

*Species facti*²[Vienna, 21st September, 1768]

After many of the nobility here were convinced, either by the reports from elsewhere or by their own examination and arranged tests, of the extraordinary talents of my son, [5] it was considered by all to be one of the most remarkable happenings of the present and of earlier ages that a boy of 12 years should write and personally conduct an *opera*. A learned article from *Paris*³ reinforces this opinion by maintaining, after a detailed description of the genius of my son, that there could be no doubt that this child will, [10] at the age of 12, write an *opera* for one or other of the theatres of Italy, and everyone believed that a German must reserve such fame only for his native land. I received unanimous encouragement in this aim. I followed the voice of the *public*, and the Dutch minister, Count von Degenfeld,⁴ was the first to make this suggestion to the theatre impresario *Affligio*⁵ [15] because he had already become intimately familiar with the ability of the boy in Holland. The singer *Carattoli*⁶ was the second to speak to *Affligio* about it, and the matter was decided upon with the impresario in the house of the personal physician *Laugier*⁷ in the presence of the young Baron *van Swieten*⁸ and the two singers *Carattoli* and *Caribaldi*,⁹ all the more so since everyone, especially the 2 singers, [20] maintained most emphatically that even very average music by such a young boy was for that reason extraordinarily wonderful, and just seeing this child conducting from the *clavier* in the *orchestra* would surely draw the entire town into the theatre. I therefore had my son write it.

As soon as the first act was finished, I asked *Carattoli* to listen to it and [25] give his judgement to reassure me. He came, and his amazement was so great that he came round to me again straightaway the next day and brought *Caribaldi* with him. *Caribaldi*, no less amazed, brought *Poggi*¹⁰ to me a couple of days later. All gave such unusual approval that they all grew angry at my distrust when I repeatedly asked them whether they perhaps thought that it was good [30] – whether they considered that he should continue – and called out, with much gesticulating, *cosa? – come? Questo è un portent! Questo opera andrà alle stelle! È una meraviglia! – non dubiti, che scrivi avanti! – &c.*,¹¹ along with a multitude of other expressions. The same was said to me afterwards by *Caratoli* in his own room. [35]

Assured of the desired success by the applause of the singers, I had my son continue with the work, but asked the personal *medicus* *Laugier* to make, in my name, all the correct arrangements with the impresario regarding the payment. This happened, and *Affligio*

¹ BD: Rough copy only.

² BD: Legal term: "The particular kind of act", a summary of the events. Cf. No. 0113/115.

³ BD: Grimm's article in the *Correspondence littéraire* of 15th July, 1766.

⁴ "Graf von Degenfeld". BD: Frederik Christoph, Count [Graf] von Degenfeld-Schomburg (1722-1781), at this point diplomatic representative of the Netherlands in Vienna.

⁵ BD: Giuseppe Affligio (also Afflisio, actually Marcati) (1719-1787), from 1767 the only person in charge of "spectacles" in Vienna, manager of the Burgtheater and the Kärntnertheater. Cf. No. 0125/120.

⁶ BD: Caratoli, cf. list in No. 0125/133.

⁷ BD: Alexandre-Louis Laugier (1719?-1774), personal physician to Maria Theresia.

⁸ BD: Gottfried Bernhard van Swieten (1733-1803), became a diplomat in 1755, served in numerous European cities. From 1777 he had educational responsibilities in Vienna ["State Education Commission"]. Owner of an enormously valuable library. Wrote the text for Haydn's "*Seven Last Words*" and "*The Seasons*". Acquainted with C. Ph. E. Bach. Met Mozart in Vienna in 1767, saw him regularly in Vienna, introduced him in his home to the music of Handel and Bach. Commissioned works from Mozart. Composed and conducted music himself.

⁹ BD: Caribaldi, cf. list in No. 0125/133.

¹⁰ BD: Poggi, cf. list in No. 0125/133.

¹¹ What? – Pardon? This boy is a portent! This opera will go to the stars! It is a miracle! – Do not doubt that he should continue to write! – &c.

promised 100 ducats.¹² Now, however, [40] in order to shorten my expensive stay in Vienna, I made a request at this point that the *opera* should already be staged before the departure of His Majesty for Hungary, but some changes which the poet had to make in the text held up the composition, and *Affligio* declared that he wished to have it performed on the return of His Majesty.

[45] Now the *opera* had already been lying finished for some weeks. The copying began, and the first act was handed out to the singers, and immediately afterwards the second as well. In the meantime, since my son had to perform to the nobility one or other of the *arias* on various occasions, yes, even the *finale* of the first act on the *clavier*, which was admired by all, [50] which *Affligio* himself witnessed with eye and ear in the house of the titled Prince von Kauniz.¹³ Now a start was to be made with the rehearsals.

But – how could I have suspected this! – here the machinations against my son also started.

It very seldom happens that an *opera* turns out perfectly well straightaway at the first rehearsal [55] and does not have to suffer a change here and there. For exactly this reason, the custom is to rehearse with *clavier* alone, and never with *instruments*, until the singers have studied their parts together, especially the *finale*.

But here exactly the opposite happened. The roles had not been studied enough, [60] there had been no rehearsal for the singers with *clavier*, and they nevertheless carried out the rehearsal of the first act with the entire *orchestra*, purely in order to give the matter a trivial and confused appearance right at the beginning. No-one who was present will call it a rehearsal without blushing, [65] and I will not recount the callous behaviour of those whose conscience will speak to them. May God forgive them.

After the rehearsal, *Affligio* said to me it was good, yet, since one part or another was too high, there must be some changes made here and there; I should simply speak to the singers. And, since His Majesty would already be here in a fortnight, [70] he wanted to perform the *opera* in 4 or, at the most, in 6 weeks, so that there would time to get everything into good order. I should not occupy myself with the matter, he maintained, being a man of his word who will keep his promise in all things; it was nothing new; in other *operas*, too, changes happened etc. etc.

[75] Accordingly, changes were made as the singers requested, and two new *arias* were written in the first act. But in the meantime *La Caschina*¹⁴ was being performed in the theatre. Now the set time had passed, and I heard that *Affligio* had once again handed out another opera. There was even talk that *Affligio* would not perform the *opera* at all, [80] he had spread word that the singers could not sing it, those who previously and in person had not only declared it good, but had exalted it to the skies.

In order to insure myself against this additional gossip, my son had to perform the whole opera on the *clavier* [85] in the house of the young Baron *van Swieten* in the presence of Count von Sporck,¹⁵ the Duke of *Braganza* and others with an understanding of music. All were most highly amazed at what *Affligio* and the singers maintained; all were very touched and declared with one voice that such un-Christian, untruthful and malicious statements were incomprehensible, that they preferred this opera to many an Italian one, and that instead of encouraging such a heavenly talent, there was a *cabal* in the background [90] obviously only aiming at cutting off this innocent boy's path to deserved honour and good fortune.

¹² BD: ≈ 450 florins, the normal fee for composing an opera.

¹³ “T: Fürsten von Cauniz”. BD: Wenzel Anton, Count [Graf] (from 1764 Prince [Fürst]) Kaunitz-Rietberg (1711-1794), diplomat, from 1753 State Chancellor [Staatskanzler]. He received the Mozarts on 15th October, 1762.

¹⁴ BD: *La Cecchina ossia la buona figliuola*, comic opera in three acts by Nicola Piccinni (1728-1800).

¹⁵ “Grafen von Sporck”. BD: Johann Wenzel, Count [Graf] Sporck (1724-1804), from 1764 General Director of Spectacles [General-Spektakel-Direktor]. He had no direct influence on *Affligio*.

I went to the impresario to find out the true state of affairs. He said to me that he had never been against performing the *opera*, but I would not consider him at fault if he looked after his own interests. [95] Some doubts had been expressed to him that it might not please the *public*. He had had rehearsals for the *Caschina*¹⁶ and now wanted the same for the *Buona figliuola*,¹⁷ but would then immediately perform the boy's *opera*. Then, if it was not well received, which he wished, he did at least have two other *operas* at his disposal. I laid out the problem of the length of my stay there already and of the prolongation. [100] He replied, Ah, it's like that! One week, more or less, then I will have it started right away. That then was the final word. *Carattoli's arias* were changed, everything was done to suit *Caribaldi*, the same with *Poggi* and *Laschi* etc. Each frequently and emphatically assured me that he had no objections; it all depended on *Affligio* etc. [105] Meanwhile, more than a month had passed. The copyist said to me that he had not yet received an order to write out the changed *arias*, and when I gathered during the penultimate rehearsal of the *Buona figliuola* that *Affligio* again wanted to put on another *opera*, I took him to task on the matter. Thereupon he gave the order to the copyists, in the presence of myself and the poet *Coltellini*,¹⁸ that everything should be handed out in two days [110] and the *opera* rehearsed with the *orchestra* within a fortnight at the latest.

But the enemies of the poor child |: whoever they are :| started their intriguing again. On the same day, the copyist was ordered to stop writing and, a couple of days later, I learned – [115] that *Affligio* had now decided not to put the boy's *opera* on the theatre schedule at all. I wanted to be certain about the matter, went to him and received the answer that he had called the singers together, they had admitted that the *opera* was incomparably composed, but that it was not theatrical and consequently they could not perform it. This talk was utterly incomprehensible to me. [120] Would the singers then really dare, without blushing for shame, to pour contempt on the *opera* they had previously extolled to the heavens, concerning which they themselves had encouraged the boy, and which they had lauded to *Affligio* himself as good? – I replied to him that he could not expect the boy to take the great effort of writing an *opera* upon himself for nothing. [125] I reminded him of his agreement; I made it clear to him that he had led us around for four months and caused us costs of more than 160 ducats.¹⁹ I reminded him of the time I had lost and assured him that I would press him both for the 100 ducats which he had agreed with the personal physician *Laugier* and for the other expenses. [130]

To this, my fair demand, he accorded me an incomprehensible answer which betrayed the embarrassment he felt at wanting to extract himself, I do not know how, from the whole affair, finally taking leave of me with the most shameful, callous expressions: If I wanted to have the boy prostituted, [135] he would have the *opera* laughed and whistled off the stage. *Coltellini*²⁰ heard all of this. So these were the wages offered to my son for his great toil in writing an *opera* |: the original of which amounts to 558 pages²¹ :|, for the lost time and the costs incurred? – And what, finally, and of most concern to my heart, were the consequences for the honour and reputation of my son, [140] since I can no longer press for the performance of the *opera*, since it had been made more than clear to me that measures would be taken to ensure that the performance would be miserable; then they furthermore give the pretext that the composition is unsingable, one moment saying it is not theatrical, then that it does not fit the text, [145] then that he is not capable of writing such music

¹⁶ BD: *Cecchina*, see above.

¹⁷ BD: *La buona figliuola maritata*, comic opera in three acts by Nicola Piccinni (1728-1800).

¹⁸ BD: Coltellini.

¹⁹ BD: ≈ 720 florins.

²⁰ BD: Marco Coltellini (1719-1777), from 1758 theatre poet in Vienna, in 1769 successor to Pietro Metastasio as court poet. His changes to Goldoni's text for *La finta giardiniera* were only in the third act.

²¹ BD: Cf. No. 0144/67.

himself, and whatever else in the way of inanity and self-contradictory babbling is heard, all of which, however, vanishes like smoke in the face of a precise examination²² of the musical powers of my child – an examination for which I most solicitously and most obediently plead, mainly for his honour – to the shame of the slanderers, so envious and rapacious of honour, [150] thus persuading everyone that this had no other aim than to suppress and grieve an innocent creature (to whom God has given an extraordinary talent which other nations have admired and encouraged) in the capital city of his German fatherland.

²² BD: Count [Graf] Sporck (line 83) was commissioned to do this (cf. No. 0141/8), but it is not clear whether this happened.