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Barrington's report on Mozart reprinted in a South Carolina newspaper (4 Nov 1771)

Dexter Edge

***The South-Carolina and American Gazette for 1771*, no. 682, November 4–11, 230**

[230]

LITERARY ARTICLE

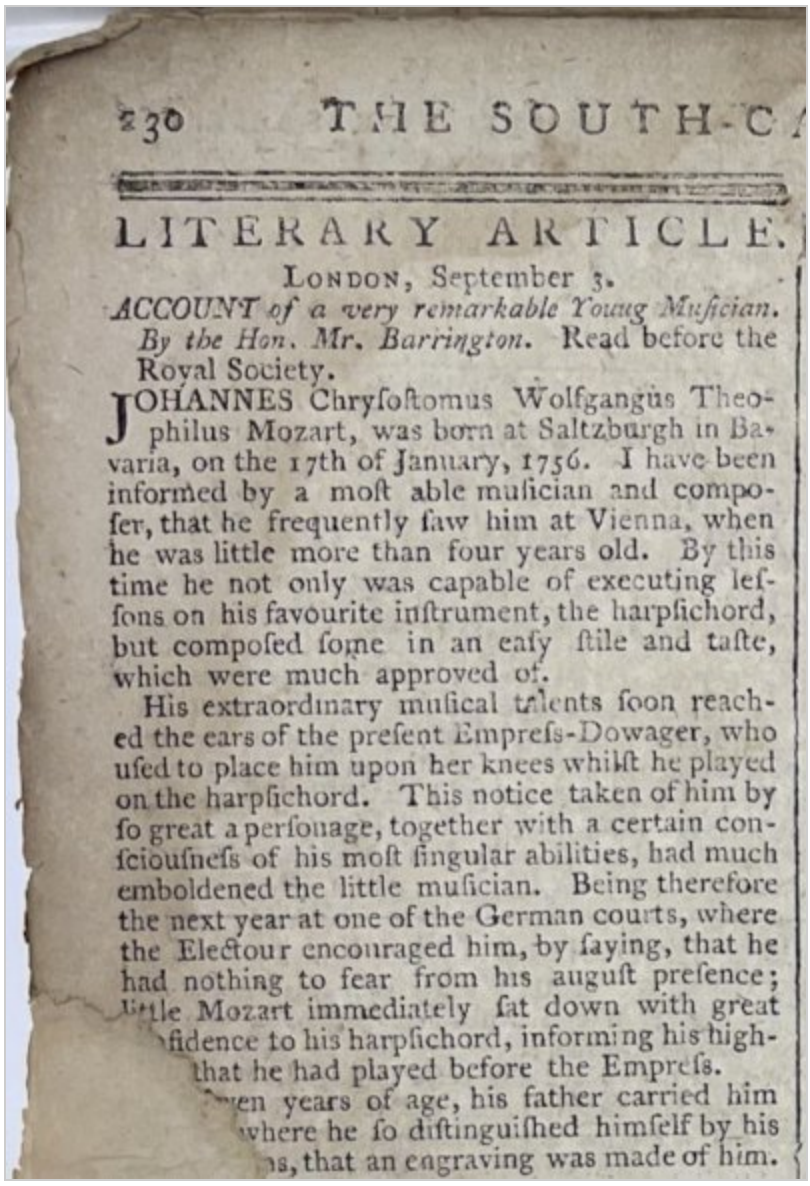
LONDON, September 3.

ACCOUNT of a very remarkable Young Musician. By the Hon. Mr. Barrington. Read before the Royal Society.

JOHANNES Chrysostomus Wolfgangus Theophilus Mozart was born at Saltzburgh in Bavaria, on the 17th of January, 1756. [...]

[Image courtesy Charleston Library Society]

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LITERARY ARTICLE.

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ACCOUNT of a very remarkable Young Muſician. By the Hon. Mr. Barrington. Read before the Royal Society.

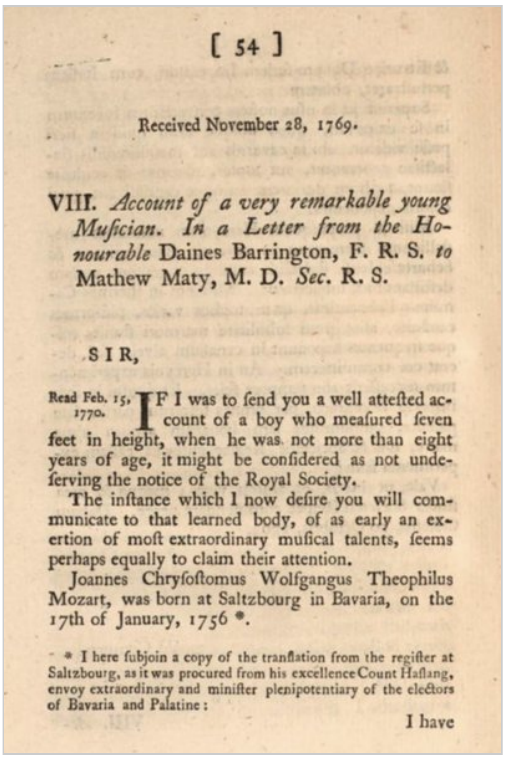
JOHANNES Chryſoſtomus Wolfgangus Theophilus Mozart, was born at Saltzburgh in Bavaria, on the 17th of January, 1756. I have been informed by a moſt able muſician and compoſer, that he frequently ſaw him at Vienna, when he was little more than four years old. By this time he not only was capable of executing leſſons on his favourite inſtrument, the harpſichord, but compoſed ſome in an eaſy ſtile and taſte, which were much approved of.

His extraordinary muſical talents ſoon reached the ears of the preſent Empreſs-Dowager, who uſed to place him upon her knees whilſt he played on the harpſichord. This notice taken of him by ſo great a perſonage, together with a certain conſciouſneſs of his moſt ſingular abilities, had much emboldened the little muſician. Being therefore the next year at one of the German courts, where the Electour encouraged him, by ſaying, that he had nothing to fear from his auguſt preſence; little Mozart immediately ſat down with great confidence to his harpſichord, informing his highneſs that he had played before the Empreſs.

When ſeven years of age, his father carried him to Paris, where he ſo diſtinguiſhed himſelf by his performances, that an engraving was made of him.

Commentary

Daines Barrington's famous report on young Mozart was received by the Royal Society on 28 Nov 1769 and read on 15 Feb 1770; it was first published the following year in volume 60 of *Philosophical Transactions* (54–64; *Dokumente*, 86–92). The volume does not give a precise date of publication, but it was reprinted in *The General Evening Post* in London in its issue for 31 Aug to 3 Sep 1771, providing a *terminus ante quem*. Barrington's report was also reprinted in *The Weekly Magazine, or Edinburgh Amusement* in its issue for Thu, 17 Oct 1771 (72–76); this version has Mozart's correct birthdate, 27 Jan, rather than 17 Jan, as given in *Transactions*.



[54]

Received November 28, 1769.

VIII. *Account of a very remarkable young Muſician. In a Letter from the Honourable* Daines Barrington, F. R. S. *to* Mathew Maty, M. D. *Sec.* R. S.

SIR,

Read Feb. 15, 1770. IF I was to ſend you a well atteſted account of a boy who meaſured ſeven feet in height, when he was not more than eight years of age, it might be conſidered as not undeſerving the notice of the Royal Society.

The inſtance which I now deſire you will communicate to that learned body, of as early an exertion of moſt extraordinary muſical talents, ſeems perhaps equally to claim their attention.

Joannes Chryſoſtomus Wolfgangus Theophilus Mozart, was born at Saltzbourg in Bavaria, on the 17th of January, 1756 *.

* I here ſubjoin a copy of the tranſlation from the regiſter at Saltzbourg, as it was procured from his excellence Count Haſlang, envoy extraordinary and miniſter plenipotentiary of the electors of Bavaria and Palatine:

I have

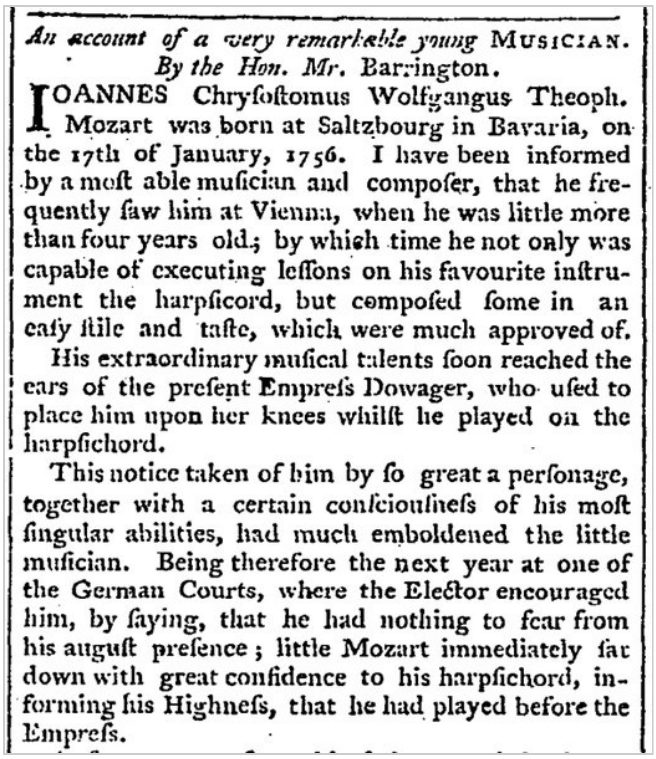
The beginning of Barrington's report on Mozart in *Philosophical Transactions*, vol. 60 (Google Books)



The General Evening Poſt.

(LONDON.)

Price Two-pence Halfpenny.] From SATURDAY, AUGUST 31, to TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 1771. [No. 5911.



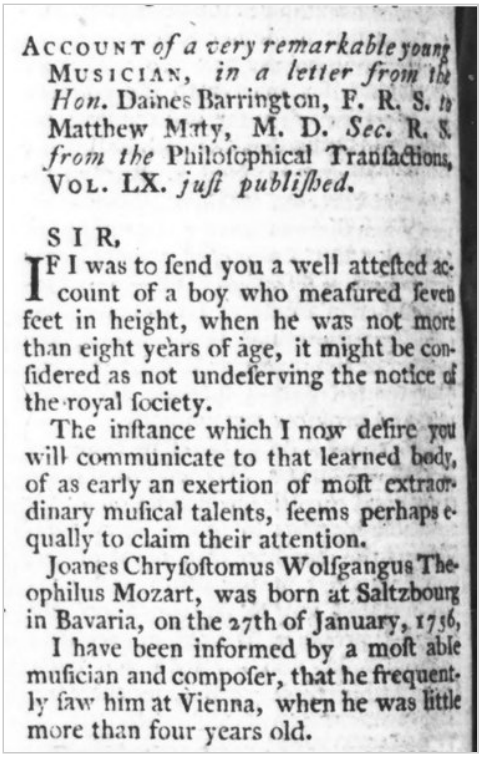
An account of a very remarkable young MUSICIAN.
By the Hon. Mr. Barrington.

IOANNES Chryſoſtomus Wolfgangus Theoph. Mozart was born at Saltzbourg in Bavaria, on the 17th of January, 1756. I have been informed by a moſt able muſician and compoſer, that he frequently ſaw him at Vienna, when he was little more than four years old; by which time he not only was capable of executing leſſons on his favourite inſtrument the harpſicord, but compoſed ſome in an eaſy ſtile and taſte, which were much approved of.

His extraordinary muſical talents ſoon reached the ears of the preſent Empreſs Dowager, who uſed to place him upon her knees whilſt he played on the harpſichord.

This notice taken of him by ſo great a perſonage, together with a certain conſciouſneſs of his moſt ſingular abilities, had much emboldened the little muſician. Being therefore the next year at one of the German Courts, where the Elector encouraged him, by ſaying, that he had nothing to fear from his auguſt preſence; little Mozart immediately ſat down with great confidence to his harpſichord, informing his Highneſs, that he had played before the Empreſs.

The beginning of Barrington's report in *The General Evening Post*
(Burney Collection)



ACCOUNT *of a very remarkable young* MUSICIAN, *in a letter from the Hon.* Daines Barrington, F. R. S. *to* Matthew Maty, M. D. *Sec.* R. S. *from the* Philoſophical Tranſactions, VOL. LX. *juſt publiſhed.*

SIR,

IF I was to ſend you a well atteſted account of a boy who meaſured ſeven feet in height, when he was not more than eight years of age, it might be conſidered as not undeſerving the notice of the royal ſociety.

The inſtance which I now deſire you will communicate to that learned body, of as early an exertion of moſt extraordinary muſical talents, ſeems perhaps equally to claim their attention.

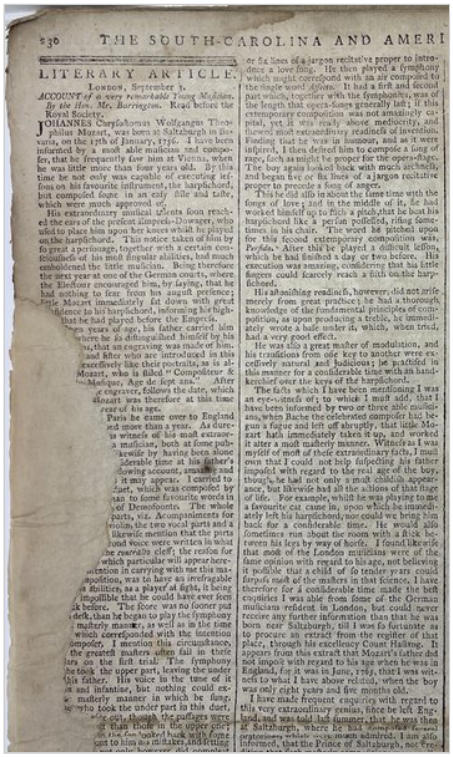
Joanes Chryſoſtomus Wolfgangus Theophilus Mozart, was born at Saltzbourg in Bavaria, on the 27th of January, 1756.

I have been informed by a moſt able muſician and compoſer, that he frequently ſaw him at Vienna, when he was little more than four years old.

The beginning of Barrington's report in *The Weekly Magazine* for 17 Oct 1771
(Internet Archive)

Remarkably, the report was also reprinted in full (except for the two introductory sentences and the footnotes) in *The South-Carolina and American General Gazette*, in its issue for 4–11 Nov 1771 (no. 682, 230, fourth page of the issue). The dateline of the report in the *Gazette* is "London, September 3." This is, to our knowledge, the earliest reference to Mozart in a North American publication, and also one of the earliest reprintings of Barrington's report. (For the earliest known reports of performances of Mozart's music in North America, see our entries for 14 Dec 1786 and 6 Oct 1789.)

The South-Carolina and American General Gazette was published from 1758 to 1782, and under this exact title from 1764 to 1781 (see Brigham 1947, 1036–37). The exemplar of the issue of 4–10 Nov 1771 at the Charleston Library Society appears to be a unicum; it is the exemplar that appears on microfilm and is the one reproduced at newspapers.com, where we first found it. A large piece of the left-hand column of Barrington's report is missing from this exemplar, and a portion of the text is consequently lost. It is unlikely, however, that unknown content is lost, as this seems to be a straight reprint.



230 THE SOUTH-CAROLINA AND AMERI

LITERARY ARTICLE.

LONDON, September 3.

ACCOUNT of a very remarkable Young Musician. By the Hon. Mr. Barrington. Read before the Royal Society.

JOHANNES Chrysostomus Wolfgangus Theophilus Mozart, was born at Saltzburgh in Bavaria, on the 17th of January, 1756. I have been informed by a most able musician and composer, that he frequently saw him at Vienna, when he was little more than four years old. By this time he not only was capable of executing lessons on his favourite instrument, the harpsichord, but composed some in an easy stile and taste, which were much approved of.

His extraordinary musical talents soon reached the ears of the present Empress-Dowager, who used to place him upon her knees whilst he played on the harpsichord. This notice taken of him by so great a personage, together with a certain conceitedness of his most singular abilities, had much emboldened the little musician. Being therefore the next year at one of the German courts, where the Elector encouraged him, by saying, that he had nothing to fear from his august presence; little Mozart immediately sat down with great confidence to his harpsichord, informing his highness that he had played before the Empress.

When he was years of age, his father carried him where he so distinguished himself by his [illegible], that an engraving was made of him. [illegible] and after who are introduced in this [illegible] exactly like their portraits, as is also Mozart, who is filled "Compositeur & Maitrise, Age de sept ans." After the engraver, follows the date, which Mozart was therefore at this time [illegible] year of his age.

Paris he came over to England and more than a year. As during witness of his most extraordinary a musician, both at some public [illegible] by having been alone considerable time at his father's allowing account, amazing and it may appear. I carried to duet, which was composed by him to some favourite words in [illegible] Demofoonte. The whole parts, viz. Accompaniments for violin, the two vocal parts and a likewise mention that the parts and voice were written in what the *contralto* clef; the reason for which particular will appear hereafter mention in carrying with me this supposition, was to have an irrefragable evidence, as a player at sight, it being impossible that he could have ever seen it before. The score was no sooner put before him, than he began to play the symphony in a masterly manner, as well as in the time which corresponded with the intention of the composer. I mention this circumstance, the greatest masters often fail in these trials on the first trial. The symphony being over, he took the upper part, leaving the under for his father. His voice in the tone of it was clear and infantine, but nothing could exceed the masterly manner in which he sung, [illegible] who took the under part in this duet, [illegible] though the passages were more than those in the upper part, [illegible] looked back with some [illegible] to him as a mistake, and letting or six lines of a jargon recitative proper to introduce a love song. He then played a symphony which might correspond with an air composed to the single word *Affetto*. It had a first and second part which, together with the symphonies, was of the length that opera-songs generally last; if this extemporary composition was not amazingly capital, yet it was really above mediocrity, and shewed most extraordinary readiness of invention. Finding that he was in humour, and as it were inspired, I then desired him to compose a song of rage, such as might be proper for the opera-stage. The boy again looked back with much archness, and began five or six lines of a jargon recitative proper to precede a song of anger.

This he did also in about the same time with the songs of love; and in the middle of it, he had worked himself up to such a pitch, that he beat his harpsichord like a person possessed, rising sometimes in his chair. The word he pitched upon for this second extemporary composition was, *Perfido*. After this he played a difficult lesson, which he had finished a day or two before. His execution was amazing, considering that his little fingers could scarcely reach a fifth on the harpsichord.

His astonishing readiness, however, did not arise merely from great practice; he had a thorough knowledge of the fundamental principles of composition, as upon producing a treble, he immediately wrote a base under it, which, when tried, had a very good effect.

He was also a great master of modulation, and his transitions from one key to another were excellently natural and judicious; he practised in this manner for a considerable time with an handkerchief over the keys of the harpsichord.

The facts which I have been mentioning I was an eye-witness of; to which I must add, that I have been informed by two or three able musicians, when Bache the celebrated composer had begun a fugue and left off abruptly, that little Mozart hath immediately taken it up, and worked it after a most masterly manner. Witness as I was myself of most of these extraordinary facts, I must own that I could not help suspecting his father imposed with regard to the real age of the boy, though he had not only a most childish appearance, but likewise had all the actions of that stage of life. For example, whilst he was playing to me a favourite cat came in, upon which he immediately left his harpsichord, nor could we bring him back for a considerable time. He would also sometimes run about the room with a stick between his legs by way of horse. I found likewise that most of the London musicians were of the same opinion with regard to his age, not believing it possible that a child of so tender years could surpass most of the masters in that science. I have therefore for a considerable time made the best enquiries I was able from some of the German musicians resident in London, but could never receive any further information than that he was born near Saltzburgh, till I was so fortunate as to procure an extract from the register of that place, through his excellency Count Hasling. It appears from this extract that Mozart's father did not impose with regard to his age when he was in England, for it was in June, 1765, that I was witness to what I have above related, when the boy was only eight years and five months old.

I have made frequent enquiries with regard to this very extraordinary genius, since he left England, and was told last summer that he was then at Saltzburgh, where he had [illegible] great proficiency which was much admired. I am also informed, that the Prince of Saltzburgh, not [illegible]

A portion of the full page containing Barrington's report on Mozart in *The South-Carolina and American General Gazette*, 4–10 Nov 1771
(Courtesy Charleston Library Society)

For more on Barrington, see our entry "Samuel Wesley gives his opinion of Mozart's music."

Notes (⇧)

There are minor differences in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization between the printing of Barrington's report in *The South-Carolina and American General Gazette* and those in *Philosophical Transactions* and *The General Evening Post*. A few discrepancies in spelling—for example, "Johannes", "Saltzburgh", and "Electour" in the *Gazette* vs. "Joannes", "Saltzbourg", and "Elector" in the *Post* and *Transactions*—cast some doubt on whether either could be the *Gazette*'s direct source. But the match between the dateline of the *Gazette's* reprinting and the date of the *Post*'s issue would seem to make it the leading contender. The version in the *Gazette* follows the *Post* and *Transactions* in giving an incorrect birthdate for Mozart (17 Jan)—as, indeed, do all the reprints we have seen, apart from *The Weekly Magazine*, where the "correct" 27 Jan may be a typo.

We are grateful to Lisa Hayes, Special Collections Librarian at the Charleston Library Society, for examining that library's exemplar of this issue of *The South-Carolina and American General Gazette* and for providing an image of it. Our thanks also to Miguel Arango Calle for his help with the research on this commentary, and to Janet Page for her comments.

Bibliography (⇧)

Brigham, Clarence S. 1924. "Bibliography of American Newspapers, 1690–1820, Part XVI: South Carolina." *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* (October 1924): 259–300.

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