

Edge, Dexter. 2023. "Barrington's report on Mozart reprinted in a South Carolina newspaper (4 Nov 1771)." In: [Mozart: New Documents](#), edited by Dexter Edge and David Black. First published 27 Jan 2023. [[direct link](#)]

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]

L I T E R A R Y A R T I C L E

LONDON, September 3.

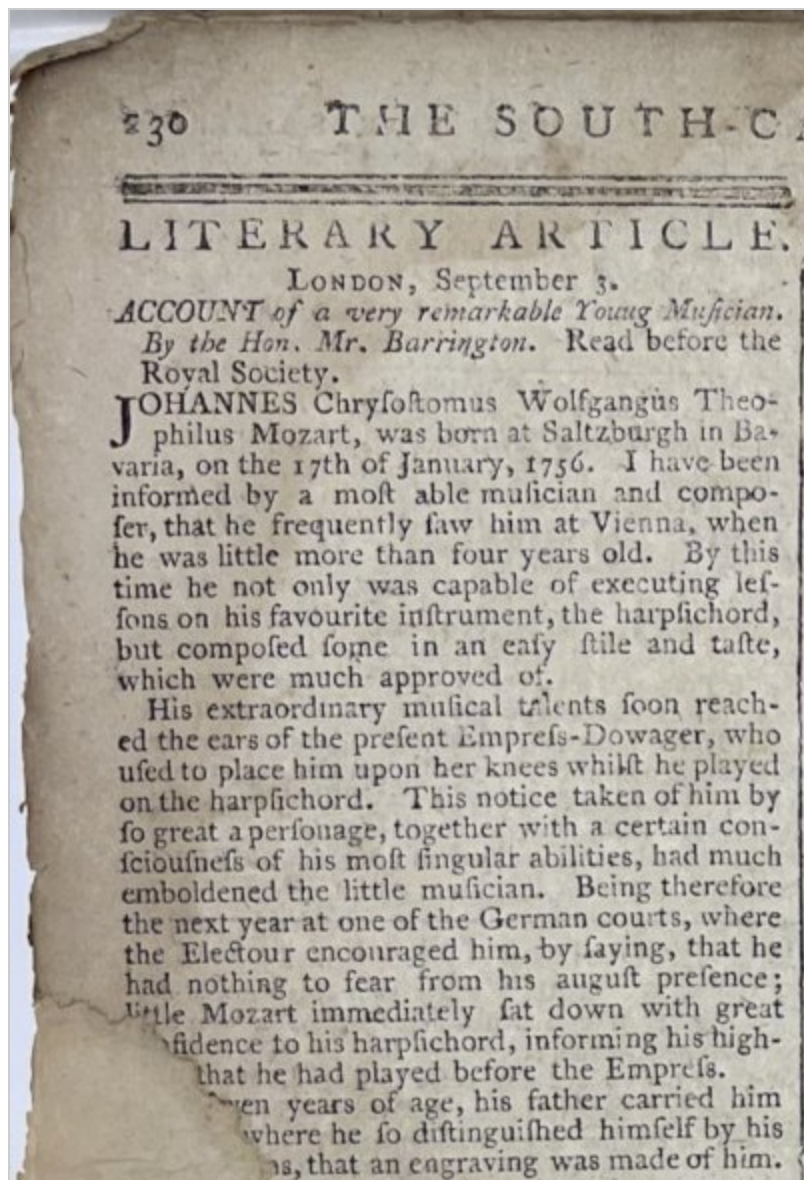
ACCOUNT of a very remarkable Young Musician.

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](#)]

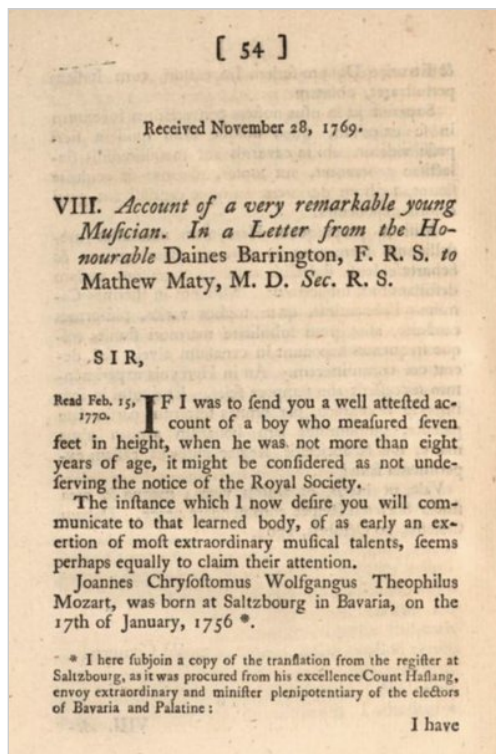




Commentary

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*.

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



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



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

S I R,

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.

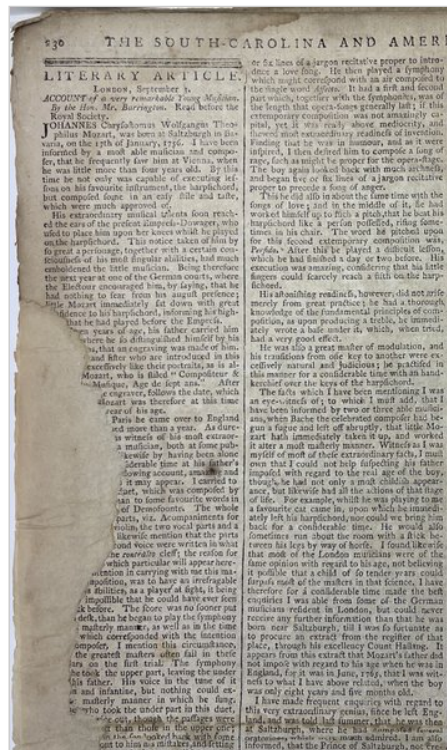
Joanes Chrysoftomus Wolfgangus Theophilus Mozart, was born at Saltzbourg in Bavaria, on the 27th of January, 1756.

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.



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 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.

———. 1947. *History and Bibliography of American Newspapers, 1690-1820*. Worcester, MA, American Antiquarian Society.

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First Published: Fri, 27 Jan 2023

Citation:

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