

The PRINCE LICHNOWSKY Newsletter

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Our Motto: *All the news that fits the Prince!*

A report from the Editor

Although it has been some 17 years since Issue No. 6 of the PL Newsletter was prepared and posted, the series has never been closed. It has patiently waited, hoping that sooner or later some new and relevant information would come along to help deal with two open questions.

To recapitulate:

The correspondence ledger of the *Hofkammer* in Vienna contains an entry dated 12 November 1791 that reads as follows:

“N: Ö: Court advises under the date of the 9th and recorded on 12th of November 1791 that Prince Karl Lichnowsky in his case against *K.K.Hof Kappelmeister* Wolfgang Amade Mozart, owing to indebtedness of 1,435 Gulden 32 Kreuzer along with court costs of 24 Gulden, has shown cause for both attachment and withholding of the half of his salary.”

It was late 1990 when the entry was discovered. For 200 years it had been there, overlooked all this time. The subject of the entry—a suit by Prince Karl Lichnowsky to force payment of a debt and the court’s subsequent ruling against Mozart—was not previously known to or even suspected by Mozart biographical research.

Thus, we were confronted with two questions: what was the origin and nature of Mozart’s debt that found a court deciding he owed Prince Lichnowsky 1,435 Gulden 32 Kreuzer?; and how is it that for 200 years this matter went totally unnoticed in Mozart biographical research?

Recently, Prof. Peter Hoyt, the current President of the Mozart Society of America, has offered a provisional answer to the first question. Working with the date of the Niederösterreich Court’s decision (9 November 1791) and the amount of the judgment (1,435 Gulden 32 Kreuzer), Prof. Hoyt has “crunched” the numbers, demonstrating that a particular sum at a particular time at a particular rate of interest would lead back to May 1789, that is, to the time when Mozart and Prince Lichnowsky, who had been traveling together since early April, making their way by stages to Germany, were about to part in Prussia on 2 May.

The following analysis by Prof. Hoyt is summarized from a forthcoming study of Mozart’s Berlin trip. In performing the calculations, Prof. Hoyt followed techniques found in eighteenth-century accounting texts and employed interest rates prevailing at the time (which, because of usury laws and the complexity of performing mathematical operations before the invention of electronic calculators, tended to use a restricted range of interest rates). Such considerations made it possible to formulate a viable hypothesis concerning the origins of Mozart’s debt to Lichnowsky.

Prof Hoyt's synopsis follows:

Overview. On 2 May 1789 (the last day both Mozart and Prince Karl Lichnowsky could have been together in Prussia) Mozart seems to have borrowed from his traveling companion 1000 Prussian thalers (200 friedrichs d'or), at an annual interest rate of 4 per cent. This loan appears to have been the basis of the court case Lichnowsky successfully pursued against Mozart in November of 1791. Subsequent events suggest that, in making this loan, both men agreed upon an exchange rate allowing for a repayment in Viennese coinage. Mozart mentions such a rate to his wife in a letter of May 23, 1789, specifying that (as he had been told) 100 friedrichs d'or was equivalent to 700 Viennese florins. That is, Mozart would receive 1000 thalers (a nicely rounded amount) while in Prussia, and he was undertaking to repay Lichnowsky a sum of 1400 Viennese florins (plus interest) in Austria. The May 23 letter also reports, however, that Lichnowsky was then running out of pocket money, and he had requested 100 fl. in cash from Mozart. Mozart, who had received 100 ducats (450 florins) in Dresden, was able to oblige. Given this supplementary transaction, Mozart was actually incurring a debt of 1300 florins. Over the next 2 years and 191 days (until November 9, 1791, the day of the court decision in Lichnowsky's legal action) the interest on this 1300 fl. accumulated until it reached 1435 florins 32 kreutzer.

Methodological Considerations. The amount of the judgment differs slightly from the figure obtained by using a calculator, which suggests instead a debt of 1435 florins and 31 kreutzer (see step 7 in the calculations below). In computing the interest on the debt, there seems to have been a rounding up of the decimal value of the interest due for the second year, changing 54.08 florins to the less precise, but more convenient, 54.1 florins (see step 3b below). This is a difference of 1.2 kreutzer—less than the price of a cup of coffee—and this approximation was too small to have a substantial impact on subsequent calculations. Note that fractions of florins expressed as decimals must be converted into kreutzer, which were each 1/60th of a florin; such conversions may involve further approximations, as they cannot always be expressed in exact values.

Calculations. At 4% interest compounded annually, the growth of Mozart's debt can be recounted in seven steps, as outlined below:

- 1) On May 2, 1789, the debt was 1300 fl.
- 2) By May 2, 1790, the debt was 1352 fl. (1300 fl. + 52 fl. interest)
- 3) By May 2, 1791, the debt was 1406.08 fl. (1352 fl. + 54.08 fl. of new interest)
 - 3b) ***This amount seems to have been rounded up to 1406.10 fl.***
(1352 fl. + 54.10 fl. of new interest)
- 4) By May 2, 1792, the "unrounded" debt would have been 1462.3232 fl. (1406.08 fl. + 56.2432 fl. new interest)

- 4b) *Using the rounded figure, the debt would have been 1462.34 fl. (1406.1 fl. + 56.24 fl. new interest)*

[Note that it is necessary to calculate the full amount of interest for the next year so as to be able to derive the interest that accumulated daily between May 2 and November 9 of 1791. This full year's interest must then be divided by 365 and multiplied by the number of days lapsed, in this case 191.]

- 5) On November 9, 1791, the accumulated interest was 29.431361 fl. ($[56.2432 \div 365] \times 191$ days)

- 5b) *Using the rounded figure, this was 29.431782 fl. ($[56.244 \div 365] \times 191$ days)*

[Note that the rounding in step 3b makes no substantial impact on subsequent calculations of interest: both the "unrounded" and "rounded" figures are virtually identical (29.4313 vs. 29.4317 florins). The discrepancy between the amounts in 7 and 7b below is therefore the result of the rounding in step 3b.]

- 6) Thus by November 9, 1791, the "unrounded" debt was 1435.5113 fl. (1406.08 fl. + 29.4313 fl.)

- 6b) *Using the rounded figure, the debt was 1435.5317 fl. (1406.1 + 29.431782 fl.)*

- 7) In Viennese currency, the "unrounded" debt was 1435 fl. 31 kr.

[Note that it is necessary to convert any fractional value of a florin into its value in kreutzer, computing at 60 kreutzer to each florin. Each kreutzer is therefore equivalent to roughly 1.66 % of a florin ($100 \div 60 =$ roughly 1.66). To convert 0.5113 florins to kreutzer, one divides 51.13 by 1.66; ergo: 30.80 kr., or 31 kr. rounded up.]

- 7b) *Using the rounded figure, the debt would have been **1435 fl. 32 kr.** ($53.17 \div 1.66 = 32.030$ kr., which rounds down to 32 kr.).*

This is precisely the amount assessed against Mozart.

In conclusion, Prof. Hoyt says it should be noted that a small number of other scenarios (involving differences in the amount of the initial loan, the date for contracting the debt, and/or the interest rate) also result in a debt of 1435 fl. 32 kr. on November 9, 1791. These other possibilities, however, can be rejected on the basis of other evidence (drawn from Mozart's life) or because they contradict the conventions of eighteenth-century financial practices. These rejected possibilities will be more fully explored in the larger study from which the above calculations are taken.

My appreciation goes to Prof. Hoyt for making his analysis of the first question available for presentation on *Apropos Mozart*.

The second question has not yet been addressed: how is it that the matter went unnoticed for 200 years?

Now as before, *The Prince Lichnowsky Newsletter* is open to discussion. Insightful and well-founded comments and answers that are suggested—to either question, the first or the second—can find a place in the PLN series. They should be addressed to the Editor at b2c@aproposmozart.com. B. C. C.