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COMMUNICATION: CONFERENCE REPORT

Italien am Mittelrhein

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The musical history of World Cultural Heritage Site the Mittelrhein has been determined by more than the Loreley and everything that is connected to this symbol of 'Rhine romanticism'. By the eighteenth century, our period of interest, the area's central town, Koblenz, had been part of the Electorate of Trier since the twelfth century and the residence of its *Fürstbischöfe* (prince-bishops) since the seventeenth. In 1654 the court chapel was founded in the residence Ehrenbreitstein (today a part of Koblenz) by Karl Kaspar von der Leyen, then Archbishop and Elector of Trier. The town can boast a (more or less fully) documented musical tradition from that time onwards.

The last *Fürstbischof* of Trier, Clemens Wenzeslaus – seventh son of Friedrich August II, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, and his wife Maria Josefa, and therefore grandson of August der Starke (Augustus II the Strong) – resided in Koblenz from 1768 until he had to flee from the French in 1792, at the end of the ancien régime. He had been joined in 1769 by his sister Maria Kunigunde, *Fürstäbtissin* (sovereign abbess) of Essen and Thorn, who lived mostly at her brother's court. Both siblings had received an excellent musical education while growing up at court in Dresden, and they later established a high-quality musical life in Koblenz, first at Ehrenbreitstein and then, after building the classicist electoral palace in the town itself, in the centre of people's lives.

To welcome Maria Kunigunde in 1769, Pietro Guglielmi's *Endimione* was performed. In 2024 its overture and one of its choruses, 'Viva l'eccelsa donna', were the starting- and end-points of a concert – from Festival RheinVokal, sponsored by the foundation Villa Musica Rheinland Pfalz – that accompanied the conference 'Italien am Mittelrhein'. Between readings of the lively letters that Maria Kunigunde sent to another of her brothers and to a sister, arias from the repertoire under Clemens Wenzeslaus were performed. These included works from Giuseppe Sarti, Francesco Bianchi, Johann Christian Bach and Domenico Cimarosa, as well as Koblenz's last *Hofkapellmeister* (court chapel master), Pompeo Sales. Kunigunde's letters, written between 1769 and 1786, offer glimpses of music in everyday life in the eighteenth century; she writes about the weekly musical academies held at the court but also, for example, about the great ice flood in 1784 and its impact.

At the two-day conference itself, Karl Böhmer (Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz) looked into the musical repertoire of the weekly 'court academies' under Clemens Wenzeslaus, analysing the 128 surviving concert programmes between 1783 and 1792 that are held in the Landeshauptarchiv Koblenz. His presentation showed that programmes comprised arias and pieces for vocal ensemble alternating with solo concertos and symphonies (overtures or single movements from complete works), as was usual for concerts at that time. In Koblenz, however, vocal music reigned more or less supreme, which can be explained by the prince-bishop's love for *dramma per musica*. In 1774, though, he inexplicably decided that his vocation did not align with a taste for opera, and the staging of operas was discontinued (a fact that is also documented by puzzled commentaries in his sister's letters). From that point on – as Böhmer showed via the concert programmes – Italian opera was even more dominant in the concerts, which came to be virtual replacements for the staged works, as this was the only opportunity left for singers in Koblenz to perform secular music. That Italian music

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at this time was still very popular is demonstrated by the repertoire, with works by Sarti, Cimarosa, Sales, Antonio Sacchini, Pasquale Anfossi and Giovanni Paisiello being the most common.

Even more popular, though, was Vincenzo Righini, arriving from Vienna and employed as *Musicdirector und Capellenmeister* at the electoral residence in Mainz between 1787 and 1793. Fabian Kolb (Hochschule für Musik und darstellende Kunst Frankfurt) highlighted the musical connections between Mainz and Koblenz that culminated in Righini writing *Alcide al bivio* at the request of Clemens Wenzeslaus; this *dramma per musica* was performed three times in Koblenz between 1790 and 1792. The fact that Koblenz saw and heard fifty-five performances altogether of works by Righini from 1787 to 1792, among which were probably seven new compositions written specifically for the city, highlights his position as the most important composer there at the end of the eighteenth century. Kolb showed at the same time the differing levels of appreciation for Italian music in Bonn, Mainz and Koblenz, noting how emerging national aspirations could be reflected in the musical hierarchy. For example, it was not Righini but concertmaster Georg Anton Kreusser who officially directed the *Kapelle* in Mainz.

At the end of the day Klaus Pietschmann (Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz) traced the relationships between Italian and German opera using the example of *Numa Pompilio*, set to music by Ferdinando Paer but also by the German Balthasar Buchwieser, singer and composer at Clemens Wenzeslaus's court from 1785 until about 1791.

The second day of the conference focused on the nineteenth century, starting with an analysis by Nicolai Glasenapp (Universität Koblenz) of the genesis and continuity of 'Rhine romanticism' from a literary standpoint. The importance of travelling as a cultural practice was traced from Laurence Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* to William Turner's trip along the Rhine in 1817 and up to present times.

Robert Abels (Universität Koblenz) discussed the 'era of Beethoven and Rossini', thereby continuing the exploration of Italian versus German music into the nineteenth century. Abels looked at the repertoire of the Musik-Institut in Koblenz, founded in 1808 and one of the oldest still active institutions of civic music culture. The archives yield the unusually high number of 158 concert programmes dating from 1819 to 1834/1835. These typify the kinds of music performed in the public sphere in the early nineteenth century, featuring a mix of arias, works for small ensembles and single movements from symphonies. Composers featured include Gaspare Spontini, Étienne Méhul, Paer, Rossini, Haydn and Paisiello, with a predominance of Beethoven. His works were performed 111 times between 1827 and 1848 (compared to three performances of Haydn and thirteen pieces by Mozart). Nevertheless, the institute mounted complete performances of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte, Don Giovanni, Così fan tutte, Le nozze di Figaro* and *Idomeneo*, as well as Louis Spohr's *Jessonda*. Koblenz also saw an early unshortened performance of Beethoven's *Fidelio* in 1828, and the first act was performed again in 1834.

Ursula Kramer (Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz) reconstructed the playlists of the Koblenz Theatre in the 1820s and 30s, highlighting a mix of German, Italian and French music in both operatic and theatrical contexts, from the setting by Heinrich Neumann (1792–1861) of Johann Joseph Reiff's libretto *Alfred der Große, König von England* to works by Méhul, Boieldieu and Cherubini, as well as, of course, Rossini. There was also a preference for Mozart's operas – not surprisingly coinciding with the Musik-Institut's performances – as well as Weber's *Der Freischütz*, though the latter was not performed at the Musik-Institut.

To conclude this small conference, Patrick Marx (Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz) presented his master's research, reconstructing Queen Victoria's journey along the Rhine in 1845. The queen was welcomed in Brühl by a concert from eight military bands consisting of around six hundred musicians, which drew much comment from correspondents of the time. In Bonn, Victoria attended the inauguration of the Beethoven memorial. Owing to some delays, a planned performance of Bellini's *Norma* had to be cancelled. Marx concentrated his presentation on the concert held at Stolzenfels Castle, near Koblenz, on 15 August. The musicians involved, led and accompanied by Meyerbeer, were Jenny Lind, Pauline Viardot-García, Leopoldine Tuczek and Johann Baptist Pischek, as well as the violinist Henri Vieuxtemps. Looking back to the cancelled *Norma*, Marx then

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focused on its originally planned cast, which is not documented, working out the vocal profiles of the singers in order to speculate on the casting of Norma and Adalgisa. Though Jenny Lind should have been the first choice, and was proclaimed by the contemporary press to be singing the title role, there seems to be some ambiguity. Viardot, of course, had sung the role as well, and Tuczek was at that time the prima donna at the Berlin court opera, so there were actually three prima donnas in the vicinity when there was only room for one.

While musical life in Mainz and Bonn has been systematically researched, Koblenz, with its pronounced taste for Italian music throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, somehow lies a little hidden between these two important towns for music history. The last publication on musical life in the city was Gustav Bereths's book from 1964, *Die Musikpflege am kurtrierischen Hofe zu Koblenz-Ehrenbreitstein* (Mainz: Schott). Much archival material still needs to be analysed and made public. A first step has been made by the digitization of a list of works performed at the Musik-Institut between 1819 and 1847 by the Stadtarchiv Koblenz, on the initiative of Robert Abels (www.dilibri.de/urn/urn:nbn:de:0128-1-108690).

The conference, taking place in the historical council chamber in Koblenz, was organized by Ursula Kramer and Robert Abels, the accompanying concert having been devised by Karl Böhmer. Conference and concert were funded by the Dr. Uwe Baur und Jutta Truber-Baur-Musikstiftung. A conference volume is being planned, aiming to shed another small light on musical life along one of the major liquid lifelines in Europe.

Corinna Herr gained her PhD at the Universität Bremen with the thesis *Medeas Zorn: Eine 'starke Frau' in Opern des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts* (The Anger of Medea: A 'Strong Woman' in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Opera; Herbolzheim: Centaurus, 2000). Her second book – *Gesang gegen die 'Ordnung der Natur'? Kastraten und Falsettisten in der Musikgeschichte* (Song against the 'Natural Order'? Castratos and Countertenors in Music History; Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2013) – derives from a 2009 *Habilitationsschrift* undertaken at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum. She was a member of the international working group Italian Opera in Central Europe and has co-edited several volumes on singing research and other subjects. Herr is Professor of Musicology at the Universität Koblenz. She is currently leading the project Darstellung und Rezeption klassischer Musik bei YouTube (The Presentation and Reception of Classical Music on YouTube), funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft.

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