

Mozart and the Czechs

by Catherine Sprague

A Portrait restored by The Friends appears to be the only surviving painting of Mozart's generous patron

Researching a new book on Mozart has brought me into fortunate contact with The Friends of Czech Historic Buildings, Gardens and Parks when, about a year ago, I came across a portrait of Count Thomas Vinciguerra Collalto on the Friends' website. This came as a complete surprise as I had spent a good deal of time searching for his picture. As many know, Mozart performed at the Collalto Palace in October 1762, marking his first public appearance in Vienna. Although I had sought his portrait at several of his estates, I was told the paintings were probably too damaged to recover.

Through his short life, Mozart (1756-1791) was in contact with Czech musicians and composers and his legacy is closely tied to them. For the most part, much has been written about Mozart's successful trips to Prague and the works written for its people, with special focus on the opera, *Don Giovanni* (KV 527) and two symphonies, the *Prague Symphony* (KV 504) and the *Linz Symphony* (KV 425). But Mozart's exposure to Czech musicians and its people actually began much earlier in his life, and goes back to his very early years in Salzburg.

The earliest of such contacts, though infrequently mentioned in the Mozart literature, must start with several Bohemian musicians employed with the musical establishment of Salzburg itself, the city where he was born and where his first impressions were formed. One of the court appointed composers was Ferdinand Seidl (ca. 1700-1773 from Silesia) a major exponent of symphonic writing in Salzburg and therefore a model to Mozart. Other Bohemian musicians, whose names sometimes appear in the Mozart family letters were Wenzel Helbelt (ca. 1736-69), composer and violinist from Moravia, along with Wenzel Sadlo (a bassoonist) and Franz Drasil. The latter two were also horn players from Brodce/Brodetz in Bohemia for whom Leopold Mozart gave high praise. It is no surprise that Bohemian musicians were especially valued for both their musical and technical skills and were present not just in Salzburg, but also all over Europe during the 18th century. Charles Burney, the well-travelled and

informed music historian of the 18th century, found the Czechs so well versed in music that Bohemia should be properly termed the "conservatory of Europe".

Mozart spent nearly one third of his life travelling all across Europe, visiting as a youth the cities of Munich, Mannheim, Paris, London, Munich and The Hague, along with all the major cities of Italy.

Mozart became very discerning about composers and was quick to criticize. But two that he did not criticize were Jiří Antonín Benda (1722-1795) and Josef Mysliveček (1737-1781). Of Benda, Mozart especially admired two of his compositions, *Medea* and *Ariadne auf Naxos* that he heard in Mannheim in 1778 and sought to use as a bouncing board for the writing of duodrama. In a letter to his father Mozart stated that "Benda has always been my favorite [composer] among Lutheran kapellmeisters [term for the head of a musical establishment] and I like those two works by him so much that I always keep them in my possession."¹ That is high praise from one of the most crucial of composers. Mozart was on very friendly terms with Mysliveček over a period of about ten years and made sure that Salzburg had copies of certain of his symphonies so that he can hear and study them.

During the Salzburg years when he was not travelling, Mozart wrote some compositions for Czech patrons during the 1770s. Salzburg was not far geographically from Bohemia and therefore it is no surprise to find Bohemians living and working there. For Mozart, the arrival of the wealthy Czernin family in the mid-1770s was a godsend. Count Prokop Adalbert Czernin deserves special mention here, as he offered to pay Mozart 20 ducats a year to write various kinds of compositions. Unfortunately, little is known about this agreement, but it represented a substantial sum of money, or more than half of Mozart's small salary in Salzburg. It is the only documented case of a patron offering to pay an annual stipend to Mozart throughout his entire life. Regrettably, the Count died very shortly after the agreement was made and we do not know whether Mozart received any portion of the stipend.

The eldest daughter of Count Czernin, Countess Antonia Lützow (1750-1801), was the niece of the Salzburg Archbishop Colloredo. For her, Mozart wrote the *Piano Concerto No. 8 in C Major* (KV 246),

¹ Letter by Mozart to his father, November 12th, 1778, from Mannheim



Friends of Mozart

Josepha Duschek/Dušková, left, with whom Mozart stayed in Prague. Above, the hornplayer Giovanni Punto, born Jan Václav Stich. Right, a late 19th-century print of Josef Mysliveček

a 1776 composition that Mozart used as a teaching piece. The younger brother of the Countess, Count Rudolph Czernin (1757-1845), who was studying at Salzburg University is thought to have commissioned Mozart to write some dance for the Salzburg carnival season of 1777 (KV 269b). The dance music written for Rudolf Černín may have never been orchestrated (for some unknown reason) and has survived only in keyboard form. In 1777, Count Rudolf Czernin founded an amateur orchestra in Salzburg, in which he played the violin and conducted. While the Mozarts may have made fun of his playing, they nevertheless appreciated the family's intense love of music.

One of Mozart's most important patrons during his Vienna years (1781-1791) was Count Johann Joseph Anton Thun (1711-1788), referred to by Mozart and his father as 'Old Count Thun'. Count Thun had his own orchestra and it must have been a very competent one. For Count Thun, Mozart wrote the Symphony No. 36 in C Major, (KV 425), known as *Linz Symphony* in 1783, which broke with the prior Salzburg symphonic traditions of Mozart and imposed serious technical difficulties on the orchestra. Thun hosted Mozart and his wife in Linz for two weeks in 1783, and then again in 1787 in Prague. His oldest son, Franz Joseph (1730-1800) was the husband of Count Wilhemine Thun (1744-1800), who played a key role in opening doors for Mozart when he moved to Vienna in 1781. Mozart was a frequent guest at her house where some of the most enlightened of society could be found, including the Emperor, Joseph II.

Mozart wrote quite a bit of music for other Bohemian patrons, including the dance music for

Count Jan Pachta (K. 509) written in Prague in 1787. Count Pachta evidently locked Mozart in a room, and told him that he could not come out until the music was written! Among the most beloved arias are those written for Josepha Duschek/Dušková, including *Ab lo previdi*, K.272 and *Bella mia fiamma, addio*, K. 528. She hosted Mozart at her villa called Bertramka on the outskirts of Prague, see photo, bottom of page 9. And, then there is the famous hornist Giovanni Punto, whose original name was Jan Václav Stich. Punto had been in his early years a member of Count Thun's orchestra, but escaped employment due to its confining conditions (as Mozart would do in 1781!). He subsequently travelled across Europe as a virtuoso, establishing his reputation as one of the finest instrumentalists of the century.

When Mozart travelled to Paris in 1778 after quitting the Salzburg court, he met Punto there and exclaimed in a letter to his father that Punto's playing was magnificent. Mozart was thrilled by the thought of writing some music for him and did so in the famous wind concertante, *Sinfonia Concertante for Flute, Oboe, Bassoon, and Horn*, K. 297b. Its manuscript is lost, however, and the piece was never performed in Paris at the *Concert Spirituel* as intended, due to a cabal in Paris against Mozart. The existing manuscript does not quite conform to the original instrumentation described by Mozart, but parts of it are thought to be conceptually and even melodically by Mozart. The work can be heard on You Tube, performed by the Mozarteum in Salzburg:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=dU6Jr0adbHw&feature=related

There is no doubt that Mozart loved Prague a great deal and the people of Prague loved him. His visit in early 1787 was perhaps the most enthusiastic reception he had received ever in his lifetime. The citizens of Prague had recently heard *The Marriage of Figaro*, (KV 492), and immediately asked him to visit their city and conduct it himself. Upon arrival at the city in early 1787, Mozart heard tunes from *Figaro* being played everywhere in the streets! At his concert, he conducted the *Prague Symphony*, K. 504, a strikingly beautiful work. His concert was so successful that he was invited to return, giving *Don Giovanni* (KV 527) to an enthusiastic crowd.

The people of Prague greatly admired Mozart, more so than any other city. Mozart's two children were taken to Prague in their early years for study and cared for by Franz Xaver Niemetschek/František Xaver Němeček (1766-1849), who also wrote the first biography of Mozart in 1798. Many of Mozart works were subsequently adapted by the Czechs that could even be heard in churches throughout Bohemia. One of Mozart's most beloved themes, the opening theme to the *Piano Sonata in A Major*, K.331 has been traced to a Czech song *Hořela lípa, hořela* ('Freu Dich mein Her, denk an kein Schmerz'). Finally, upon the young composer's untimely death at age 35 on December 5th, 1791, 4,000 people turned out for a special memorial musical event in Prague, and the city bells tolled for over 30 minutes. Nothing of this magnitude occurred in Vienna or elsewhere, where Mozart had experienced a mixture of triumphs, increasing financial pressures and wavering support.

The research will appear in a book to be published in 2013 by Pendragon Press and will include many new discoveries. My co-author is Dr. William Cowdery, of Cornell University, a close associate of Neal Zaslaw who is a board member of the Mozarteum. There are well over 100 new images, including, I am happy to say, portraits of 'Old Count Thun', the three Czernin family members, and several other Czech portraits. None of these have yet appeared in any Mozart book, but have deserved to be included among all the other portraits normally given high value.

Thank you for the opportunity to write about Mozart in your very interesting newsletter.

Catherine Sprague

Catherine Sprague is a graduate of Indiana University. She is a pianist and lecturer on Mozart and early French Baroque music. Catherine is married with two children and lives in New Jersey, USA.



Some Former Properties of the Collalto Family

The Palais Collalto, Vienna, above, is where Mozart gave his first public performance in the city. Location: Am Hof, adjoining the Kirche Am Hof in the centre of the city.

The Château of Brtnice, Moravia (below) is privately owned and stands in need of repair.

The Château of Uherčice, Moravia, (bottom), is in state ownership and well known to readers of the Newsletter, see page 4.





The Prague that Mozart Knew

Above

The Pacht Palace is now a hotel that has a fine view out over the River Vltava, near Charles Bridge. The range visible from the street was added later, but Mozart knew the 1760s wings beyond and stayed in the palace in order to finish his commission from Count Jan Pacht.

Below **The Villa Bertramka**, Smíchov, now Prague 5, where Mozart stayed with the Duschek / Dušek family. Now a museum showing memorabilia of Mozart's time in Prague, the villa is owned by the Mozart Society.



Above **The Estates Theatre / Stavovské divadlo**
The only theatre where Mozart performed whose exterior has remained substantially as he knew it.
Part of the Czech National Theatre.

