

THE MYSTERY OF MOZART'S ORIGINAL LETTER OF 5 JULY 1791

or

Mozart vs. Picasso

H. S. Brockmeyer



The drawing that you see above appears in Emily Anderson's *The Letters of Mozart & His Family*, Vol. III, as well as in Deutsch und Bauer's *Mozart: Briefe und Aufzeichnungen, 1787-1857*, Band IV. The drawing appears on Mozart's letter of 5 July 1791, sent to his wife, who was taking the baths, out at Baden bei Wien.¹

I sought permission to reproduce the image in a book I am currently working on, (2024) so I contacted the Internationale Stiftung Mozarteum in Salzburg, to see if they had it in their collections. They did not – but pointed me to the Royal Danish Library in Copenhagen. Constanze lived there for a few years with her second husband, the Danish diplomat Georg Nissen, and, apparently, three letters from Mozart must somehow have landed in a friend's hands.

Little did I anticipate the surprises that my search would bring.

From Vincent and Mary Novello's travel diaries, during their visit to Constanze in Salzburg in 1829, we learn that Constanze was very generous with gifting personal

items belonging to Mozart. To Vincent Novello, she gave, as presents, a Mozart score and a tuft of his hair. Earlier, there were three letters that may have been included in her bestowal to close friends. She and her husband hosted music parties at their elegant apartment on Lavendelstræde, in Copenhagen, and it's likely that many guests were Mozart aficionados.



Lavendelstræde 1, Copenhagen, on the corner of Hestemøllestræde, where Constanze and Georg Nissen resided in the 1st floor corner apartment

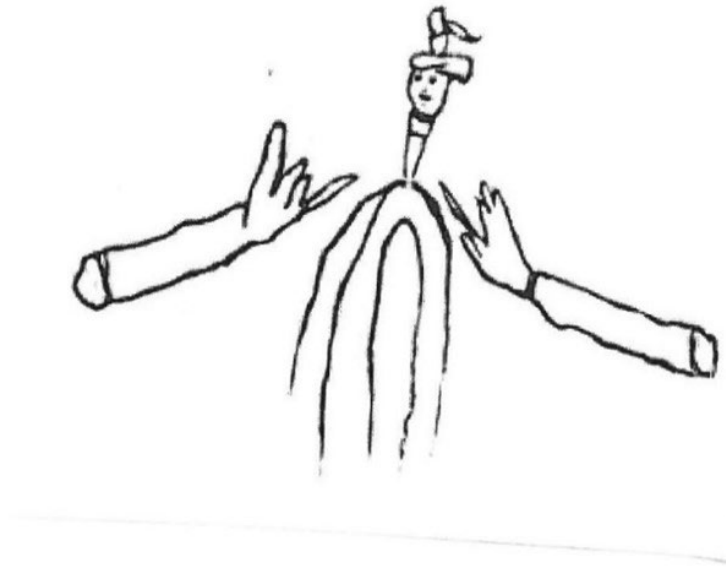
Wikipedia.org "Lavendelstræde"
Photographer: Ramblersen, 3 May 2017
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I contacted the Royal Copenhagen library, and they confirmed that they, indeed, had Mozart's letter of 5 July 1791. After I purchased the image, and received it, I noticed that there was no drawing on it. Perusing Anderson's *The Letters of Mozart & His Family*, Vol. III, I noticed that Mozart wrote to Constanze twice on 5 July, and I had received a copy of the first portion of his letter.

Mozart's letter with the drawing was later owned by Knud Lyhne Rahbek, and after his death, was inherited by the Boye family, who donated it in 1940 to the Royal Danish Library. It most likely was given to someone in their family, from Constanze, many years ago, during her few years in Nissen's home country.

One of the librarians at the Royal Danish Library, Laura Søvsø Thomasen, was amazing with her detective work. She emailed me that Mozart's 5 July letter – the second part, missing since the 1950's – with the original drawing -- appeared in a journal, published in Copenhagen in 1890 – *Literatur Og Kritik* [Literature and Criticism].

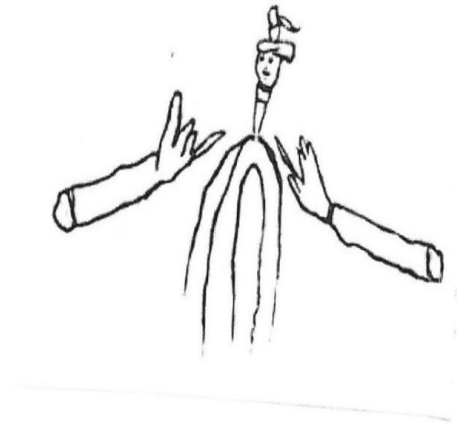
Laura had also found – wonder of wonders – Mozart's letter with the original drawing; the journal was reproduced on a website by HathiTrust.org, who granted me permission to replicate the drawing:



**The original drawing from Mozart's 5 July letter to Constanze,
discovered in an 1890 Danish literary journal**

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<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uiug.30112114873976&seq=16>

The mystery about Mozart's drawing, is that it does not resemble the drawing in Anderson's *The Letters of Mozart & His Family*, Vol. III, or Deutsch und Bauer's drawing in Mozart's letter, in *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen*, Band IV. Here are the drawings, side by side, for comparison:



As you can see, it's not the same drawing; the one on the left is Mozart's original conception. Someone doctored the 5 July 1791 drawing, to make it look more artistic. We must wonder – who decided that Mozart's drawing was not usable? Apparently, Mozart was a great musician, but not a great artist; still, there was no need to change his drawing. His letters were originally meant only for his wife's eyes – not for posterity.

Both drawings convey Mozart's fear that he will be attacked with sharp objects from invisible beings; the two drawings convey the same emotions. This would mirror Mozart's stark feelings of persecution and rejection, in his last year, 1791. He wrote enigmatically to Freemason friend, Michael Puchberg on 12 July:

Unfortunately Fate is so much against me, *though only in Vienna*, that even when I want to, I cannot make any money. A fortnight ago I sent round a list for subscribers and so far the only name on it is that of Baron van Swieten!²

And there is this portentous comment, in a letter from Mozart to his wife, of 6 July 1791: "... because when I know with certainty that nothing is wrong with you -- then all my effort is dear and pleasant to me: -- because the most fatal and confused situation that I could always find myself in becomes a small thing to me when I know that you are healthy and you're happy."³

The original 5 July letter of Mozart has gone missing; perhaps Anderson or Deutsch had only the written portion, but someone remembered that a drawing had appeared on

Mozart's original letter, so they, perhaps from memory, attempted to reproduce it; though this explanation does not sufficiently explain why the drawings are different.

Royal Danish librarian Laura Thomassen enlightens in this email:

In his book "Mozart og Danmark" ("Mozart and Denmark") Carsten E. Hatting (1991) writes that the letter from Mozart to Constanze 5 July 1791 is not at the Royal Library, although it is stated in the edition of the collected letters. In 1956 it is stated by Kåre Olsen that the letter's whereabouts are unknown. This letter was owned by Joh. Frederik Braëm (alongside two other Mozart letters). At some point in time the letters were lent to J. P. E. Hartmann and they were published in a journal in 1890.

In the 1890 *Literatur Og Kritik* [Literature and Criticism], edited by C. Riis Knudsen, Mozart's 5 July letter appears – with his original drawing – along with 2 other letters in the chapter: "Tre hidtil Breve fra Mozart til hans Hustru" – Three Letters So Far from Mozart to His Wife, pages 1 -8. The drawing is on page 7.⁴

LITERATUR OG KRITIK.

ET TIDSSKRIFT,

UDGIVET OG LEDET

AF

C. RIIS-KNUDSEN.

IV. BIND.

KØBENHAVN.

OTTO B. WROBLEWSKI* FORLAG.

1890.

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UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT
URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Reproduction of the title page of the journal where Mozart's 5 July letter to Constanze was discovered in an 1890 Danish literary journal, with his original drawing

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Thus, we are confronted with yet another Mozart mystery, but this one has a somewhat satisfactory ending.

In 1829, Constanze Mozart was questioned by the visiting English couple, Vincent and Mary Novello, "whether [Mozart] could draw, or paint well – or possessed any particular talent for any other art or pursuit than his own science."

Constanze replied: He "Was fond of Painting –Sculpture—and could draw himself. Indeed" she added, "he had superior talents for all the Arts."⁵

We wonder what the Novellos would say if they had seen Mozart's artwork. It has a "Picasso" style, don't you think?

¹ The drawing appears in Anderson, *The Letters of Mozart and his Family*, Vol III, L. 609, 1429, and in Deutsh und Bauer, *Mozart: Briefe un Aufzeichnungen 1787- 1857*, Band IV,

² *The Letters of Mozart and His Family*, Vol. III, London: MacMillan and Co., Ltd, 1938, L. 567, 1383- 1384.

³ Deutsh und Bauer, *Mozart: Briefe un Aufzeichnungen 1787- 1857*, Band IV, L. 1182, Kassel: Bärenreiter-Verlag, 1963, 149.

⁴ The website from Hathi Trust for the journal:

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uiug.30112114873976&seq=15>

⁵ *A Mozart Pilgrimage: The Travel Diaries of Vincent and Mary Novello in the Year 1829*, Edited by Nerina Medici & Rosemary Hughes, London: Eulenburg Books, 1955, 80.