

1407. CONSTANZE NISSEN¹ TO BENEDIKT SCHACK,² MUNICH

Herr / Herr Benedikt Schack / Singer at the Royal Court.³ / Munich /
Entrusted to the kindness of the esteemed / organist Keller.⁴

[5] Most highly honoured, dear friend of my blessedly departed husband
and also my good friend,

Salzburg,
16th Febr.
1826

You should not remain astonished for too long at your inability to associate this incoming letter with the signature: I hasten to let you know that it is Mozart's widow who allows herself the pleasure of writing to you.

I hope you can still remember me a little, even if only as an appendix to that friend of your heart. I remember you very well as an obliging and serene man of talent and genius, qualities which you last proved to me in Munich,⁵ and I have received confirmation that you have not ceased to remain true to your amiable character. [15] You would certainly also allow me to profit from this and to call on your qualities and sentiments once again, even if it were not the case that I can be certain, as I am now, that my aim in itself contains so much that is appealing to you that in the end you will even be grateful to me for giving you the opportunity to express your feelings for *M.* and to contribute publicly even more substantially to his honour [20] than you have done previously.

Not being satisfied with the fragmentary skeleton of the descriptions of the life of my blessedly departed husband, I am occupying myself, in association with my present life companion, with collecting all materials that may help to make this more comprehensive. Most of those contemporaries of his who could have provided me with this have passed on; [25] others were not observers. I consider you to be the person who can assist me better and more satisfactorily than any other. I must therefore turn to you.⁶ You combine capability with a pure will. I know no-one anywhere who has lived with him so familiarly and so much, [30] no-one who knew him better or was more committed to him, and this precisely in those most important last years before his death, and namely during his stay in Vienna, about which his biographers, in the most amazing way, are almost unable to tell us anything except the names of some of his works, but nothing about the person himself. The largest of the gaps in his biographies really do concern Vienna.

[35] I only hope I am not letting myself be seduced into wishing too much from you! My wish goes far: it goes as far as wishing that you might be so gracious as to imagine you had a bosom friend who knows nothing about *M.* and desires to know everything, and that you were inclined to let him know everything that you had experienced with him yourself, what you had noticed about him, [40] and what you had discovered through others, not only from the

¹ BD: Nissen's handwriting, Constanze's signature. Georg Nikolaus Nissen (1761-1826), secretary to the Holstein Legation in Regensburg and then to the Danish Legation in Vienna. Met Constanze at the end of 1797, was either her landlord or cohabitant. Nissen advised Constanze in all business matters from 1798 onwards, especially with the publishers Breitkopf & Härtel and André. The letters, often formulated by him and signed by Constanze, reveal an experienced, if cautious, businessman. Cf. No. 1224 for longer note.

² BD: Benedikt Schack [properly "Ziak" or "Žák"] (1758-1826), studied philosophy and singing in Vienna from 1776, became a music director in Silesia in 1780, joined Schikaneder's troupe, employed in Munich from 1796. After losing his voice he turned to composing for the church. He was previously successful as a composer of singspiels. He sang *Tamino* in the first performance of *The Magic Flute*. Reportedly participated in the rehearsal of the *Requiem* by Mozart's deathbed on the afternoon of 4th December, 1791.

³ "königlichen Hofsänger".

⁴ BD: Maximilian Keller (1770-1855), organist, frequently in Salzburg to take composition lessons from Michael Haydn. He was entrusted with passing the letter on to Schack; when the latter died in December, 1826, however, he still had not received it.

⁵ BD: This meeting must have been before 1809, as Schack did not yet know Constanze as Nissen's wife.

⁶ BD: Cf. No. 1401/14 ff.

musical point of view, but quite generally, both regarding the person in particular and what was true of the artist, everything that was characteristic, events large and small, anecdotes, in short, whatever in the least bears on the story of his person, his manner, his most frequent, favourite subjects of conversation, his character, and the story of his works, [45] his behaviour when serious and in high spirits etc. etc., and that you then write it down, be it in the leisurely and effortless form of a letter, which costs you the least time, or as you would tell it at your leisure and without straining yourself in the least, as in a friendly conversation, just as it comes into your mind. [50] Everything, even the apparently trivial, is of value to me, because everything is characteristic, and because some of what appears trivial is often of service in explaining other things.

How does this seem to you? Am I not taking too great a liberty? Am I not seeking to misuse you? Would this not be too much of an intervention in your little leisure time? I say, your little leisure time; [55] for how can it be doubted that a man of such rare talents and of such an exceptionally active spirit, who has been called to my mind anew by the details provided by Gerber and Lipowsky,⁷ never allows himself any rest?

It would be most felicitous for my undertaking if circumstances allowed you to take up the work

[60] soon

and if you would present me with a half or whole sheet from time to time by letter post as soon as you have written it.

I sense the magnitude of the test to which my expectations are subjecting you; [65] you will come through it, however, inasmuch as it is possible, for, as my husband says, *ultra posse nemo obligatur*.⁸ You will also consent to unite, for the future and in a more permanent way, in as far as it is in your power, the two names which are united in printed written works and are also still united in the mouths of many. But if I have overstepped this limit in my request, [70] choose from details, inform me of isolated occurrences and remarks, anecdotes, and of what memories, for example, are most valuable to you. I will receive appreciatively everything and anything, even so few and such trifling alms.

Do you not have any letters, short messages, notes or any other manuscripts by *M.* [75] (besides your scores)? In the absence of originals for me to keep, I would be very obliged for even mere copies. – Do you know of anyone else who has a scrap of paper? – It would be of great as well as of general interest to know, for example, what you could tell us about *M.*'s few compositions in your operas. – You can no doubt still remember which books on music [80] (not scores, Lipowsky names these) *M.* lent you? I too would very much like to know.

A complete biography of *W.A.M.*, it seems to me, must be preceded by one about his father and teacher, and I have also attempted to gather material for that. You also made the acquaintance of this fine man: [85] what would your imaginary friend learn about him from you? I am reproaching myself that it only occurs to me now to inform you of what encouraged me to undertake this. Now let me tell you. My sister-in-law,⁹ who at the age of 75 has unfortunately been living in complete blindness for some little time now, presented us with approximately 400 letters a couple of years ago, letters which constitute the correspondence of many years between father and son, but unfortunately only as far as 1781,¹⁰ [90] and about which none of the biographers to date had even the least knowledge. It brings exceptional honour to Leopold *M.*

⁷ BD: Ernst Ludwig Gerber (1746-1819), *Neues historisch-biographisches Lexikon der Tonkünstler*, 4 vols., Leipzig, 1812-1814; Felix Joseph Lipowsky (1764-1842), *Baierisches Musiklexikon*, Munich, 1811.

⁸ BD: = No-one is obliged to do more than he can.

⁹ BD: Nannerl.

¹⁰ BD: Nannerl had obviously kept back the letters after 1781, when Mozart again came into contact with the Weber family, this time in Vienna. Cf. No. 1442/4.

[No matter]¹¹ how I search through everything in print (not only what deals with *M. ex professo*¹² and carries his name [emblazoned on] its brow), but also where he is mentioned in passing, [95] or simply wherever I can [imagine] that he will be mentioned, my repeated and tireless efforts to obtain the following little books have remained fruitless. Even the author of the first one no longer seems to have one. With the second, there is not one copy left at the publishers: one would therefore have to conclude that it is of some value, and yet I know of no-one who has read it; [100] nor can I find out the name of the author: Oh, could you tell me where to find both?

1. Vienna Theatre Almanac¹³ for 1794; by Sonnleithner junior,¹⁴ who provides “Mozart’s Life” in the same publication.¹⁵

2. Mozart’s Biography in its musical Aspect,¹⁶ by N**¹⁷ br.,¹⁸ Prague (publ. Wiedman) 1797. [105]

– If I now only add that my residence is known at the local post office and that I would ask you to send me details of your address so that I can write to you directly and accelerate our correspondence, it behoves me to finish and to beg your forgiveness for the length of my letter. [110] I am impatient to receive the answer with which you will gladden me. It will let me know to what extent I may hope to keep up correspondence with you from time to time and, depending on my immediate needs, to put questions to you regarding Mozart and his works. My first husband was of course your colleague in *Apollo* and occasionally your working partner;¹⁹ [115] my second husband knows that he can make no such claims. Do not, therefore, humiliate him even further, but remain our, and thus also his, working partner. As it is, you are already entitled to a truly interesting chapter of your own in the description of Mozart’s life. It seems that *M.* was never intimate with anyone to the degree that he was with you.²⁰ [120] I trust that you will put us in a position to let you receive your just deserts in public in this regard as well and, as mentioned, to maintain the union of both your names.

It now remains only for me to give my scribe²¹ the command to underline the smaller matters that I have laid upon your heart [125] so that you do not have to search too long when you are so kind as to busy yourself with them.

I am, with sincere friendship and respect,

Your most devoted

Constance Nissen

POSTSCRIPT BY GEORG NIKOLAUS NISSEN:²²

¹¹ BD: Seal damage in three places; text made up by BD.

¹² = professedly, avowedly.

¹³ BD: “Wiener Theateralmanach”.

¹⁴ BD: Probably Ignaz Sonnleithner (* 1770), brother of the elder (* 1766) Joseph Sonnleithner. Both were associated with Schubert.

¹⁵ BD: “Mozarts Leben”.

¹⁶ BD: “Mozarts Biographie in musikalischer Hinsicht”.

¹⁷ BD: The reference is to Niemetschek’s biography.

¹⁸ “br.” = “(Masonic) brother”?

¹⁹ BD: This term is justified by their involvement in the first performance of the *Magic Flute*.

²⁰ BD: Cf. lines 25-30.

²¹ Georg Nissen.

²² BD: Georg Nikolaus Nissen (1761-1826), secretary to the Holstein Legation in Regensburg and then to the Danish Legation in Vienna. Met Constanze at the end of 1797, was either her landlord or cohabitant. Nissen advised Constanze in all business matters from 1798 onwards, especially with the publishers Breitkopf & Härtel and André. The letters, often formulated by him and signed by Constanze, reveal an experienced, if cautious, businessman. Cf. No. 1224 for longer note.

[130] I likewise allow myself the honour of commending myself to Herr Schack and of expressing the wish, sir, that your friendship towards my predecessor in the holy bed of matrimony may give his successor some rights to similar sentiments towards himself.

For the sake of the address on the honoured communication
[135] we anticipate from you, I must properly add:

Nissen

actual Royal Danish
Councillor of State.