

Riddles and Counterpoint: Mozart's pupil Franz Jacob Freystädtler

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In the spring of 1786, Mozart received a visitor from Salzburg who had traveled to Vienna in order to undertake musical studies with him.¹ It was May 16, to be exact, shortly after the premiere of *Le Nozze di Figaro*, during the period when Mozart found himself at the peak of his success in Vienna. The previous two and a half years had been stellar years for the composer, brought about by an outpouring of compositions and a series of concerts. At the time of the student's arrival, Mozart lived in the Figaro-Haus, his most expensive living quarters during his ten years in Vienna. Though teaching was not among his preferred activities, Mozart nevertheless took in and welcomed the new pupil from Salzburg. The student was Franz Jacob Freystädtler (1761-1841), a lively young man who was Mozart's junior by only five years, and who was reputed to be an excellent pianist – “ein sehr fähiger Mensch zum Klavier-schlagen” (a very capable player at the keyboard).² He had come to Vienna for further instruction in composition and theory, studies which lasted for approximately a year. His name in the Mozart biographical literature is most often associated – incorrectly – with helping to complete a portion of the unfinished Requiem, but it is his composition studies with Mozart that are of interest to us here.

Freystädtler and Mozart probably knew each other quite well. Both had been born and raised in Salzburg and were sons of musicians/composers of nearly identical ages. Possibly the two had been acquaintances or friends in their youth or adolescent years, although no documentation exists to confirm this. From 1767 until 1779, Freystädtler lived with his father and mother in the Goldgasse, situated on the same side of the Salzach River as the Tanzmeisterhaus, where the Mozart family lived from 1773 onwards. A close association between the two families may have further come about since Franz Jacob's father, Johann Jacob Freystädtler (1723-1787), served as a composer, choirmaster and “Totensänger” (funeral singer) of St. Sebastian Church, the parish church of the Mozart family. Even if Leopold Mozart never mentioned the Freystädtlers in correspondence available to us, it is fair to assume that they were known to the Mozart family. It is possible that Wolfgang may even have been thinking of Freystädtler's father when he referred to the Salzburg Totensängers and

¹ The authors are grateful to Prof. Neal Zaslaw (Cornell University) and Prof. Hans Ueckert (Hamburg) for their advice and comments on an earlier draft of this article. A special note of thanks goes to Dr Michael Lorenz (Vienna) for his generosity in sharing his knowledge of Freystädtler's life and career.

² *Hofratsrelationen* 1789/I, fol. 714v-715v, Salzburger Landesarchiv.

their questionable singing talents in a letter he wrote his father from Mannheim on November 4, 1777. The letter contains a series of criticisms heaped upon the Mannheim singers in typical Mozartian fashion with comments such as, “the singing here is unimaginably poor,” followed by “the soprano would much rather sing alto, he can’t reach the high notes anymore,” and “the few boys they have are terrible,” and finally ending his sharp criticism with “the tenor and bass are like the funeral singers in Salzburg.”³ There can be little doubt that Mozart thought poorly of Salzburg’s “Totensänger”.

From all accounts, Freystädler’s musical training had begun with his father and then continued as a choirboy in the Archbishop’s Kapellhaus where Leopold Mozart taught violin to the choirboys and, during part of his tenure, keyboard. He moved from there to studies on the organ with Franz Ignaz Lipp, one of the organists of the court musical establishment often mentioned in the Mozarts’ letters, whose daughter was married to Michael Haydn. Then in 1777, at the age of sixteen, Freystädler entered the Kapelle of St. Peter’s, a musical institution in Salzburg second only in importance to the court’s own musical establishment. There he served as organist until September, 1782.⁴ It now becomes clear that Mozart and Freystädler were similarly employed as organists in Salzburg, though Mozart held the higher and more important position of court and cathedral organist. As with so many other musicians of his time, Freystädler was also proficient in another instrument, the cello, and furthermore, possessed a powerful bass voice. Coupled with his imposing appearance, which according to the obituary report, was given as a very handsome (“stattlichen”) man with large, blue eyes, he must have made a striking impression.⁵ His superiors at St. Peter’s gymnasium in Salzburg, however, minced no words about his character: “bona quidem mente praeditus, sed eo deterior in moribus, in religione, in amore, in debitis in otio”, i.e. gifted with an excellent mind, but all the worse in morals, in religion, in love affairs, getting into debts and laziness.⁶

³ *Mozart: Briefe und Aufzeichnungen*, ed. Wilhelm A. Bauer, Otto Erich Deutsch, and Joseph Heinz Eibl, 7 vols (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1962-1975), vol. 2:101. Hereafter referred to as *MBA*, followed by the appropriate volume and page numbers.

⁴ Michael Lorenz, ‘Freystädler, Franz Jacob’, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. by Stanley Sadie, second edition (London: Macmillan, 2001), vol. 9:257. Much of the biographical information in the present article is based on this entry in *The New Grove Dictionary*.

⁵ See Anton Hackel, ‘Erinnerungen I. Franz Freystädter’, *Allgemeine Wiener Musik-Zeitung* 121 (8 October 1842), p. 489.

⁶ *Catalogus Musicorum San Petrensiū. In quorum notitiam veniri potuit, et quorum Nomina in antiquissimo libro Chori inscripta fuere inventa*. Sign. 311/A/2, fol. 198f, Stiftsarchiv St. Peter (Salzburg).

About four years prior to Freystädtler's arrival in Vienna, or sometime in 1782, Freystädtler left Salzburg to become a piano teacher in Munich, where he hoped for success as a teacher and keyboard player. There he earned a good living but quickly encountered serious problems when he failed to make good on his debts. The financial and legal difficulties resulted in his civil arrest and even imprisonment in Munich, a state of affairs that did not sit well with his parents or the Salzburg authorities. At the time of Freystädtler's visit with Mozart in 1786, his financial difficulties continued, while hopes of resolving them hinged upon receipt of an inheritance from his father. However, this inheritance of nearly 422 gulden was not received until 1789, two years after his father's death, and only after much haggling back and forth with the stubborn Salzburg authorities who demanded that he submit statements from musicians demonstrating his ability to sustain a livelihood. Freystädtler's father, fully aware of his son's negligent handling of money, had carefully stipulated that any monies to be handed over to his son must be delayed until he had achieved a stable means of support and demonstrated greater financial restraint.⁷

It is against this backdrop that we can now begin to appreciate more fully the relationship between Freystädtler and Mozart. From all the available written evidence, Mozart befriended his new student quickly and most likely played a role in helping Freystädtler to receive his inheritance by submitting a supportive statement to the Salzburg authorities.⁸ Mozart may have felt sympathy for Freystädtler, a fellow musician who had taken flight from the oppressive city of Salzburg (and perhaps from an overbearing father), in circumstances that were not unlike his own. At any rate, the close association between the two men is evident from four different documents: (1) Freystädtler is among those mentioned in Mozart's high-spirited, oft quoted letter from Prague dated January 15, 1787, written to his friend, Gottfried Jacquin, in which he announced the nicknames given to himself, his traveling companions and friends back in Vienna;⁹ (2) a four part canon entitled, *Lieber Freistädler, lieber Gaulimauli*, K. 232/509a, was written for Freystädtler, providing a clear indication that Mozart found joy and some level of amusement in his pupil; (3) Mozart also wrote the unfinished burlesque piece, *Der Salzburger Lump in Wien*, K. 509b, in which the 'hero' is a thinly veiled portrait of Freystädtler; and (4) Mozart came to the rescue of Freystädtler by

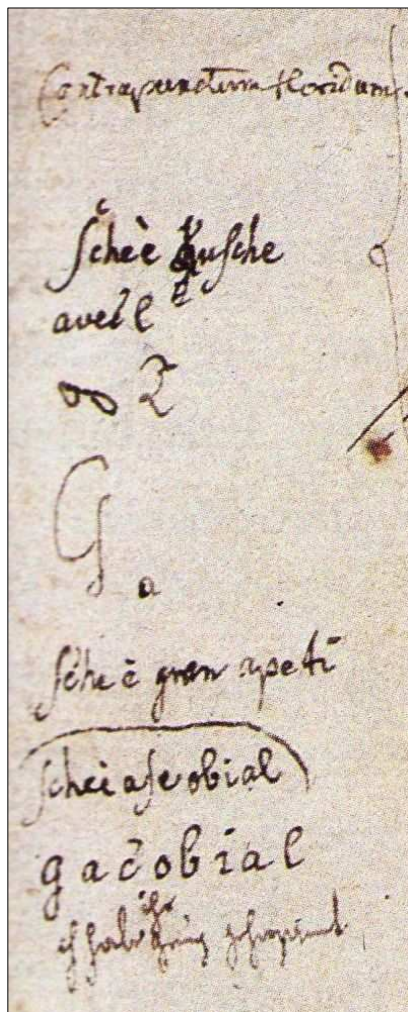
⁷ Michael Lorenz, 'Mozarts Haftungserklärung für Freystädler. Eine Chronologie', *Mozart-Jahrbuch* 1998 (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2000), pp. 1-19. Also available on line <<http://members.aon.at/michaelorenz/mozart/>>.

⁸ Michael Lorenz, 'Mozarts Haftungserklärung für Freystädler', pp. 18-19.

⁹ Mozart explains, "*Ich. Pünkittiti. – Meine frau. SchablaPumfa. [...] der freystädler. Gaulimauli. haben sie die güte letzern seinen Namen zu comuniciren.*" (*I am Pünkittiti. – My wife is SchablaPumfa. [...] Freystädler is Gaulimauli. Please kindly inform the latter of his name*). Letter of January 15, 1787 (*MBA* 4:11).

providing the bond and written surety for him during a lawsuit in 1786/7 in which he was accused of having stolen a piano. Two further activities point to a friendship between Mozart and his pupil: participation in the popular game of skittles which, according to Freystädtler, took place during his counterpoint lessons with Mozart¹⁰ and Freystädtler serving for a time as a copyist for Mozart.

We now come to the studies which Freystädtler took up with Mozart in 1786 and which lasted until sometime in 1787. They contain another piece of evidence, which adds a special note of



humor to the friendship between Mozart and Freystädtler. The written record of these lessons and studies consists of 52 leaves with various music exercises. The greater part (41 leaves) was acquired by Aloys Fuchs and with an additional two leaves, this portion of the autograph is now part of the Mozarteum's collections.¹¹ Fuchs erroneously identified the leaves as composition and counterpoint exercises devised by Leopold Mozart for his son and it was not until 1961 that Wolfgang Plath established the true nature of the document.¹² Page 38 of the autograph is quite special in that the margin contains what we could call extracurricular material, revealing a distinctly playful side to the teacher-student relationship between Mozart and Freystädtler.¹³

The text on the page starts innocently enough with the notation "Contrapunctum floridum" in Mozart's hand. This is a reference to the fifth counterpoint species in J.J. Fux's theoretical treatise *Gradus ad Parnassum*. The

"Contrapunctum floridum" phrase written in the margin should not cause us to lose sight of

¹⁰ Hermann Abert, *W.A. Mozart. Neubearbeitete und erweiterte Ausgabe von Otto Jahns Mozart*, 2 vols, 7th ed. (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel), vol. 1: 827. This anecdote first appeared in Hackel's obituary (see footnote 5).

¹¹ Three leaves are kept at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, six at the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin (NMA, X/30/2:17-18).

¹² Wolfgang Plath, 'Beiträge zur Mozart-Autographie I. Die Handschrift Leopold Mozarts', *Mozart-Jahrbuch* 1960/61 (Salzburg: Zentralinstitut für Mozartforschung der Internationalen Stiftung Mozarteum, 1961), p. 83.

¹³ A color facsimile of the entire page with a brief description can be found in Rudolph Angermüller and Geneviève Geffray, eds, *Mozart, Bilder und Klänge* (Salzburg: Salzburger Landesausstellungen, 1991), pp. 352-353.

the fact that for teaching purposes Mozart did not use the original (Latin) text but a German translation from 1742 by Lorenz Christoph Mizler. Underneath Mozart's notation we can distinguish some symbols, isolated letters, and what looks like a string of nonsense words (scheè, kusche, ase etc.). As Wolfgang Plath's research has shown, all these were penned by Freystädtler, though this does not preclude Mozart's involvement one way or the other. To work out the meaning of the marginal annotations, we have to realize they are a combination of two different language systems, French and German. The apparently nonsensical "scheè kusche avec l" is a rough phonetic transcription in German of the French phrase "J'ai couché avec elle" (I have slept with her). Since Freystädtler falls back on the German sound system to write down the pronunciation of each word, his transcriptions are only an approximation of the actual sounds in French.

The illustration shows that Freystädtler originally wrote "gusche" but changed it to "kusche", which in German is closer in sound to the French word "couché".¹⁴ Substituting a voiced plosive (the sound g) for a voiceless plosive (the sound k), especially at the beginning of foreign words and proper names, is rather common in some varieties of German (including Pennsylvania Dutch). The correspondence of the Mozart family members provides many examples of such substitutions. Thus, in Leopold Mozart's letters, mayor Kahr appears as Gahr, the composer Cambini as Gambini and pastry cook Klitsch as Glitsch.¹⁵ In April 1776, Nannerl, Mozart's sister, mentioned the death of "griegs Rath schwarz" in her diary, before changing Schwarz's professional title to the correct form "kriegs Rath" (literally: councilor of war). And in November 1780 she recorded how Dr Barisani prescribed her "ein trängel" (a medicinal drink), correcting it to "ein tränkel" afterwards.¹⁶ In this respect, Freystädtler's initial spelling "gusche" instead of "kusche" is not out of the ordinary. Also note that Freystädtler writes the word with a long or medial s in the middle, which should not be confused with the letter f. The same long s can be seen at the beginning of the word "schee". The complete, four-word sentence described so far is a key to the solution to the rebus-like riddle written underneath:

¹⁴ A German word somewhat similar in sound and still used in Austria today is "kusch", meaning "shut up". The second syllable of Freystädtler's "kusche" is not a schwa but has to be read with a long vowel. It rhymes with Amadé.

¹⁵ The three examples can be found in *MBA* 1:100, *MBA* 2: 353 and *MBA* 3:575 respectively.

¹⁶ Walter Hummel, ed., *Nannerl Mozarts Tagebuchblätter. Mit Eintragungen ihres Bruders Wolfgang Amadeus* (Salzburg and Stuttgart: Das Bergland-Buch, 1958), p. 23 and p. 79. The initial spelling "griegs Rath" and the form "trängel" are visible on the facsimiles reproduced in Hummel's edition. The alternative spellings have not been recorded in the *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen* (see *MBA* 1:529 and *MBA* 3:34).

๓ L

The riddle is a play on various homophones and resembles the technique used widely today in text messages, where for example “c u” is shorthand for “see you”. The first symbol in the rebus in the Freystädler autograph is a lower-case “g”. The pronunciation of the letter “g” in the French alphabet sounds exactly like “j’ai” (I have). In addition, the letter “g” is lying on its side, which needs to be taken into account in our interpretation. The phrase “lying (on its side)” can be translated in French as “couché”. The first part of the riddle is solved:

| <i>rebus</i> | <i>literal reading in French</i> | <i>homophonic equivalent in French</i> | <i>phonetic transcription in German (by Freystädler)</i> | <i>English translation</i> |
|--------------|----------------------------------|--|---|----------------------------|
| ๓ | g couché | j’ai couché | scheè kusche | I have slept |

The tilted “g” is followed by an “L”, which is shaped not unlike the modern pound symbol £. The letter “l”, when read in isolation, sounds like the French feminine pronoun “elle” (she, her). The “l” appears together with (“avec”) the letter g:

| <i>rebus</i> | <i>literal reading in French</i> | <i>homophonic equivalent in French</i> | <i>phonetic transcription in German (by F.)</i> | <i>English translation</i> |
|--------------|----------------------------------|--|--|----------------------------|
| [+] L | avec l | avec elle | avec l | with her |

We can apply the same principle to the two other riddles in the margin of the autograph. The second riddle is again a combination of two different letters in which the typography is semantically significant. In other words, the meaning of the rebus is determined by the shape and relative size of the letters:

G a

The first letter is a capital, in this instance a demonstratively large “g”. This may be rendered in French as a “g grand”, which from a phonetic point of view, is identical to “j’ai grand”:

| <i>rebus</i> | <i>literal reading in French</i> | <i>homophonic equivalent in French</i> | <i>phonetic transcription in German (by F.)</i> | <i>English translation</i> |
|--------------|----------------------------------|--|--|----------------------------|
| G | g grand | j’ai grand | scheè gran | I have (a) big |

The large “G” is followed by a very small “a”, or in French, an “a petit”.¹⁷ This is similar in sound, though not identical to, “appétit” (appetite). Because of the different vowel sounds in the second syllables (“a petit” and “appetit”) the two phrases are strictly speaking not homophonous. The difference in pronunciation is small, however, and may be disregarded. As Freystädtler’s transcription makes clear, the final “t” in “a petit / appetit” is silent:

| <i>rebus</i> | <i>literal reading</i> | <i>homophonic equivalent in French</i> | <i>phonetic transcription in German (by F.)</i> | <i>English translation</i> |
|--------------|------------------------|--|--|----------------------------|
| a | a petit | appétit | apeti | appetite |

The final riddle, separated by a curved divider, should be read as a sequence of isolated letters in the French alphabet, each representing a one-syllable sound: “g a c o b i a l”, or “J’ai assez obéi à elle” (modern French: Je lui ai assez obéi). Here, Freystädtler transcribed the first three syllables only (g a c: “scheè ase”), the cluster “o b i a l” is merely repeated above the riddle. The table below gives the solution for each individual letter in the rebus. The second column shows the sound value of each syllable using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA):

| <i>rebus</i> | <i>phonetic value (IPA notation)</i> | <i>homophonic equivalent in French</i> | <i>phonetic transcription in German (by F.)</i> | <i>English translation</i> |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|--|--|----------------------------|
| g | [ʒe] | j’ai | scheè | I have |
| a c | [a] [se] | assez | ase | enough |
| o b i | [ɔ] [be] [i] | obéi | | obeyed |
| a | [a] | à | | to |
| l | [ɛl] | elle | | her |

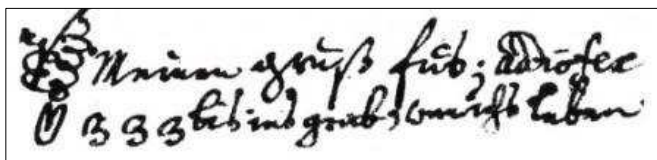
A translation in idiomatic English would be “I have obeyed her enough”. As the French sentence is slightly more complex than the preceding riddles, Freystädtler added the German translation “Ich habe ^{ihr} genug gehorsamt”, originally omitting “ihr” (her).¹⁸ Interestingly, this is the only German sentence on the manuscript and Freystädtler wrote it in another hand than that used for the French phrases and transcriptions. To mention just one obvious feature, the shape of the letter “h” in the word “scheè” is very different from the “h” in “habe”, which has a descender, the long downward loop below the baseline. The latter is typical of the so-called Kurrentschrift, the common standard for German letter writing in the eighteenth century. As a

¹⁷ The more common word order in French would be for the adjectives “grand” and “petit” to precede the noun: un grand g, un petit a.

¹⁸ The form “gehorsamt” is no longer used in modern German. The NMA erroneously gives the second word as “hab” (NMA X/30/2:31).

rule, this script was not used for languages other than German. Numerous examples of this kind of language-related switch in handwriting styles can be observed in Mozart's correspondence, for instance in his letter to his wife from June 6, 1791.¹⁹ The first seventeen lines are in French and written in an ordinary cursive script. When Mozart resorts to German in the remainder of the letter, he also changes his handwriting and uses the much spikier Kurrentschrift.

The first rebus on the Freystädler manuscript suggests the riddles should be interpreted in a sexual context. In view of the preceding phrase ("j'ai couché avec elle"), the second riddle "J'ai grand appétit" can well mean "I have a great appetite for sex". Likewise, the third phrase may have sexual overtones. Given Freystädler's amorous exploits, which had prompted his father to include certain conditions in his will, the sentiments expressed in the riddles may not have been entirely hypothetical. When compared to Mozart's more famous examples of wordplay, such as reshuffling words within sentences ("ich gute eine wünschte nacht"), spelling words backwards ("Gnagflow Trazom"), and combining words from several languages ("hodie nous avons beegnet per strada Dominum Edlbach"), the riddles discussed here are special in that they include a clear visual component (the shape and direction of the letters), adding an extra layer of semantic sophistication.²⁰ However, in one of the humorous letters to his cousin, Maria Anna Thekla Mozart ("das Bäsle"), the composer also draws on a rebus-like technique to express his feelings. In his letter to her of November 5, 1777, he ends with the



drawing of a little heart, followed by the phrase "3 3 3 bis ins grab", or "3 3 3 until the grave".²¹ This goodbye only makes sense if we know that in

Mozart's Austrian dialect, the numeral 3 (*drei* in German) sounds like the German word *treu*, meaning "true" or "loyal". In his letter Mozart is effectively expressing his eternal loyalty to his cousin: "true true true until the grave".²² Mozart's use of the number "3" as shorthand for

¹⁹ *MBA* 5:134-135. A facsimile of the first page of Mozart's letter with the different handwriting styles can be found in Gilles Cantagrel, *Mozart. Letters and Manuscripts*, trl. by Gray Sutherland et al (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2005), p. 213.

²⁰ The three examples of Mozart's wordplay and many more are discussed in Emanuel Winternitz, 'Gnagflow Trazom: An Essay on Mozart's Script, Pastimes, and Nonsense Letters', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 11, Nos 2/3 (Summer-Autumn 1958), pp. 200-216. For more on Mozart's linguistic acrobatics and creative use of register see Wolfgang Mieder, "'Now I Sit Like a Rabbit in the Pepper': Proverbial Language in the Letters of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart", *Journal of Folklore Research* 40, No.1 (2003), pp. 33-70.

²¹ *MBA* 2:106.

²² A more elaborate version of this rebus appears in a letter written by Leopold Mozart on December 18, 1772 (*MBA* 1:468). It was a popular image, one that can also be found on the reverse of an embroidered picture card

“*treu*” is the equivalent of writing “2” for “to” or “too” in English text messages. It is on the same principle of sound resemblance or homophony that the Freystädtler riddles are based.

When Freystädtler found himself in financial difficulties in 1789 and appealed to the Salzburg authorities to grant him access to his father’s inheritance, he sent glowing references from music connoisseurs and masters in composition as proof of his modesty and respectable character. Among these was probably a letter of recommendation from Mozart written to convince the authorities of his (former) pupil’s earnestness.²³ Mozart may have mentioned in his testimony how under his tutelage in 1786-87 Freystädtler had applied himself with diligence to his music studies. Nevertheless, as the autograph shows, during the exercises in strict counterpoint, student and teacher had clearly enjoyed some light-hearted fun.

once in Leopold’s possession. The upper part of the card shows a blindfolded Cupid strewing red hearts and green threes from a basket. For a facsimile of the card, see Walter Hummel, ed., *Nannerl Mozarts Tagebuchblätter*, pp. 91-92.

²³ Michael Lorenz, ‘Mozarts Haftungserklärung für Freystädtler’, pp. 18-19.