

1223.¹ BREITKOPF & HÄRTEL² TO CONSTANZE MOZART, VIENNA³

To Madame Mozart in Vienna.

[Leipzig,] 15th May, 98

Most honoured friend. Some time will already have passed since you were informed by the public newspapers of the complete edition to be made by us of the compositions of your immortal esteemed spouse, [5] and it will certainly have left you bemused, perhaps even made you somewhat dissatisfied, that we had not already turned to you in this regard before making the project known, so as to be assured of your approval and to come to an understanding with you concerning various things. You will, however, quite certainly excuse us completely when we indicate to you the circumstances which arose concerning this. [10]

It had indeed long been the wish of all admirers of the merits of your esteemed husband that a correct and complete collection of his genuine compositions should appear, and we therefore formed the plan for such an edition some time ago. [15] We believed we had all the less need to hesitate because most publishers of compositions by Mozart, as you have often assured us yourself, have not received these directly from Mozart himself for an appropriate fee, but usually through a third party, so they have no proper and exclusive ownership of these compositions published by him. [20] On top of that comes the fact that most of these publishers have produced reprints from their own exemplar, and that almost all the known compositions have been reprinted several times. Nevertheless, we would not yet have gone ahead with such an edition without first coming to a complete understanding with yourself and several music dealers who have published works by Mozart [25] and in particular without first being assured of your unreserved approval of it, if we had [not]⁴ unexpectedly found an announcement by Herr Spehr (or the Musical Magazin in Brunswick) in the newspapers, which announced a similar complete collection and edition of Mozart's works for the coming Easter Fair. Now, in order not to abandon completely the plan we had already formed long ago, [30] we had to brush aside at once all grounds for hesitation, which had been rendered pointless by that announcement anyway, and proceed to the execution of

¹ BD: Original unknown. Edition Nottebohm.

² BD: The firm "Breitkopf" was founded in 1719. It later became Breitkopf & Härtel: On 1st November, 1795, Christoph Gottlob Breitkopf concluded a contract of partnership with Gottfried Christoph Härtel (1763-1827). This was followed in 1796 by a secret contract of sale in which the entire Breitkopf business was made over to Gottfried Christoph Härtel. The latter was also declared universal heir by Breitkopf shortly before his death in 1800. Christopher Gottlob Breitkopf (1750-1800). He composed and was an outstanding player of the glass harmonica. His father, Johann Gottlob Immanuel Breitkopf (1719-1794), made the acquaintance of Mozart, as well as of Haydn and Gluck, on a visit to Vienna in 1786. Constanze probably met Ch. G. Breitkopf and his wife during her stay in Leipzig (November, 1795). Leopold Mozart's correspondence with J. G. I. Breitkopf started in the year 1772 (cf. No. 0263). He repeatedly tried to interest the publisher in his son's music, but apparently without success during Mozart's lifetime.

³ BD: Gottfried Christoph Härtel (cf. note on No. 1218) had been collecting material for a complete edition of Mozart's works since the beginning of his publishing activities, initially without Constanze's cooperation. When the Brunswick publisher Johann Peter Spehr announced a "complete edition of Mozart's works" (cf. line 26) for the Easter Fair, 1798, the publishers B & H announced their intention of producing an "correct and complete collection" of the "genuine compositions" of Mozart and turned to Constanze, in their letter of 15th May, 1798, to ask for support for this project. Their primary interest was in not yet engraved, authentic compositions which the widow might still have, but also in interesting and less well-known biographical details. Constanze's answer followed on 26th May, 1798 (No. 1224). In an article in the B & H Yearbook for 1928, Wilhelm Hitzig writes regarding this project (*Oeuvres complètes* [hereafter = OeC]) that "From the letters in the archive [of B & H], a picture emerges of a nothing less than unbelievable confusion, an incomprehensible muddle, of sometimes intentional obfuscation, a picture of the most shocking fraud and professional falsification in all matters relating to the artistic items in Mozart's estate."

⁴ BD: "not" supplied editorially.

our project without losing any time. Although we were assured that Herr Spehr would find few supporters and his plan would necessarily come to a halt after some time, [35] the public would as a result be all the more deterred from supporting another future edition, and this was one more pressing reason for us to make haste with our edition, adopting at the same time such procedures as would guarantee us a certain success. The exceptional cheapness of our edition for persons pre-ordering and subscribing, the well-known accuracy of our editions, [40] have in fact procured us so many supporters that we can confidently reckon with the continuation of this work, and the approval of the music lovers whose opinion we have heard so far is widespread.

We now have no further wishes unfulfilled, except to have your approval for this edition, which will certainly be no matter of indifference to you, [45] and if possible, madam, to be assured of the complete possession of all genuine compositions by your esteemed spouse. The production of such a carefully prepared collection of all Mozart's works, the like of which has never been seen for the works of any musical artist, can certainly not be anything other than pleasing to you [50] and we may therefore flatter ourselves that you, more keenly than anyone else, surely desire the greatest perfection in the same and will be glad to further it in every way.

As far as the completeness of our edition is concerned, we do of course still lack a number of those works by Mozart which have not yet been engraved for publishing [55] and which are either still in your hands or in the hands of a number of individual admirers of Mozart. In the meantime we have hopes that we will yet acquire many of these items which are scattered here and there. Since the announcement of our edition of Mozart in the public press, many owners of Mozart compositions have already approached us, [60] offering them to us in some cases without any conditions, in other cases for a specific payment. And now we are all the more confident that even those private persons who still wish to extract some profit from the possession of such Mozart manuscripts will first of all turn to us, [65] since other purveyors of music will in future not be able to promise much success from publishing works by Mozart due to the general familiarity and exceptional cheapness of our edition and will therefore under no circumstances be able to offer this profit to the owners of such manuscripts.

So far, we have accepted only a few of those Mozart compositions offered to us for payment, [70] and have instead simply prevailed upon the owners to send us the themes or beginnings of these pieces, because we must suspect that many of these pieces, as yet not engraved, are also in your hands, and we would far rather purchase them from you than from such persons as have only become their owners by circumstance and chance. [75]

We therefore beg you most submissively, madam, to be so kind as to let us know which genuine, not yet engraved compositions by your esteemed husband are still in your hands, and to be pleased to send them to us little by little. By this we will then be able to immediately distinguish which of these items [80] have been offered to us by other owners, which of them we could receive from yourself, and which of them we would nevertheless rather purchase from you than from anyone else. If you should happen to know of any other Mozart compositions which are at the moment not in your hands, but whose owners you however know, [85] you would oblige us very much by providing some information in this regard. Since we will furthermore bring out a description of the life of your immortal spouse in one of the following volumes, you would leave not only us, but certainly also the great number of his admirers, with a great debt of gratitude if you would communicate to us any interesting and less well-known stories about his life and his art. [90] Several admirers of Mozart have already collected stories for a description of his life: perhaps you can give us even more detailed evidence about these. We may consider ourselves all the more assured of your kind readiness in this because you are the person for whom it is most important that the life story of this great man [95] should be written without distortion and truthfully.

We look forward with pleasure to a speedy, amicable reply and remain in the
meantime, with all true respect,
Lpz. 15th May
1798.

your most obedient
Breitkopf & Härtel