilholz d. ä.
Figaro, Kammerdiener des Grafen	Herr Gern.
Cherübin, Page des Grafen	Mlle Keilholz d. j.
Marzeline, Ausgeberinn im Schlosse des Grafen	Mad. Nicola.
Bartholo, ein Arzt	Herr Demmer.
Basilio, Musikmeister	Herr Leonhard.
Don Gusmann, Richter	Herr Haßloch.
Hannchen, Tochter des	Mlle. Boudet.
Antonio, Gärtner im Schlosse, und Onkel der Susanne	Herr Bakhaus.
Bauern, Bäuerinnen und Bediente.	

Die bestimmten Eingangsgelder sind folgende:

In die sechs ersten Bänke des Parterres zur linken Seite	45 kr.
In die übrige Bänke	24 kr.
In die Reserve=Loge des ersten Stocks	1 fl.
In eben eine solche Loge des zweiten Stocks	40 kr.
In die verschlossene Gallerie des dritten Stocks	15 kr.
In die Seiten=Bänke allda	8 kr.

Anfang ist präcise um halb sechs Uhr.

Poster for the premiere of *Die Hochzeit des Figaro* in Mannheim, 24 Oct 1790
(Homering 1992, 53)

Nearly all of the cast had participated in earlier performances of Mozart's operas in Mannheim. The tenor Franz Anton Epp, who played the Count in *Figaro*, had sung Belmonte in Mannheim's production of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* since its premiere in 1784 (see our

entry for 18 Apr 1784). He also sang the role of Don Gusmann (Don Ottavio) in the first Mannheim production of *Don Juan*. Figaro at the Mannheim premiere was sung by the bass Georg Gern, who had played Osmin in the Mannheim premiere of *Entführung* (see 18 Apr 1784) and Leporello in the Mannheim premiere of *Don Juan* on 27 Sep 1789. The eminent soprano Josepha Beck, who played the Countess in the premiere of *Figaro*, had (as Mademoiselle Schäfer) sung Konstanze in the Mannheim premiere of *Entführung* and (as Madame Beck) Donna Anna in the Mannheim premiere of *Don Juan*. She went on to sing the roles of Franziska (Fiordiligi) in the Mannheim premiere of *Die Wette* (*Così fan tutte*) on 12 May 1793, Pamina in the Mannheim premiere of *Die Zauberflöte* on 29 Mar 1794, and Vitellia in the Mannheim premiere of *Titus* (*La clemenza di Tito*) on 8 Aug 1802. (For more on Josepha Beck, one of the most important Mozart sopranos of her era, see our entry for 10 May 1791.) Susanna in the Mannheim *Figaro* was sung by Christiane Keilholz, whose younger sister Dorothea sang Cherubino; both had made their debuts in Mannheim in a performance of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* on 6 Jun 1790 (as Konstanze and Blonde), and they then appeared in *Don Juan* a week later, as Donna Anna and Zerlina (for more on the Keilholz sisters, see our entry for 6 & 13 Jun 1790). Christina Keilholz also took lead roles in spoken theater in Mannheim; she had played Ophelia in a performance of *Hamlet* on 21 Oct 1790, just three days before the premiere of *Figaro*.

The ensemble of the Nationaltheater in Mannheim was unusually stable, with many members remaining for decades; some were given lifetime appointments.

- The actor and third bass Wilhelm Backhaus (also Bakhaus, d. 1834), who sang the role of Antonio in the Mannheim premiere of *Figaro*, had been a founding member of the ensemble at its inception in 1779. He played the role of Rolf in *Geschwind, eh' es Jemand erfährt* (an adaptation of Goldoni's *Un curioso accidente*) on 7 Oct 1779, the first performance by the new company (Pichler 1879, 52), and he played Daniel in the world premiere of Schiller's *Die Räuber* in Mannheim on 13 Jan 1782 (Pichler 1879, 66). Backhaus had also sung the role of the Comthur (the Commendatore) in the Mannheim premiere of *Don Juan* on 27 Sep 1789. Snippets of Backhaus's now lost diary survive in 19th-century transcription; one of these snippets is an anecdote about Mozart's visit (*Neue Folge*, 66–67; see also our entry for 22 Oct 1790). In the first decade of the nineteenth century Backhaus became a member of the Nationaltheater's *Ausschuß* (directorate).
- The role of Bartolo in the first Mannheim production of *Figaro* was taken by actor and second bass Joseph Demmer (d. 1811). Demmer had made his debut with the Mannheim company on 28 Mar 1780; following several years in Breslau, he returned to Mannheim in 1787 (Würtz 1975, 67). He sang the role of Masetto in the Mannheim premiere of *Don Juan* (Pichler 1879, 106), and went on to play Monastatos in the Mannheim premiere of *Die Zauberflöte* in 1794.
- Basilio in the Mannheim *Figaro* was sung by "tenor buffo" Samuel Friedrich Leonhard (d. 1804; see Würtz 1975, 78). Leonhard had come to the Mannheim Nationaltheater in 1784 on the recommendation of Friedrich Wilhelm Gotter. He sang the role of Pedrillo in a new cast for *Entführung* in Mannheim on 21 Oct 1787, and Don Juan in the Mannheim premiere of that opera

in 1789. He later went on to sing Wilhelm (Guglielmo) in the Mannheim premiere of *Die Wette* (*Così*) in 1793 and Papageno in the Mannheim premiere of *Die Zauberflöte* in 1794.

- Marzelina (Marcellina) in the Mannheim premiere of *Figaro* was sung by Madame Nicola (also Nikola, née Kirchhöffer, 1765/66–1795; see Würtz 1975, 76). She also sang the role of Zerlina in the first Mannheim production of *Don Juan* (a role later taken by Dorothea Keilholz).
- Don Gusmann (Don Curzio) in the Mannheim premiere of *Figaro* was sung by tenor Carl Theodor Haßloch (1769–1829), who made his debut with the Nationaltheater on 23 Aug 1789 (Würtz 1975, 72). By 1793 he married Christiane Keilholz, and they later performed for many years in Kassel and then Darmstadt; in 1802 in Kassel they gave the first production of *Idomeneo* in German (which was also the first known production of that opera after Auersperg's in Vienna in 1786). For more on the Haßlochs, including their remarkable season at the Hamburg theater in 1800/1801, see our entry for 6 & 13 Jun 1790.
- Hannchen (Barbarina) in the Mannheim Figaro was sung by Mademoiselle Boudet, apparently the younger sister of Manon Müller (née Boudet), who had sung the role of Konstanze in the new cast of *Entführung* introduced in Mannheim on 21 Oct 1787. Little is known of the younger Boudet, and she seems to have appeared infrequently as a singer.

The relatively low prices listed on the poster for the premiere of *Figaro*, with seats on the "side benches" as low as 8 kreuzer, suggest that the Nationaltheater aimed to attract an audience from a wide socio-economic background—a sensible approach, given that Mannheim was no longer the principal residence of the Electoral court, and the population of Mannheim was less than 25,000 at the time (for historical statistics in Mannheim's population, see this article on German Wikipedia).

The review of the Mannheim *Figaro* in *Annalen des Theaters* includes the nonce word "kombabisirt." It alludes to the story of Combabus in Lucian's *On the Syrian Goddess* (Περὶ τῆς Συρίης Θεοῦ, or *De Dea Syria*; the goddess in question was Atargatis). The story of Combabus is succinctly summarized in the current English Wikipedia article on Atargatis:

> According to a story retold by Lucian, the Assyrian queen Stratonice saw in a vision that she must build a temple at Hieropolis to the goddess and so the king sent her there with a young man named Combabus to execute the task. Knowing the queen's reputation Combabus castrated himself and left his genitals, sealed in a box. When the queen fell in love with Combabus and tried to seduce him, he revealed his mutilation, but this didn't dissuade her from desiring his constant companionship. When Stratonice and Combabus returned home, she accused him of trying to seduce her, and Combabus was arrested, tried, and sentenced to death. Combabus called for the sealed box to prove his innocence, where upon the king relented and rewarded Combabus for his loyalty. The temple was completed and a statue of Combabus was placed in it. This is said to be the origin of the practice of castration by the priests in the temple. [en.wikipedia]

The English edition of *Dokumente* translates "kombabisirt" as "caponized," accurately capturing the sense of castration but losing the sense of *self*-castration (*MDB*, 377). Because it is a nonce word, we have created an analogous one in English, "combabitized."

Beaumarchais's *Le mariage de Figaro*, the original source for Da Ponte's libretto, was well known to audiences in Mannheim: the play had first been performed there, in German translation, on 3 May 1785 (Walter 1899, ii:294), and it had been given eleven times in all by the time of the Mannheim premiere of Mozart's opera. In his autobiography, Iffland describes the first production of Beaumarchais's *Figaro* in Mannheim and relates an amusing anecdote about Elector Karl Theodor's attitude toward it. The premiere of *Figaro* took place just a few days after the Mannheim premiere on 24 Apr 1785 of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (as *Julius Cäsar*, in Wieland's translation, adapted for the stage by Dalberg; see Walter 1899, ii:293). Iffland's discussion of *Figaro* follows immediately after his discussion of Shakespeare's play:

> Mit nicht minderer Präzision und großer Eleganz wurde Figaro gegeben. Herr Gorvais, ehemaliger churfürstlicher Hoftänzer, der eben von Paris gekommen war, hatte es übernom= men, diese Vorstellung einzurichten. Beck stellte den Figaro mit Leichtigkeit und Anstand vor. Demoisell Witthöft war als Susanna im hohen Grad liebenswürdig und fein.
>
> Der Churfürst hatte zu München einer Gat= tung Obergewalt der Umstände nachgegeben, vermöge deren dort die Vorstellung nicht zuge= lassen wurde. Der Hochwürdige in Gott, Peter Frank, soll ihn zu Manheim daran erin= nert, der Churfürst aber gelächelt und darauf geantwortet haben: "Das habe hier zu Man= heim nichts auf sich." Er sah die Vorstellung mit Vergnügen, und bemerkte, wie gewöhnlich, jede Feinheit zuerst und laut. *[...]*
> [Iffland 1798, 134–35]

[translation:]

> *Figaro* was given with no less precision and greater elegance. Herr Gorvais, former dancer in the electoral court, who had just come from Paris, took over the preparation of this performance. Beck played Figaro with lightness and grace. Demoiselle Witthöft as Susanna was amiable and fine to the highest degree.
>
> In Munich, the Prince-Elector had yielded to a higher prerogative, by virtue of which performance was not permitted there. The Right Reverend in God, Peter Frank, is said to have reminded him of this in Mannheim; but the Prince-Elector smiled and answered:

> "Here in Mannheim, that's not a problem."
> He saw the performance with pleasure and
> as usual was the first to remark aloud on
> every subtlety. *[...]*

In his libretto for Mozart's opera, Da Ponte shortened the text considerably, and toned down the politically incendiary aspects of Beaumarchais's original, most famously in his replacement for Figaro's anti-aristocratic rant in Act V, which in the opera becomes the aria "Aprite un po' quegli occhi," Figaro's rant against women and his (imagined) impending cuckoldry. The reviewer for *Annalen des Theaters* would almost certainly have known the Nationaltheater's production of the play, and thus "kombabisirt" was likely intended as a multi-layered allusion to the play's truncation, Figaro's cuckoldry, the "emasculation" of his incendiary speech, and more broadly the opera's emasculation of the political content of the play. The reviewer's criticisms of the Mannheim cast should also be read in this light: the reviewer is not criticising their performances of the opera's roles per se, but rather their renderings of the characters as the reviewer knows them from the play. The reviewer in fact praises the "expression and truth" of Mozart's music in the context of a libretto that the reviewer finds problematic.

The reception in Mannheim of this version of Mozart's *Figaro* seems to have been lukewarm, and it was performed much less often than *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* and *Don Juan*. Following the premiere on 24 Oct 1790, *Figaro* was given two weeks later, on 7 Nov, but not again for nearly a year, on 30 Oct 1791. That performance was followed by a hiatus until 29 Jun 1794, when the opera was revived for what turned out to be just a single performance. The revival was the subject of a review in *Rheinische Musen*, again focusing on the deficiencies of the adaptation:

[273]

> Fortsezzung des Mannheimer Tagebuchs.
> *[...]*
> Den 29ten: Die Hochzeit des Figaro, Oper.
> (gieng gar nicht gut; Musik, Gesang, und Spiel
> schleppte. Ein paar Rollen nur hoben sich heraus.)
> Ueberhaupt war es eine unglückliche Idee, Beau=
> marchais trefliches Lustspiel in eine Oper umzuschaffen.
> Alles was dort durch raschen Gang und schnelle Koups
> wirkt, wird hier durch lange Gesänge trainirt—auf=
> gehalten—unwirksam gemacht. Jedes Intriguen=
> Stück muß rasch gespielt werden; nicht einmal ein lan=
> ger Dialog darf die Spannkraft seiner Triebfedern zu=

[274]

> rückhalten, geschweige eine lange, obgleich Kunstvolle,
> und Schönheitreiche Musik. Den allerauffallendsten Be=
> weis hievon giebt die Szene, wo der Graf Jemanden
> in der Gräfin Kabinet verborgen glaubt, welches denn,

wie bekannt, am Ende Susanna ist. Hier hält ein
langes Duett zwischen Graf und Gräfin die Untersu=
chung, und das Thüröffnen so auf, daß indessen eine
ganze Kompagnie Menschen den Einfall hätte haben
können, hineinzuschlüpfen; auch blieb noch dazu nach
des Pagen Hinunterspringen das Fenster weit offen ste=
hen, und es konnte nur ein Graf Almaviva hier so ganz
ohne Vermuthung der eigentlichen Geschichte bleiben.

Wer es selbst versucht hat, deutschen Text zu frem=
der Musik zu dichten, kennt die Schwierigkeiten da=
von; auch hier sind sie oft sehr sichtbar, einige Worte
gehen sehr hart unter die Musik, und der Sänger muß
alle Mühe anwenden, sie auszusprechen; namentlich ist
dies der Fall in Figaros schönen Baß=Arie zum Schluß
des ersten Akts: Itz gehts nicht mehr an Damen=Toi=
letten &c. und in einigen Final=Gesängen.

Die Oper hatte seit dem Abgange der Delle. Keil=
holz gelegen.—Man vermißte sie als Susanna.
[*Rheinische Musen*, no. 12 (1794), 273–74]

[translation:]

Continuation of the Mannheim Diary
[...]

29 [Jun]: *Die Hochzeit des Figaro*, opera.
(did not go well; music, singing, and acting dragged.
Only a few roles stood out.)

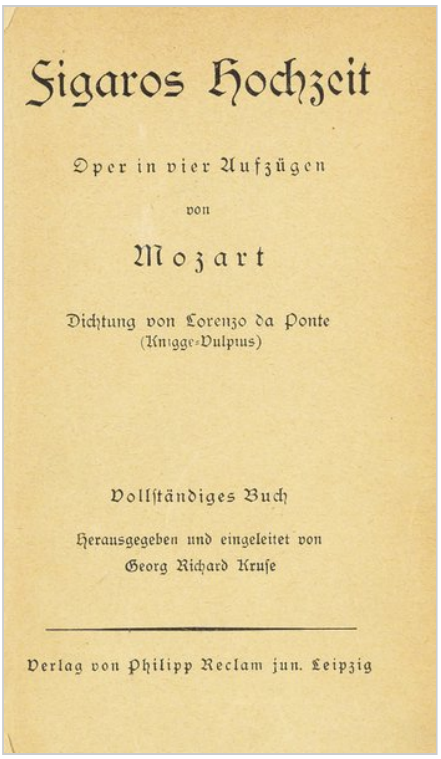
In general it was an unhappy idea to turn
Beaumarchais's excellent play into an opera.
Everything that worked there via rapid action and
swift *coups* is here rendered ineffective—halted—
by long songs. Each bit of intrigue must be played
rapidly; not even a long dialogue should hold back
the tension of its mainspring, much less a long musical
passage, even if it is artful and rich in beauty. The most
striking proof of this is the scene in which the Count
thinks someone is hidden in the Countess's closet,
who then, as we know, turns out to be Susanna.
Here a long duet between the Count and Countess
so impedes the inquest and the opening of the
door, that in the meantime an entire company of people
could have had the idea of sneaking in; also here, in
addition, the window stands wide open after the page
has jumped down, and only a Count Almaviva could
remain so clueless about what has actually happened.

Whoever has himself tried to compose German text
to foreign music knows the difficulty of it; here, too, it

> is often very visible—some words fit quite harshly with the music, and the singer must strain to deliver them; this is the case, for example, in Figaro's beautiful bass aria at the end of the first act: "Itz gehts nicht mehr an Damen-Toiletten &c.", and in the vocal parts of the finale.
>
> The opera had not been given since the departure of Demoiselle Keilholz.—One misses her as Susanna.

(The reference in the final sentence is to Christiane Keilholz; see our entry for 6 & 13 Jun 1790.)

As it turns out, the line cited from Figaro's "Non più andrai" is the principal evidence for the identity of the German adaptation used in the Mannheim production. No printed libretto from that production is known to survive. Friedrich Walter, in his indispensable study of the archive and library of the Mannheim theater, was able to examine and describe the original performing score from the Mannheim production of *Figaro* (Walter 1899, ii:173); unfortunately that score did not survive the Second World War, and Walter's description is now our primary source of information about it. Walter did not know the author of the German text in the score, remarking only that "[d]ie deutsche Übersetzung entspricht nicht der heute allgemein gebräuchlichen von Knigge und Vulpius" (the German translation does not correspond to the one by Knigge and Vulpius in general use today). This statement has sometimes been taken to mean that the libretto of the Mannheim *Figaro* was not equivalent to either of the best known early German translations: that by Adolph Franz Friedrich Ludwig Freiherr Knigge and his daughter Philippine; and that by Christian August Vulpius (1762–1827). However, Walter was not referring to either version individually; he was in fact referring to a combined version of the Knigge and Vulpius translations that came into common use in the nineteenth century.


Figaros Hochzeit

Oper in vier Aufzügen

von

Mozart

Dichtung von Lorenzo da Ponte
(Knigge-Vulpius)

Vollständiges Buch

Herausgegeben und eingeleitet von
Georg Richard Kruse

Verlag von Philipp Reclam jun. Leipzig

Figaros Hochzeit, libretto (Knigge-Vulpius), title page
(Deutsche Nationalbibliohtek)

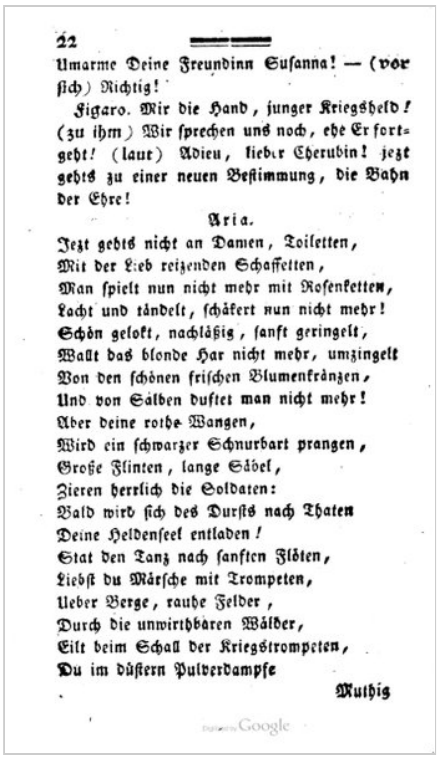
The quoted line in the 1794 review of the Mannheim revival of *Figaro* strongly suggests that the production used Vulpius's translation. The reviewer gives "Izt gehts nicht mehr an Damen=Toiletten" as an example of a line that is extremely awkward to sing. The line is slightly misremembered: the 1789 Cologne printing (said to be unauthorized) of Vulpius's translation gives the line as "Jetzt gehts nicht an Damen, Toiletten."

Die
Hochzeit
des
Figaro.

Eine Operette
in vier Aufzügen.
Nach dem Italiänischen frei bearbeitet
von
C. A. Vulpius.

Die Musik ist von Mozart.

Cöln am Rheine 1789.
Gedruckt und verlegt in der Langenschen
Buchhandlung.



22

Umarme Deine Freundinn Susanna! — (vor sich) Richtig!

Figaro. Mir die Hand, junger Kriegsheld! (zu ihm) Wir sprechen uns noch, ehe Er fortgeht! (laut) Adieu, lieber Cherubin! jezt gehts zu einer neuen Bestimmung, die Bahn der Ehre!

Aria.

Jezt gehts nicht an Damen, Toiletten,
Mit der Lieb reizenden Schaffetten,
Man spielt nun nicht mehr mit Rosenketten,
Lacht und tändelt, schäkert nun nicht mehr!
Schön gelokt, nachläßig, sanft geringelt,
Wallt das blonde Har nicht mehr, umzingelt
Von den schönen frischen Blumenkränzen,
Und von Salben duftet man nicht mehr!
Aber deine rothe Wangen,
Wird ein schwarzer Schnurbart prangen,
Große Flinten, lange Säbel,
Zieren herrlich die Soldaten:
Bald wird sich des Dursts nach Thaten
Deine Heldenseel entladen!
Stat den Tanz nach sanften Flöten,
Liebst du Märsche mit Trompeten,
Ueber Berge, rauhe Felder,
Durch die unwirthbaren Wälder,
Eilt beim Schall der Kriegstrompeten,
Du im düstern Pulverdampfe

Muthig

Title page and beginning of the aria "Jetzt gehts nicht an Damen, Toiletten" ("Non più andrai")
Christian August Vulpius (trans.), *Die Hochzeit des Figaro* (Cologne, 1789)
(Google Books)

Rheinische Musen was edited by Heinrich Gottlieb Schmieder, who himself wrote several original German libretti and translated several others into German, including *Don Giovanni* and *Così fan tutte* (on Schmieder's work as a librettist and translator of libretti, see our entry for 1 May 1791). It seems plausible, then, that Schmieder himself might have been the author of the review of the 1794 Mannheim revival of *Figaro*; at any rate, by that time Schmieder had considerable experience of his own attempting to produce singable German translations, and he would have been well qualified to criticize.

Vulpius's *Figaro* was issued in an authorized edition by Heinsius in Leipzig in 1794. A reviewer for the *Oberdeutsche allgemeine Literaturzeitung* praises Vulpius's version of "Non più andrai" in comparison with a more recent German version of the libretto published in Passau in 1793 (*Oberdeutsche allgemeine Literaturzeitung*, No. 148, 13 Dec 1793, cols. 1200–1205). The reviewer reproduces both translations of the aria in full, but the first few lines of each are sufficient to give the flavor:

Vulpius:

> Jetzt gehts nicht an Damen=Toiletten,
> Mit der Liebe reitzenden Staffetten;
> Man spielt nun nicht mehr mit Rosenketten,
> Lacht, und tändelt, schäckert nun nicht mehr. —

Passau:

> Bis hierher war dein ganzes Bestreben,
> Bloß für Weiber und Mädchen zu leben,
> Unaufhörlich an ihnen zu kleben —
> Wie die Biene auf Blumen im May.

The reviewer calls Vulpius a "Dichter" (poet) and the author of the Passau version a "Stümper" (bungler), but to a modern ear, the Passau version, while not great poetry, seems to fit the melody much more naturally. The version by Vulpius seems dreadful from a singer's point of view.

Another review of the 1794 edition of Vulpius's version of *Figaro* compares it unfavorably with Knigge's:

> *[...]* Wer die Schwierigkei=ten bey solchen Uebersetzungen, mit Beybehaltung der fremdenMusik, kennt, wird dem Hrn. Vulpius kein Verbrechen daraus machen, daß die Poesie der Arien nicht immer sehrschön ist; allein desto leichter wäre es ihm gewesen, den Dia=log hie und da ein wenig vernünftiger einzurichten, und hierzuhätte er bey Figaro's Hochzeit das französische Schauspielnützen können. Dies ist, nach des Rec. Meinung, nichtohne Erfolg von Knigge geschehn, der auch *le Nozze diFigaro* aus dem Italienischen übersetzt hat, wozu, seinendramatischen Blättern nach, der ganz umgearbeitete Dialogvon seiner Tochter herrührt. Die Uebersetzung ist nur ab=schriftlich bey einigen Theatern. Weil wir grade eine Probedieser Arbeit vor uns haben; so wollen wir eine Arie, dieCherubim singt, hier abschreiben, und die Uebersetzungen vonbeyden Verfassern hinzufügen: *[...]* [*Neue Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek*, 11/2/8 (1794), 554]

[translation:]

> *[...]* Whoever knows thedifficulties of such translations, with the retention of foreignmusic, will not think Herr Vulpius criminal if the poetry of the arias is not always very beautiful; yet it would havebeen all the easier for him to adapt the dialogue more sensibly, and with *Figaros Hochzeit* he could have usedthe French play in doing so. In the reviewer's opinion, this was done not unsuccessfully by Knigge, who has also translated*Le nozze di Figaro* from Italian; according to his *DramaturgischeBlätter*, the entire adapted dialogue was done by his daughter.This translation is available only in manuscript at a few theaters. Because we happen to have a sample of this work before us, we will transcribe here an aria sung by Cherubino and the translations by both authors: *[...]*

The reviewer goes on to give the complete Italian text of Cherubino's "Non so più cosa son, cosa faccio," followed by Knigge's translation and then Vulpius's. Again, the first few lines give the flavor:

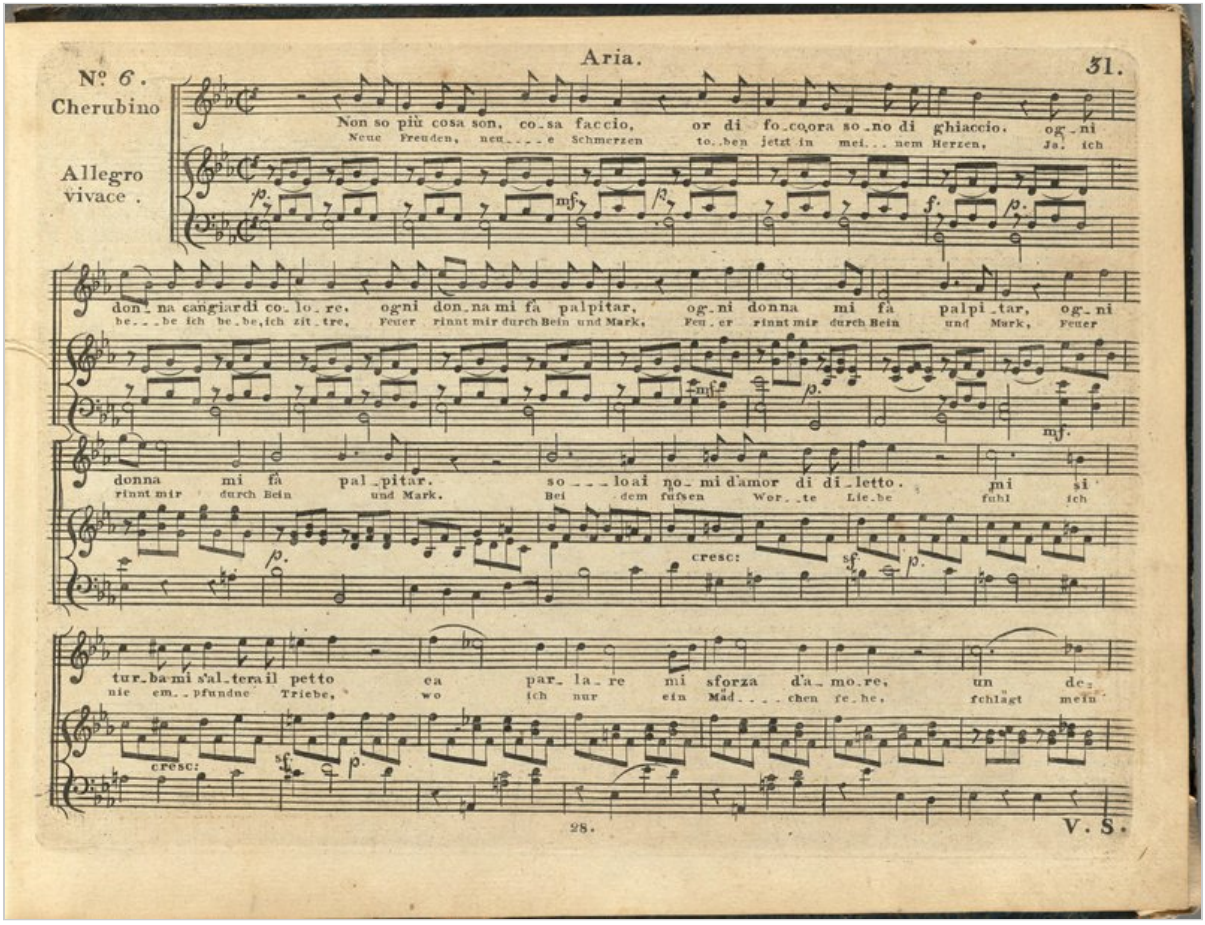
Knigge:

> Neue Freuden, neue Schmerzen
> Toben jetzt in meinem Herzen;
> Ja! ich bebe; ja! ich zittre;
> Feuer rinnt durch Bein und Mark.

Vulpius:

> Nein, ich vermag es nimmermehr zu sagen,
> Wie mich Lieb' und Hoffnung plagen —
> Meines armen Herzens lautes Schlagen,
> Ach! erregt auch nur ein einz'ger Blick.

Vulpius's version seems frankly unsingable, but the reviewer fails to mention that Knigge has dispensed with the anapests of the original Italian (essential to the headlong hormonal tumble of Cherubino's words in Da Ponte's original and Mozart's setting), producing a version that does not fit at all naturally under the original melody:



The first page of "Non so più cosa son, cosa faccio" in the piano-vocal score
by Christian Gottlob Neefe, with the German translation by Knigge (Bonn: Simrock, 1796)
(Harvard Library)

Whatever the reason for the relative lack of popularity of Mozart's *Figaro* in Mannheim—whether it was the unfavorable comparison with Beaumarchais's play, Vulpius's ungainly translation, or a combination of both—it was not performed again in Mannheim until 4 Jan 1801 (Walter 1899, ii:365).

Notes (⇧)

All statistics for the performances of Mozart's operas in Mannheim are taken from the calendar for the Nationaltheater in Walter (1899, ii:249ff). The poster for the Mannheim premiere of *Figaro* is also reproduced in Jacob (1936, 25); however, the image in that reproduction has been extensively cleaned up.

Homering (1992, 55) reproduces an image of a page for Mozart's *Figaro* from the so-called "Hauptbuch" of the Nationaltheater in Mannheim, with notes on casting, costume, sets, props, and stage layouts. Unfortunately the reproduction in Homering's article is illegible. When we are able to obtain a legible image, we will add a transcription and discussion to this commentary.

A complete if somewhat old-fashioned English translation by Herbert A. Strong of Lucian's story about Combabus is available at the Internet Archive here (sections 19ff.)

On the Knigges and their translation of the libretto of *Figaro*, which was used by Großmann's company for the local premiere of the opera in Hannover on 18 May 1789, see also our entry for 18 May 1788.

We would like to thank Evan Baker for bringing the facsimiles in Jacob's book (1936) to our attention, and Steven Whiting for his advice on particular questions of translation.

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