

Volkmar Braunbehrens

## The Mozart-Salieri Connection

## I.

That he had the fortune to arrive in Vienna just when the first works were appearing -- welcomed by some, rejected by others -- which heralded the beginning of the end for the hoary tradition of the Metastasio operas: this made a lasting impression on Salieri. Of course, it was not then immediately apparent that the new operas would have such a far-reaching effect; at first, it was more a matter of hesitant steps in a new direction. The underlying aesthetic precepts -- simplicity, clarity, and naturalness in creating musical drama -- in the place of florid, artificial rhetoric, convoluted intrigue, and stereotypical, undramatic plots, would be vigorously argued before winning acceptance. But something so fundamentally new was occurring that, in later years, we would speak of it as the reform of opera -- and Salieri could boast that he had been there when it all began.

The new operas of Gluck were just coming out when Wolfgang Gottlieb Mozart (with his whole family and a servant) also arrived in Vienna in 1767 -- and remained there for the next year and a half. Leopold Mozart naturally went off to the Opera, taking his son of eleven years with him. In letters to Salzburg, he expressly mentions "Alceste" by Gluck and "Amore e Psiche" by F.L. Gassmann. And naturally too, the Wunderkind should himself write an opera while he is in Vienna, if only an opera buffa ("But not a little opera buffa, rather one that lasts 2½ to 3 hours," as Leopold Mozart put it). 1/

In all likelihood, it was here in the Opera that Mozart first saw Salieri, his elder by more than five years. Mozart probably paid little attention to him though: seated at the cembalo, he was just a lanky young man, not yet of any particular distinction. Salieri, for his part, would almost certainly have heard of the extraordinary Wonder-child. Indeed, it is possible that Salieri could have had occasion to admire his piano playing at first hand at one of the young genius's frequent performances. Leopold Mozart was not one to pass up an opportunity to call attention to his son. And Salieri would definitely have heard the talk going around that this eleven-year-old child planned to write an opera for that very opera house in which Salieri spent his evenings playing the cembalo. No one believed the young Mozart could do it, of course. Many put it down as a hoax by the father (who was generally thought capable of such a thing). Most composers in Vienna looked on the idea as a farce, a silly piece of self-promotion, something to put a stop to.

It was in this time that the young Salieri was carrying out his first assignments in composition, writing little arrangements and pieces to insert in operas and learning the craft of a composer for the theater under the tutelage of

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*--In Spring 1989, the new biography of Antonio Salieri written by Volkmar Braunbehrens, "Salieri: Ein Musiker im Schatten Mozarts," was published in Munich (Piper Verlag; ISBN 3-492-03194-3). The new book is the basis for this article, which is to appear in the "Neue Zeitschrift für Musik" (Mainz).*

*--The translation was prepared from a pre-publication draft and may not in all respects reflect the article as printed.*

*--Footnotes to the text begin at page 13. The INDEX begins on page 14.*

Gassmann. He also composed some modest works for the church and some orchestral pieces, most of which he later tore up. He still regarded himself as a beginner, one who would secretly compose music for pieces that his teacher was setting to music, to be able later to compare the two outcomes. There is some evidence of an early opera, "La vestale," from this period, but it has not survived. This may be another case where Salieri undertook a bit of parallel composition, for Gluck did in fact bring out a reworking of an older work by this name in 1768, a work which with its prominent role for the chorus was quite suited to an apprentice composer taking his first steps in the new path.

## II.

In the summer of 1773, Mozart returned to Vienna, this time accompanied only by his father. The two of them wanted to have a look around at what the future might bring. In the long run, they had no intention of mouldering away in Salzburg. Mozart was now seventeen. In the last few years he had made three trips to Italy, spending altogether some two years in the country, and had been received there as an opera composer with great success. But what were the specific goals of this Vienna trip? Did Leopold Mozart entertain hopes that his son, despite his tender years, might actually receive an official appointment to the royal court? The letters of Leopold Mozart contain allusions which we still cannot decipher. He speaks of "circumstances. . .which I cannot name." 2/ To be sure, his trust in the confidentiality of the mails was not great; or was he primarily concerned that his letters might be shown around in Salzburg, possibly leading to unnecessary, even dangerous gossip?

Among the many visits the two Mozarts made during this stay in Vienna was one at the home of the Martinez family, where the old Metastasio also lived. It could be that they ran into Salieri there, for he was a frequent visitor.

By this time, Salieri had distinguished himself with the composition of eight operas, at least two of which became quite popular. "La fiera di Venezia" turned out to be one of his best regarded works and during his lifetime was staged more than thirty times throughout Europe. In the autumn of 1773, Mozart composed a set of variations for piano (KV173c=180) on a theme from this Salieri opera -- a pretty piece of occasional music, if not particularly significant, and one that appeared in print some years later (in 1778): certainly a friendly gesture from the younger composer to the elder. Up to now at least, there had been no differences, no "cabals," to trouble the relationship between the two composers.

## III.

It was towards the end of 1781 -- Mozart had now been living in Vienna for some nine months -- that a situation arose for the first time which cast Mozart and Salieri as competitors. There is no evidence that personal animosity was involved on either side, and the fact that Salieri ultimately was favored was inevitable. The matter at hand was the designation of a piano teacher for the Princess Elisabeth von Württemberg. She had been chosen to be the future bride of Archduke Franz (even though she was still only fourteen years old) and was being educated at a convent in Vienna. Because the Archduke, as the nephew of the childless Joseph II, was destined one day to become the Holy Roman Emperor, only the finest teachers were considered good enough for the bride-to-be.

Mozart allowed himself to hope that he might get the position, which he assumed was highly paid. He had no post, none at all, at this point and was for the time being totally dependent on fees from his "students." If ever Mozart could be said to be poor as a church mouse, it was in this first year in Vienna.

But, when you think about it, why should this position -- one of great interest to the Court -- be bestowed upon Mozart who, for all his reputation as pianist and composer, was practically a stranger in Vienna? Indeed, Joseph II saw no reason whatsoever to prefer Mozart in the matter, without intending in the least to disparage him. On the contrary, Joseph II esteemed Mozart highly and would soon extend him a very friendly and direct relationship. There were others to be taken care of, however, others who had Joseph II's word. As Vizekapellmeister of the Italian Opera, Salieri had in fact little enough to do -- simply because this branch of the Opera had been closed for some time. 3/ So the Emperor was happy to assign him other duties to help justify the salary being paid him by the Court. For when it came to spending money, the Emperor was very strict, especially where sinecures were concerned. Then too, Salieri was the man on the spot, one who already had spent the last fifteen years in Vienna.

Mozart, resigned, wrote his father: "The matter with the Princess von Württemberg and me is all over; the Emperor spiked it for me, because only Salieri counts with him. The Archduke Maximilian proposed me to her; -- she had replied: if it had been up to her, she wouldn't have taken anyone else. But the Emperor had offered her Salieri; because of the singing. She's very sorry."4/ Salieri certainly had this advantage: he was a very successful teacher for the voice, something you could confirm evenings at the Opera when Catarina Cavallieri sang. And in this field, Mozart simply had to pass. It was, under the circumstances, hardly an injustice. Salieri, by the way, appears to have filled the position as piano teacher only for a short time, that is, until the Italian Opera opened once again (in 1783) and Salieri was able to resume his duties as Vizekapellmeister.

Georg Summerer became the new piano teacher to the Princess. Mozart's comment (written some ten months after the letter quoted above) is revealing: "The distinguished claviermeister for the princess is now known; I need only tell you his salary and you will easily be able to deduce the magnitude of the meister;--400 Gulden. His name is Summerer. Even if it could annoy me, I would do my best not to let it show, but thank God I don't have to pretend because in fact only the opposite would be able to annoy me, and I would naturally have had to refuse, which is always unpleasant when one finds himself in the unhappy situation of having to do so to an important person."5/ Mozart regarded this salary as so ridiculously low that he would have rejected the Emperor's offer of the post. And yet it was not long before in Salzburg that Mozart had settled for 450 Gulden as Konzertmeister and with certainly more to do than to give a couple of piano lessons.

#### IV.

In 1783, the Emperor at Salieri's recommendation named Lorenzo Da Ponte as Theaterdichter -- theatre poet -- in Vienna, even though he had never written a libretto up to then. His first undertaking was "Il Ricco d'un Giorno" for Salieri. The opera failed completely and, with great difficulty, they just managed to eke out six performances. There were of course unfavorable external circumstances. Perhaps it had to do with the intense partisan feeling between the followers of Giambattista Casti and those of Da Ponte, who made Casti the butt of their jokes. Or it may have been that the music and the entire music-dramatic approach of the opera were too unusual. Or it was a constellation of all this and more besides. Da Ponte's comment: "The leading role in the opera had been written for Nancy Storace, then at the peak of her career and literally worshipped by the Viennese. Unfortunately she took sick and we had to give the part to another soprano, who was like a pigeon in the role of an eagle."6/

Salieri, blaming Da Ponte for the failure, angrily swore never to collaborate with him again and promptly turned to Da Ponte's rival, Casti, for a new libretto. But Salieri's vow had erupted in a fit of rage and was soon forgotten (and Da Ponte went on to furnish Salieri with the book for four more operas). It was indeed for the very same Nancy Storace -- whose sudden case of laryngitis had kept her from singing in "Il Ricco d'un Giorno" and who thus bore some responsibility for the opera's flop -- that Da Ponte, following her recovery, wrote a short cantata with the title, "Per la ricuperata salute di Ophelia." The cantata was set to music by Salieri, Mozart, and Alessandro Cornet working together and appeared in print at the end of September 1785. (There is a certain irony in the fact that Cornet, who was active in Vienna primarily as a voice teacher and tenor and only seldom composed, was best known for a singing method which placed great emphasis on protecting the voice.)

The cantata is a good example of the ability of Mozart and Salieri to work effectively together, particularly when it had to do with a soprano esteemed by them both. Storace was to be Mozart's first Susanna (in "Le nozze di Figaro"); for Salieri, she was not only the most important mainstay in his Italian Opera ensemble, but she was to play the role of Ofelia in his new opera written with Casti (as already alluded to in the title of the cantata). This was the "opera comica: La Grotta di Trofonio," one of Salieri's most frequently performed operas. (In connection with the cantata, O.E. Deutsch writes: "There is no known copy of this cantata [KV Anh. IIa]. Nor has the text survived." And then in the next sentence: "For this reason, the allusion to Ophelia is hard to understand." But this can surely be clarified beyond all doubt by referring to the list of performances at the Nationaltheater in Vienna.) Z/ Despite all the quarreling and bickering round and about the theater between Da Ponte and Casti, and Salieri and Da Ponte, when this new production of Salieri and Casti was finally performed some weeks later on 12 October 1785, Da Ponte had actively spoken out on its behalf. Moral: theater intrigues should not be taken all too seriously.

## V.

In these times, when older operas were staged in new productions, it was fully accepted that individual arias might be replaced. The new production should, after all, be tailored to the vocal and dramatic abilities of the soloists, to facilitate the most advantageous display of the bravura possibilities of each particular voice. Given another ensemble and a new soloist with quite different vocal characteristics, even the most effective aria could make an unfavorable impression and perhaps fail completely. Or it could be that the original music simply did not allow the particular talents of the new singers to shine forth. People went to the Opera -- even then -- especially to hear the biggest stars and wanted to have a demonstration of their abilities. This is why singers often turned to composers familiar with the cast of characters to write new arias -- particularly bravura numbers -- for their personal use. Copyright law which might have deterred such a practice did not then exist. At one time or another, every opera composer of the day had written new arias for presentation in the works of his colleagues.

For a performance of Pasquale Anfossi's opera, "Il curioso indiscreto" in July 1783, Mozart undertook to compose two new arias for Aloysia Lange as well as a rondo for the tenor Valentin Adamberger. In this connection, it is interesting to note that Adamberger was the only male soloist who had been taken over from the German Nationalsingspiel into the company of the Italian Opera; several of the lady singers had been transferred, among them Aloysia Lange, despite her reputation as a capricious singer with a talent for making herself disliked. Thus cast as a rival of Nancy Storace, newly engaged as the primadonna, she was eager to have a new bravura aria to confirm her standing

in the Italian Opera as well. In short: a case of petty jealousies, but one with consequences for Mozart, not only because Aloysia Lange had in the meantime become his sister-in-law, but also because these newly composed arias were the only numbers in the opera to enjoy success. Mozart writes: "It failed completely, with the exception of my 2 arias. -- and the second, which is a bravura aria, had to be repeated. Well, you should know my enemies were so spiteful that from the very start they spread the rumor, Mozart wants to change Anfossi's opera. I heard about it, so I got word to Count Rosenberg that I wouldn't hand over the arias unless the following was printed both in German and Italian in the booklet with the text. . ." 8/

From this, it would appear that Count Rosenberg, in his capacity as Oberdirektor of the Imperial Court Theatre, had expressly criticised Mozart's contributions and perhaps charged him with arrogance towards Anfossi. For in fact, the following notice was printed in both languages in the text booklet:

"Notice. Because the 2 arias on pages 36 and 102 were set to music by Maestro Anfossi for someone else and as such not suited to the special abilities of Madame Lange, Maestro Mozttzrt (sic!) has composed new music at the pleasure of Madame Lange. This is hereby announced so that the honor shall rest where it should, without the reputation of the already well-regarded gentleman from Naples being in any way affected." 9/

This was a most unusual procedure, one that could hardly help to calm things down. It brought this theater affair out into the open for all to see and was sure to be noticed. And what part did Salieri have in this teapot tempest? He placed himself firmly on the side of Count Rosenberg and the touchy Italian singers and, in his zeal, even tried to go the Oberdirektor one better. As Mozart reports on it:

"I handed over the arias which had done me and my sister-in-law indescribable honor. -- and my enemies were quite nonplussed. Now came a trick of Herr Salieri, one that didn't affect me so much as it did poor Adamberger. I think I've already written you that I also composed a rondo for Adamberger. At an informal rehearsal (because the rondo had not yet been copied), Salieri called Adamberger to one side and told him that Count Rosenberg would not welcome his inserting an aria and, as a good friend, he would advise him not to do it. Adamberger got mad at Rosenberg and, in his misplaced conceit not knowing how to get back at him, committed the stupidity of saying -- all right then -- to show him that Adamberg has already made his name in Vienna and doesn't need to do himself the honor of music written just for him, so he will sing what's already in the opera, and for as long as he lives he'll never insert another aria. What did he get out of that? Just this, that he failed, which could hardly have been otherwise! Now he's sorry, but it's too late. For even if he were to ask me today to give him the rondo, I wouldn't do it. I can well use it in one of my own operas. But the most exasperating thing about it all is that what his wife and I both predicted turned out to be the case, that is, that neither Count Rosenberg nor the management knew a word about it, and it was all just a ruse of Salieri's." 10/

We can see how worked up Mozart gets, even though it only concerns a meaningless, petty intrigue of little substance and less consequence. Three times in this letter Mozart uses the expression "my enemies," which in this matter appears to be more than a little overdone. The fact is we have no knowledge whatsoever of any real enemies of Mozart, and in those places in his letters where Mozart seizes upon such formulations -- and they show up rather frequently -- it usually involves angry exaggerations about some rather vague subject. Just as here. And yet, because of such letters, it is the fate of Salieri --

who in this theater affair was simply using his authority as Kapellmeister to rein in a new singer -- to be branded Mozart's sworn enemy by the writings of music history.

## VI.

This bit of history was already two years old when a sudden constellation of events occurred which could indeed be looked on as a small competition between Mozart and Salieri, perhaps one even deliberately planned as such. The instigator was Joseph II, who had friendly relations with both composers. Salieri belonged to the small group that made up the chamber music circle which regularly met with the Emperor for informal music-making and he could with reason think of himself as the Emperor's protégé. While Mozart did not hold any court position, he did have the personal esteem of Joseph II, who fully appreciated his musical abilities. The occasion arose when one of the infrequent Court festivals was planned, this one to honor the visiting Governor General of the Netherlands. A "Spring Festival on a Winter's Day" would be presented at the Schönbrunn palace (which was unoccupied at this time of the year) and the Orangerie -- kept heated because of the exotic plants standing there -- would be put to use.

The theme of both pieces to be presented was the problems that come in running the theaters, with the excesses and abuses that crop up from day to day portrayed in caricature. The Emperor himself probably fixed the terms for the competition between the two ensembles of the Imperial Court Theater, the German Schauspiel and the Italian Opera. In his libretto for Salieri's contribution to the festivities, Casti clearly shows that (at least on this side of the Alps) the Italian Opera meant opera for the court and the nobility: a certain Count Opizio has commissioned a new opera, it must be ready in just four days, and a prince has offered to contribute 100 Zecchini to the enterprise. . .but naturally only if a certain soprano gets a part. . .

In the other piece, "Der Schauspieldirektor," written by Johann Gottlieb Stephanie (who had provided the libretto for Mozart's "Entführung aus dem Serail"), it is obvious that the Schauspiel operated essentially as a series of uncoordinated ventures, each at its own risk, each desperately in need of money or able to cling to life only through improvised measures totally at odds with artistic integrity, or both. But in each case -- Schauspiel or Italian Opera -- it is the audience that must shoulder a good part of the blame, because it prizes showy effects, empty spectacle, and "stars" more than artistic quality. If it is the fate of the Italian Opera that the music comes before the libretto and the singers come before the composer, then the Schauspiel has the problem that comedy, tragedy, ballet, and dramatic opera are all demanded of one and the same ensemble. And in "Der Schauspieldirektor," all of these different kinds (except for the ballet) will in fact be presented one after the other.

Mozart's part in this work is limited, strictly speaking, to the one category of the German Singspiel (which for the most part was taken over by actors who were also called upon to sing). His share in "Der Schauspieldirektor" thus involved only the overture and four numbers coming in the last sixth of the libretto. Salieri, by contrast, had an entire opera -- "Prima la musica e poi le parole" -- to compose, a work of almost an hour's duration. So far as scope is concerned, then, a very unequal competition, and one which also justified the substantial difference in payment: Salieri received 100 Ducats (the normal fee for an opera) from the Emperor, whereas Mozart received only half as much. Looking at each work in its full extent, it is obvious that this difference in fee was no calculated affront to Mozart, as is often alleged. (Mozart would anyways have scarcely had time for a more extensive involvement, because this little project had to be whipped out in the midst of the enormous work in progress on "Le

nozze di Figaro," which had its premier three months later.) Mozart's music for "Der Schauspieldirektor" is of course in no way unimportant incidental music. Here his full powers are displayed in the lively duel between the two contending sopranos. At the same time, he lets the orchestra speak in brilliant, swirling colors, all the while leaving room for abrupt changes of mood and subtle nuances. All in all, a notable prelude to "Figaro."

Salieri's contribution to the evening uses overdrawn parody to portray the preparation of a new opera: the miserable cooperation between composer and librettist, the problems of engaging the sopranos, the pain of first rehearsals. In four days' time the opera is supposed to be written, rehearsed, and performed, something the librettist sees as absolutely impossible. But the music is all finished, says the composer, and only needs to be fitted with a new text. The playwright insists that the music should reflect the meaning of the words, while the composer maintains his music is suited to every imaginable shade of emotion. . .

A parody achieves its effect by how close it approaches the subject of its ridicule, not by its distance from it, and in this respect the text prepared by Giambattista Casti was entirely adequate and certainly as good as that for "Der Schauspieldirektor." He had contrived numerous occasions for crowd-pleasing comic effects. For it was the aim of this opera-about-the-opera to play on the formal division of the species into opera seria and opera buffa, as represented by the two sopranos, thus enabling Salieri to bore in on aspects of both categories. The result is music full of contrasts and surprises, effectively underpinned by a lively and varied orchestration. There was even opportunity for an extensive quotation from another opera: the primadonna sang an aria from Sarti's "Giulio Sabino," a bravura aria distinctly written for a soprano-castrato and a part that the famous Luigi Marchesi had sung in Vienna only half a year before. Nancy Storace, who sang the role of the primadonna, had obviously paid very close attention watching and listening to Marchesi, for she was able to produce a marvellous parody not only of his vocal style but of his effeminate gestures as well. Every person there recognized immediately that it was Marchesi in all his personal characteristics -- his way of singing, his typical movements -- and that, quite apart from the splendid vocal effects, great fun was being made of the institution of the castrati singers. This is one reason why Salieri's little opera was destined ultimately to remain an "occasional" work, a work for the occasion, for its appeal was grounded in the audience's enjoyment of such topical references as well as in its unique cast of singers and, as such, is not easily taken out of its historical context. 11/

No comment by either Mozart or Salieri regarding this evening of opera that they shared has passed down to us. It does not appear to have occasioned little jealousies or rivalries of any sort. And not even the casting of the two productions led to problems, for each composer had gotten the singers he needed. In addition to Aloysia Lange, Mozart also had Catarina Cavalieri, Salieri's student and, *on dit*, his mistress as well. From every point of view, then, a respectable professional encounter between the two composers; and the double performance does not really appear to have been a test of their relationship.

## VII.

Matters were rather different with "Le nozze di Figaro," however, an opera whose undue length demanded the utmost both from the audience and from the players. More than that, it demanded the best available cast and thus deferring the entire remaining season's schedule to this one production. Constant friction -- from the theater management down to the smallest role -- was inevitable and for the most diverse reasons. Apart from

some express references to theater intrigues in connection with this production, the reports of Da Ponte and others are vague and unreliable and certainly do not suffice to establish what really went on. But for our purposes here, it is enough to ask whether Saleiri was implicated in these intrigues (and if so, to what extent) and what his relationship to Mozart was in all this.

Michael Kelly, who was the first Don Basilio and Don Curzio in "Figaro," speaks of a "cabal that was not easily overcome" 12/ made up of three of the main soloists, with Salieri in the background. From his remarks, it is not clear what it was all about. Why should they have been unsatisfied? Was it that this opera gave them too little opportunity to dazzle and show off? Or did they think they were being asked to work too hard for an opera that was bound to fail? Or had they gotten into arguments with Mozart during the rehearsals? We only know what Kelly wrote. And what of Salieri's part in this "cabal"? Comments made by Mozart's librettist, Da Ponte, seem to concern mainly Count Rosenberg and his machinations, which could equally as well have been directed at Da Ponte as at Mozart. Even the letters of the Mozart family yield little that is worthwhile. Leopold Mozart, at home in Salzburg, did write his daughter about the up-coming premiere: "It really will be something if it succeeds, for I know that he has to contend with unbelievably strong cabals. Salieri and his whole crew will again move heaven and earth to do something. Herr and Madame Duschek assured me that the reason your brother has so many cabals against him is because he enjoys such a big reputation as a result of his talent and skill."13/ But what Leopold Mozart "knew" was not based on messages from Mozart whose last known letter had reached his father eight weeks before, but rather on stories heard from the Duscheks who in any event had themselves already been in Salzburg for more than two weeks. On closer inspection, it turns out that what Leopold Mozart had to say about Salieri was merely conjecture. Repeating the sentence, it should sound like this: "Salieri will again move heaven and earth. . ." But then we do not know anything about an earlier intrigue. What flows from this letter is too thin to be much of a source.

There does remain, however, that passage in the Mozart literature that has seeped like poison against Salieri. It has been exploited uncritically time and again and should not be overlooked. Specifically, in his "Life of the k.k.Kapellmeister-Wolfgang Gottlieb Mozart," published in 1798, Franz Xaver Niemetschek writes concerning "Figaro": "How very much the entire band of Italian singers and composers hated Mozart for the superiority of his genius, and how true it was, what I have previously remarked in connection with the *Entführung aus dem Serail*" (and there he had written: "The crafty Italians were quick to realize that such a man might soon pose a danger for their Italian jingle-jangle. And their envy was awakened with all the virulence of Italian venom!"). Then, going on: "This cowardly bunch of worthless people steadfastly strove to hate him, to slander him, and to denigrate his art right up till the untimely end of this immortal artist."14/ Although Salieri had not been mentioned by name, the reader was bound to associate him with Niemetschek's remarks, for he was an Italian composer and the only one who was so firmly tied to Vienna -- who else could be meant? Of course, in this matter Niemetschek really does not qualify as a primary source, the less so given the strength of his anti-Italian feeling. And yet this assertion of Niemetschek's was taken over by Constanze Mozart's second husband, Georg Nikolaus von Nissen, into his biography of Mozart and thus became holy writ for the world of Mozart letters.

What actually remains, then, of the alleged cabals of Salieri at the time of the rehearsals for "Figaro"? For one thing, it seems fairly certain that there were difficulties with Count Rosenberg, difficulties that are reported by Da Ponte and Michael Kelly and are mentioned in contemporary journals as well. But that

Salieri himself played an active part in this connection is not established by any source. His contemporaries no doubt regarded him as belonging to an "Italian faction" headed by Count Rosenberg. But it seems more likely that Salieri kept his distance from such squabbling lest he jeopardize his position with Joseph II who overrode Count Rosenberg when it came to Mozart operas.

During this time, Salieri was himself working on two new operas. The commissions for them had come from Paris and he had received them (he wrote) "with the greatest of pleasure, for there a carefully executed musical work (the only one truly worthwhile) is better performed and more enjoyed than anywhere else."<sup>15/</sup> The author of one of these operas, "Tarare," was none other than Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, whose "La folle journée, ou le mariage de Figaro" was causing tongues to wag everywhere. When Mozart first got his hands on the libretto of "Figaro" in February 1785, did he realize that Salieri was also composing a Beaumarchais opera? That in fact Salieri was collaborating directly with this instigator of scandal? Mozart was not a close friend of Salieri, but he could have learned about it somehow, say, through the Irish tenor Michael Kelly who saw Salieri as often as he did Mozart and who knew of the work on "Tarare."

At least by the time Da Ponte was urging Joseph II to go ahead with "Figaro," all three of them -- the Emperor, Salieri, and Mozart -- would have been aware of the unique circumstance that two Beaumarchais operas were being composed in Vienna at the same time. And one can readily imagine the exquisite sense of justice with which Joseph II, who relished such things, bestowed his double consent on his two protégés: Mozart could be performed in Vienna and Salieri was allowed leave to go to Paris. Mozart was of course not setting an opera libretto to music but rather a play for the theater which first had to be laboriously transformed into an opera (and that by Da Ponte, for whom Salieri at this point had precious little regard), while Salieri could devote himself to composing a work conceived from the outset as a musical drama. Moreover, Mozart was driving himself at a terrible pace: in the course of the seven months that he worked on "Figaro," Mozart also composed the music for "Der Schauspieldirektor," three piano concertos, the Masonic funeral music, and at least eight other pieces. Salieri, by contrast, took three years on "Tarare," although in this time he had also had to finish "La Grotta di Trofonio," compose the operas, "Prima la musica e poi le parole" and "Les Horaces," and attend to his duties as Kapellmeister in Vienna.

When the premiere of "Le nozze di Figaro" took place on 1 May 1786, Salieri almost certainly was present. He probably remained in Vienna some weeks more; his wife is said to have had her sixth child on 19 June. He would have left for Paris around the first of July at the earliest. If you look at the schedule for the Italian Opera in Vienna that year, it strikes you that two works by Salieri were presented one right after the other, on 26 and 28 June, but from then on and until the end of the season it was only his very successful "La Grotta de Trofonio" that appeared and that only once a month. The performances on 26 and 28 June must have been farewell presentations. (An appearance on the season's program is a sure sign of Salieri's being in Vienna; Salieri held his own without difficulty as long as he was there, but his influence dwindled away quickly during longer absences.)

## VIII.

In December 1789, some three years later, difficulties emerged once again in the time when Salieri's opera "La cifra" was having its premiere and Mozart was starting rehearsals for "Così fan tutte." In a letter to Michael Puchberg, Mozart wrote: "On Thursday I invite you (but only you) to join me at 10 in the morning for a little opera rehearsal; -- only you and Haydn are invited, -- then

I'll tell you viva voce about Salieri's cabals which have all come to nought." 16/ Even though Mozart's comments in his letters should not be overinterpreted, still Mozart must have had something on his mind other than "imaginary cabals" (this the conjecture of the commentator to the edition of Mozart's letters 17/). For one thing, Mozart's allusion could have concerned setting a date for the opening of his opera; Salieri would have wanted to guard against Mozart's work following too hard upon "La cifra" and thus assure sufficient playing time for his own work. For another (and this is perhaps the more likely), it may have concerned Adriana Francesca Del Bene; she not only was committed to singing Eurilla in "La cifra" but was also to be the first Fiordiligi in "Così." (In a play on her stage name -- "La Ferrarese" -- Mozart added the following regarding Fiordiligi and Dorabella when writing out the list of characters of the opera: "The ladies are from Ferrara and live in Naples." Dorabella was sung by Luisa Villeneuve, Del Bene's sister.) Eurilla and Fiordiligi were both demanding roles and the two composers were trying in much the same way to bring the extraordinary vocal talents of Signora Del Bene to the fore with particular effect. Such a massive call upon the abilities of one soprano naturally had to be taken into account in the programming and could have worked against any idea of scheduling "La cifra" and "Così fan tutte" around the same time.

In short, a fairly common theater problem, but one hardly to be read as a profound and gripping clash between Mozart and Salieri. "Così fan tutte" had been presented five times in quick succession when the season's program came to a halt on 11 February 1790. A few days later, on 20 February, Emperor Joseph II died.

The consequences of his death for the Opera in Vienna were, for the time being, difficult to foresee. Naturally people expected new management would be brought in, particularly since no one imagined that the new Emperor, Leopold II, would personally oversee the conduct of the theaters as his brother had. And the Emperor had a great many problems other than the Opera, which he attended for the first time, by the way, only on 20 September (to see "Axur" by Salieri). Wait and see was the order of the day. This can be detected in the drastic reduction in the number of premieres and new stagings. Still, both Salieri and Mozart showed up often in the new season: there were 16 performances of "Figaro" and five of "Così fan tutte," while Salieri was represented with eight performances each of "La cifra," "Axur," and "Le Talismano." (It can hardly be maintained with any seriousness that Mozart in these times had been forsaken by his public, especially given that "Figaro" had been performed 13 times in the preceding season as well.) In other words, Mozart and Salieri were presented with almost identical frequency.

With a new ruler, the merry-go-round of positions and appointments began to turn. Count Ugarte replaced Count Rosenberg as Oberdirektor of the Imperial Court Theater, and even Salieri asked to be released from his position as Kapellmeister of the Italian Opera.

Salieri had had no more success than Mozart in gaining access to the new Emperor. If it is true that Leopold II said of Salieri, "Such an important composer should be writing operas and not just sitting at the cembalo every night in the opera house," then it suggests that he respected Salieri but had no real idea of what he had done for the Italian Opera in the Court Theater. And when he named Josef Weigl, Salieri's pupil and assistant, as Salieri's successor without any increase in his already meagre salary of 600 Gulden, then it suggests a certain lack of appreciation for the Opera and its achievements. Salieri was relieved of his duties as Kapellmeister with the stipulation that he was to write one new opera each year, an arrangement that divested him of the wearing responsibilities of theater management while still retaining his services for the Court Theater.

It is clear from many of the decisions taken during the 1791 performance season that a new regime with different ideas was now in charge of things at the Opera. To be able to return to the original manner of performing opere serie, a castrato -- Angelo Testori -- was engaged for the company, something that had not occurred during the entire Josephine era. And then a ballet company that earlier had fallen victim to Joseph II's penny-pinching ways was reconstituted. And finally there appeared innovations which can only be taken as evidence of indifference to artistic endeavor and a predilection for showy entertainment: individual acts were taken from operas and presented with ballet numbers added. In no time at all, the character of the Imperial Court Theater had changed completely, and it begins to dawn on us why a composer like Mozart sought out new theaters and was in the best of hands presenting "Die Zauberflöte" at Schikaneder's Freihaustheater auf der Wieden.

## IX.

In the end, Salieri, now free of the stress of running a theater, enjoyed a relaxed, untroubled relationship with Mozart. For how else should we read that letter which Mozart (who had found occasion enough in the past to complain about Salieri's "cabals") sent his wife in mid-October 1791? He had earlier been out with his brother-in-law Franz Hofer to pick up son Carl from his boarding school and then, on top of that, had asked Salieri and the soprano Catarina Cavalieri to join them at the theater. He wrote:

"Yesterday, Thursday the 13th, Hofer went with me out to see Carl, we ate there, then we came back here. At 6 I picked up Salieri and Catarine Cavalieri with the carriage and took them to the loge -- then I hurried over to pick up Mama and Carl who I had in the meantime parked at Hofer's. You can't imagine how friendly they were -- and how much they liked not only my music, but the libretto and everything put together. They both said it is an opera, -- worthy of being performed at the grandest festivities before the greatest monarch, -- and they would certainly see it often because they have never seen a prettier or more enjoyable show. -- He listened and watched with complete attention and from the overture to the last chorus, there wasn't a number which didn't bring a bravo or bello from him, and they could hardly find words enough to thank me for the favor. They had been in the mood yesterday to go to the Opera. But they would have had to be in their seats by 4 o'clock -- here they could see and hear it without rushing. After the theater I sent them home and had supper with Carl at Hofer's."18/

Salieri's spontaneous and openly expressed appreciation, perhaps even enthusiasm, was too genuine to be taken merely as grudging envy or some admixture of admiration and dislike. And Mozart was much too sensitive a person not to have detected overtones of insincerity or flattery -- particularly from Salieri, whom he had known for so long. The two of them were, in their separate ways, the most spectacular opera composers in Vienna, even though Salieri's success with operas outside Vienna had so far been the greater. But then Salieri limited himself to composing for the theater, whereas Mozart was known primarily as a pianist and as a composer of the most diverse kinds of music. The very fact of this invitation to "Die Zauberflöte" tells us that theirs was the friendly association of colleagues. Salieri was no longer the distrusted Kapellmeister who had to be catered to; indeed, as regards the new Emperor, he was no better off than Mozart. For his part, Salieri -- the composer of "Axur" -- had not the slightest reason to consider himself overshadowed by Mozart.

Less than eight weeks later, Mozart was dead -- he had died suddenly following a short infectious illness that to this day defies precise definition. Salieri is said to have visited the bed-ridden Mozart, but we cannot prove that. He is also said to have been among those present at St. Stephen's for the funeral service; we cannot prove that either, but it seems likely. What could he have thought as the prayer for the dead was sung? He kept his silence -- and in years to come must suffer that this silence would abet the absurd suspicion that he himself had poisoned Mozart. Did he at least try to move the Society of Musicians to present a memorial concert (as he had once done for Gluck), especially since everyone knew that Mozart's family was destitute and without means? No proof of this either has come down to us. Mozart, after all, was not a member of the Society, despite all he had done for the fund for widows and orphans, and it appears to have been one of the strictest principles of the Society not to make exceptions. But even if Salieri was one of the directors, we cannot hold him responsible that nothing was done. What did happen is that Salieri later on took Mozart's younger son, Franz Xaver Wolfgang, as one of his pupils -- free of charge, as was the case with almost all of his students.

## X.

In June of the year 1822, the aged Salieri was visited by Friedrich Rochlitz, the well-known music critic for the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* of Leipzig. Several years later, Rochlitz wrote an account of the visit, with emphasis on the discussion concerning Mozart:

"Later on we came to Haydn and Mozart. He spoke of their works, with thoughtful appreciation for the older man and lively affection for the younger. (. . .) Among Mozart's works he especially liked the quartets and, of the operas, "Figaro." 'And what about the concertos---?' He would grant, he said, that they were perhaps to be placed at the peak of all Mozart's instrumental works for the wealth of their delightful and very personal musical ideas as well as their artistic and deeply felt composition: but, he continued, they transcended their art form, particularly the last ones with their masterful development, and they were beyond effective realization as concertos by the performers with their poor-sounding pianofortes. 'And the Requiem---?' Ah, he said solemnly, that is something extraordinary. There Mozart -- after a terribly unsettled life and looking death in the face -- was moved by an inspiration from Eternity, a divine inspiration. --- These were not his words, but this is what he meant."19/

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Translation: Bruce Cooper Clarke  
April 1989

[AFTERWORD: In 1992, Volkmar Braunbehrens's book, *Salieri: Ein Musiker im Schatten Mozarts*, was published in an English translation by Eveline E. Kanés with the title, *Maligned Master: the real Story of Antonio Salieri*. (Fromm International Publishing Corporation, New York; ISBN 0-88064-140-1)]

## Footnotes

1. Letter of 30 January 1768.
2. Letter of 21 August 1773.
3. During the time of the German-language "National-Singspiel," the Italian Opera of the Imperial Court Theater remained closed (1778-1783).
4. Letter of 15 December 1781.
5. Letter of 5 October 1782.
6. "Denkwürdigkeiten des Venezianers Lorenzo Da Ponte," published by Gustav Gugitz, 3 vols., Dresden 1924; vol. 1, p.208ff.
7. Otto Erich Deutsch: Mozart -- Die Dokumente seines Lebens, Kassel etc. 1961, page 223.
8. Letter of 2 July 1783.
9. Translated from the German text according to the wording given in the printed textbook of the libretto, as cited by O.E. Deutsch: Mozart -- Die Dokumente seines Lebens, p.192ff.
10. Letter of 2 July 1783.
11. Nikolaus Harnoncourt has produced a phonograph record of this opera, together with Mozart's "Der Schauspieldirektor" (Teldec 6.43336 AZ). In contrast to his normal thoroughness (often achieved despite objections from record companies), he was not able in this case to bring himself to record the complete opera. In his accompanying comment on Salieri's opera, Harnoncourt says that the secco-recitatives "as well as some arias have been dropped to make it possible to produce the performance on a single record." Apparently he is not much taken with Salieri's opera, for almost half of "Prima la musica e poi le parole" is missing; Mozart's "Schauspieldirektor," on the other hand, can be heard in its entirety. Moreover, the attention given to the performance of the Salieri opera comes nowhere near the level of that given the Mozart opera. For these reasons, the recording fails to convey a really adequate impression of Salieri's work. One purpose of the recording, it appears, was to commemorate that memorable event of 7 February 1786, the other to show that Mozart is certainly the better composer. Leaving aside the fact that no one contends otherwise, such an approach constitutes a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy when the music of Salieri is not performed and presented in such a way that its qualities and musical characteristics -- whatever they may be -- cannot be appreciated. Even the complete libretto is missing from the text accompanying the record and the user has no recourse but to depend on Harnoncourt's rather free account of the abbreviated parts to arrive at an understanding of what Salieri's opera is all about.

12. Michael Kelly's memoirs, in: *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, 15. Jahrgang 1880, No. 26 of 30 June.
13. Letter of 28 April 1786.
14. Franz Xaver Niemetschek: *Leben des k.k.Kapellmeisters Wolfgang Gottlieb Mozart, nach Originalquellen beschrieben*, Prague 1798, p.25; newly published under the title: *Ich kannte Mozart*, Munich 1984.
15. As quoted in Ignaz F. Edler von Mosel: *Über das Leben und die Werke des A. Salieri*, Vienna 1827, p.93.
16. Letter of December 1789.
17. Commentary to the previously cited letter. Vol. VI, p.389.
18. Letter dated 14 October 1791; this is the last surviving letter of Mozart.
19. From the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* of 2 January 1828.

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