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A Rediscovered Autograph of Wolfgang Amadé Mozart The “Nantes Sketch”

On 18 September 2008 the world learned of the discovery of a long unknown music autograph of Wolfgang Amadé Mozart. The sensational announcement spread like wildfire on the internet and in the press. "German researchers in Nantes are thought to have discovered a leaf with two previously unknown Mozart scores," reported *Der Tagesspiegel*, citing a story in the French newspaper *La Presse Océane*.¹ In a press conference, a speaker, practically breathless from excitement, used a color copy of the manuscript to illustrate the supposed insights to be gained from its contents.² Given that this sort of publicity-oriented hip-shooting is about as accurate as that achieved with a shot gun—many pellets are fired, but few hit the target—the yield of serious information, once the smoke had cleared, was rather meager. Even publications that had treated the news with less excitement and waited a few days to make the announcement, as did the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*,³ ended up printing errors that a calmer approach could have avoided. Without going further into the story of the discovery and its setting (which follows the media's own rules!), a few facts about the subject itself should be set forth with respect to the traditions that have been handed down and to the musical records based on them.

To begin with basic facts: the discovery in the Bibliothèque municipale of the western France city of Nantes (Département Loire-Atlantique) involved a leaf in oblong format, folded in the middle, trimmed on all sides, and a bit spotted, i.e., foxed; at one time it had been fastened in a protective cover, as evidenced by a clear trace of glue on the left edge of the front side. As is usual with paper stocks from Mozart's Vienna period, it was ruled originally with twelve systems, the upper three, however, having been detached. The detached upper staves had been written on, or at least that holds for the lowest one, for on what is now the upper edge of the leaf one can see fragmentary note beams and stems. Part of a water mark was also probably located on the removed quarter of the leaf—the absence of this mark is a serious loss of an important aid for a more precise dating of the manuscript. Of the remaining nine systems on the recto side, the first through the fourth as well as the sixth and seventh are filled with entries by Mozart; the remaining systems are empty. Both of the two independent sketches continue from line to line, that is, we have here continuous one-voice notations, and not, as was asserted in press reports, one or two scores. The verso of the leaf was left blank by Mozart. Traces of others' hands are apparent to the observer; most prominent among these is that of the Vienna

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musician and autograph collector Aloys Fuchs (1799-1853)⁴ at the bottom of the recto side, with a certification in a form often to be found on manuscripts he had authenticated: "Die Aechtheit der vorliegenden Handschrift W. A. Mozarts bestätigt hiermit / Wien am 18. August 1839. Aloys Fuchs mpr" (The genuineness of this as the hand of W. A. Mozart is hereby attested / Vienna, 18 August 1839. Aloys Fuchs mpr). Blue property stamps of the library appear on both sides of the leaf (the kind of markings, which today are not customary but were routine in the nineteenth century); on the verso is the print of a round stamp in red: "FONDS LABOUCHERE / Nantes B.M."

With respect to the provenance of the autograph, we may say briefly that it travelled from the estate of the composer, perhaps via Mozart's widow or his sons, to Aloys Fuchs. From him it moved, directly, or more likely via other owners, finally to the French painter Pierre-Antoine Labouchère (1807-1873).⁵ Labouchère came from a prosperous Huguenot family that had settled in Nantes; he was educated to be his father's successor in the banking and merchant trades, but decided quite early to dedicate his life to painting, with a pronounced preference for the presentation of scenes from Reformation history. Labouchère, who is a noteworthy figure in the history of French Protestantism, left his books and autograph collection (among these our sketch leaf) to the library of his home town. Its holdings were recorded in a national catalogue, which registered manuscripts preserved in public libraries of France at the end of the nineteenth century. In the volume for the region Nantes, Quimper, and Brest, which appeared in 1893, supervised by the prominent historian and archivist Auguste Molinier (1851-1904), the Mozart autograph is registered; thus it was bibliographically documented 115 years ago.⁶ Yet manuscripts as well as books are subject to the vagaries of fate: during this period of more than a century, neither the editors of the Köchel *Verzeichniss* nor the collaborators on the Old or the New Mozart Editions, nor the many international Mozart scholars, nor the specialists in the realm of Mozart philology came across this catalogue entry. Until this past year even the Bibliothèque in Nantes was unaware of what a treasure they were guarding on their bookshelves. Only in 2007 was it accidentally discovered; it was then carefully transcribed and prepared for a critical edition with commentary under the auspices of the *New Mozart Edition*.⁷ Not surprisingly, these facts of appearance and provenance played no role in the press reporting.

My concluding remarks address the musical content of the autograph. Both passages are one-voice continuity sketches of vocal works.⁸ Characteristic of this type, seen mainly with Mozart in the context of aria compositions, is that voice part and instrumental section—whether introductory or connecting—are carried out in a one-voice format from the beginning of the composition to a formal break. The second sketch adheres to this type, although (fairly unusual in such writings) Mozart gives it a heading—"Credo:" He notates the violin clef as well as the key signature (D major) but omits the sign for 4/4 meter; the passage begins with a seven-bar introduction in an instrumental lead voice, which would seem to be for (first) violin.



[MUSICAL EXAMPLE 1]

Over bar 7 the composer again writes "Credo:"—although clearly more hastily—and indicates the onset of a high singing voice, probably intended to be choral. This part, untexted in the sketch, continues for six bars, then apparently breaks off at the end of the system. As far as can be seen at present, it looks as though the continuation in the following lines has no direct connection, but rather is a new start in a somewhat later place; this conclusion, however, remains to be proved. In any case, it is certain that this sketch is the beginning of a Credo movement for a Mass in D, of a work plan that seems not to have been further developed with the ideas notated here.

Less clear are the relationships in the first sketch, which is 32 bars in four-four meter.



[MUSICAL EXAMPLE 2]

This sketch is in D minor and is written throughout in soprano clef. Whether there is any connection between this and the following Credo is as uncertain as is its assignment to any other movement of the mass. It has so far not been possible to provide text underlay (missing in the original) that might affirm the thesis that it had to do with a Kyrie, although further consideration may lead to this conclusion. We must also consider the possibility that a further record of the D minor sketch may exist, which could also be related to the possibly planned mass. Above all, the idea that the two surviving sketches have to do with projects independent of one another should by no means be ignored. We see often enough on leaves containing Mozart's sketches examples of notes related to entirely different compositions. It is certain, however, that the musical material here does not appear in any other known work.

Regarding the idea, inspired by the second sketch, of assigning the notes to a mass, the question of dating the leaf then becomes exceptionally interesting indeed. While earlier views held that Mozart's composition of masses terminated with his breaking off work on the C minor mass in 1783, the conviction now prevails, supported by an entire series of mass movement fragments,⁹ that from the late 1780s the composer again occupied himself intensively with liturgical works (perhaps with an eye toward the position as Kapellmeister of the Stephansdom). The re-discovered sketch leaf in Nantes fits well into this context and invites the speculation that both sketches may be material for a projected D minor mass, of which only the introductory Kyrie, K. 341(368a), was completed—this D minor Kyrie was in fact placed by Otto Jahn in the period between November 1780 and March 1781, and has been known since then as the "Munich Kyrie." Yet a good deal—above all the idea of possible occasions for performance of such compositions and the musical language and conventions of late Viennese style—speaks for a dating after 1787.¹⁰ Since no autograph for K. 341 (the Kyrie movement) is extant, this question must remain open; little support is provided by the sketch leaf, which also cannot be given a fixed date of origin. Its dating must remain vague for lack, as already noted, of a

recognizable watermark. No even halfway secure chronology exists for Mozart's handwriting during the Vienna years, so nothing further can be stated beyond the impression based on long years of dealing with Mozart autographs that the writing here is from the late 1780s. (It should be added that Mozart's sketch writing with its rushed and graphically changeable characteristics often convincingly corresponds to the chronology established for his usual normal writing.)

In light of these brief and often indefinite statements, the September 2008 media euphoria almost turns into disappointment. The music world has neither gained a new composition by Mozart nor realized from the sketch leaf spectacular new insights. Nevertheless this highly welcome re-discovery provides a valuable piece in the mosaic of our understanding, objectively and carefully arrived at, of Mozart's compositional process—one often veiled in a fog of trivial mythic images. Calmly and thoughtfully to establish the place of the Nantes fragment in the complex picture of Mozart's compositional ways remains the task of research.

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Footnotes

1. http://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/pop/Mozart.art97_2617412.
2. http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x6smh4_une-partition-inedite-de-mozart-ret_news.
3. Christian Wildhagen, "Er mochte die Kirchenmusik. Schönes Bindeglied: Mozart-Skizzen in Nantes entdeckt," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 22 September 2008, no. 222, page 23.
4. Richard Schaal: *Quellen und Forschungen zur Wiener Musiksammlung von Aloys Fuchs*. Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften 1966 (=Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-Hist. Klasse, Sitzungsberichte, Vol. 251, Section 1).
5. F. Boniol: Art.: "Pierre-Antoine Labouchère," in: *Musée Virtuel du Protestantisme Français* (<http://museeprotestant.org/Pages/Notices.php?scatid=71&cim=O¬iceid=608&lev=1&Lget=DE>).
6. Auguste Molinier, ed.: *Catalogue général des manuscrits des bibliothèques de France. Départements. Vol. 22: Nantes, Quimper, Brest* (Paris: Ministère de l'instruction publique et des beaux-arts, 1893), 394.
7. NMA X/31/4: *Nachträge (Einzelstücke. Skizzen, Varia)*. Ulrich Konrad, ed. (forthcoming).

8. See: Ulrich Konrad, *Mozarts Schaffensweise: Studien zu den Werkautographen, Skizzen und Entwürfen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992; = Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse. Series 3, No.201). See also the condensed excerpt by the author: "Mozarts Skizzen," *Acta Mozartiana* 45 (1998): 45-58. The composer's workshop material is presented in its entirety in facsimile with critical reports in *NMA X/30/3: Skizzen*, ed. Ulrich Konrad (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1998). *Editor's note*: Professor Konrad's overview of the methodology and conclusions in *Mozarts Schaffensweise*, translated by Bruce Cooper Clarke, "How Mozart Went about Composing: A New View," was published in the *MSA Newsletter* (VIII/2 [August 2004]), 6-7, and can be seen on www.aproposmozart.com.
9. These reflections were sparked by the groundbreaking researches of Alan Tyson: *Mozart: Studies of the Autograph Scores* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), esp. 27, 125-61. See also the recent overview by Hartmut Schick: "Die geistliche Musik" in *Mozart Handbuch*, ed. Silke Leopold (Kassel/Stuttgart: Bärenreiter/J. B. Metzler, 2005, 163-207); also Günther Massenkeil: "Messen," in Thomas Hochradner/Günther Massenkeil, *Mozarts Kirchenmusik, Lieder und Chormusik* (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 2006; [= vol. 4], 57-123. The inserted fragments are printed in *NMA I/1*, Abt. 1: *Messen*, and 6: *Einzelsätze und Fragmente*, as well as in *NMA X/30/4: Fragmente*.
10. See Schick "Geistliche Musik," 207f., and Massenkeil, "Messen," 120.