

masses could feed upon a low German fare. Joseph's National Theater harbored his unique hybrid called "Nationalsingspiel," where the German language would be taught to sing. This idea found a ready sympathizer in Mozart. He had worked on a German opera, *Zaide*, before arriving in Vienna, without any commission in hand, and he presented it in an incomplete form to Joseph's court, as testimony to his interest in seeing the "Nationalsingspiel" project succeed.

Even earlier, when news of Joseph's language project had first spread, Leopold Mozart, ever mindful of opportunities for his gifted son, made inquiries of a friend in Vienna. The friend wrote to Leopold (Jan. 23, 1778): "If your son will take upon himself the task of setting to music some good German comic opera, submit it to the discretion of His Majesty, and then await the decision," it might work. The friend told Leopold that the poet Wieland had just written from Mannheim that "Mannheim has changed all the opinions he ever had about music." Leopold's son had been in Mannheim for the preceding three months. What was Mozart doing with music during that overlooked period in Mannheim?

## Mozart's aborted Paris trip

Prior to Sept. 15, 1781 Mozart wrote his father from Vienna: "I hope all will go well in the winter. . . . If I see that it is to my advantage, I shall remain here. If not, I am thinking of going straight to Paris."

Ironically, only three years earlier, Mozart had been driven out of Paris. In 1778, he was offered the position of court organist at Versailles, with a direct connection to Emperor Joseph's sister, Marie Antoinette. The French court had just officially thrown its support behind the Americans in their revolt against Britain's King George III.

While in France, Mozart frequented pro-American circles. For ten days he worked, with Johann Christian Bach (from London), at the estate of the de Noaille family, in-laws of the Marquis de Lafayette, who had gone to Philadelphia to fight for the Americans against the British. Lafayette's wife Adrienne's father was a key humanist Catholic figure around the French court; her uncle was the French ambassador to London.

Evidently the possibility of a great musical genius making such political connections did not please some powerful persons. Shortly after this visit, Mozart found his luggage put on a carriage out of France, and was given a ticket out of town.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart took a lively interest in the workings of the Mannheim theater, and collaborated in this dynamic institution with the Baron Otto von Gemmingen on the (now lost) melodrama *Semiramis*. Baron Gemmingen, we shall come to see, was one of a select group of conspirators committed to furthering the issues of the American Revolution. The particular Freemasonic chapter that Mozart later joined, was the one set up by Gemmingen in Vienna in 1783. And just four years after Mozart's sojourn in Mannheim, the Mannheim theater produced the first drama by Friedrich Schiller, the German "poet of freedom" who gave the highest literary expression, in any language, to the ideals of the American Revolution.

## The Abduction from the Seraglio

It was as part of his German language project, that Joseph wanted Mozart to compose an opera in German, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (*The Abduction from the Seraglio*), for the state visit of the Grand Duke Paul of Russia to Vienna in the fall of 1781. The theme resonated with the centennial celebrations of the Austria's great 1683 victory over the Turks, then in preparation, but the Russians and their allies in the Vienna aristocracy had darker motives in reviving the age-old (and once well-founded) animosity to the Ottoman Empire. The Austrian people was to be manipulated into ignoring the issues of the American revolt against the British Empire, and instead to define their strategic interest as continual warfare against the barbarian Turks, whose moribund empire happened to stand in the way of Russian and British imperial designs.

As Mozart explains in a Sept. 26, 1781 letter to his father, Leopold, "The whole plot is being turned upside down, and at my instigation." In the ending of the original play upon which the libretto was based, by the Leipzig merchant Christoph Friedrich Bretzner, a young Christian, Belmonte, is set free by the Turkish Pasha Selim because it is found out at the last instant that Belmonte is the long-lost son of the Pasha—a well-worn dramatic device dear to the oligarchist's bias. Mozart chooses to compose a much more powerful ending which confronts, rather than strokes, the listener's prejudices. At the climax of the opera, the Pasha tells Belmonte:

"It was because of your father, that barbarian, that I was forced to leave my native land. His insatiable greed deprived me of my beloved, whom I cherished more than my own life. He robbed me of honor, property, everything—he destroyed all my happiness."

Belmonte responds: "Cool your wrath on me, avenge the wrong done to you by my father. Your anger is justified and I am prepared for anything." The audience is prepared for the worst from the Turk, as is Belmonte.

However, they get the shock of their lives, as the Pasha announces: "It must be very natural for your family to do wrong, since you assume that I am the same way. But you