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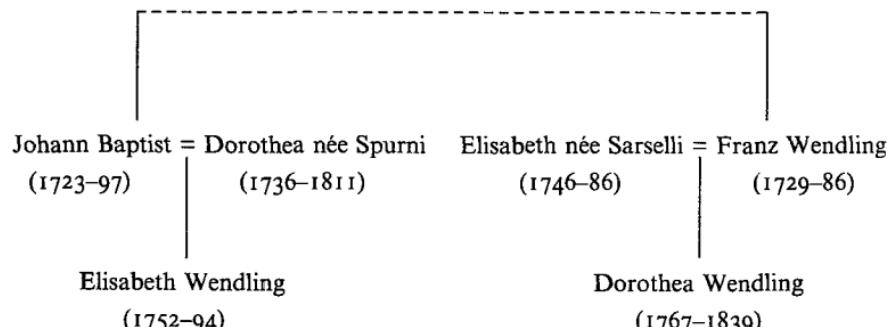
### 3 'Madame Dorothea Wendling is arcicontentissima': the performers of *Idomeneo*

MARK EVERIST

When Mozart received the commission for *Idomeneo* and began work on the opera, he knew that he would be writing for some of the best singers in Europe and for one of its finest orchestras.<sup>1</sup> The principal tenor was to be Anton Raaff (*Idomeneo*), then aged sixty-six and at the end of a career that had started with study under Bernacchi in the late 1730s. He had worked with Jommelli in Vienna, dominated tenor roles in Italy in the 1760s, and concluded his career in the service of Karl Theodor in Mannheim and Munich.<sup>2</sup> While he was at Mannheim in the 1770s, Raaff shared the stage with Dorothea Wendling (*Ilia*), who was considered by the aesthetician Christian Schubart and Wilhelm Heinse, the novelist, to be one of Europe's finest sopranos.<sup>3</sup> Christoph Wieland thought her superior even to the famous Gertrud Elisabeth Mara.<sup>4</sup> The wife of Dorothea Wendling's brother-in-law, Elisabeth Wendling (*Elettra*), had been praised by Leopold Mozart in 1763.<sup>5</sup> Since four participants in the première of *Idomeneo* were named Wendling, a fragment of their family tree is given as Figure 3.1.<sup>6</sup>

The orchestra was effectively the same that had so impressed Charles Burney among others. In August 1772 he described it in words that have since become famous: 'There are more solo

Figure 3.1



players, and good composers in this, than perhaps in any other orchestra in Europe; it is an army of generals, equally fit to plan a battle, as to fight it.<sup>7</sup>

More important to Mozart than the international fame of at least two of his principals was the fact that he was familiar with the musical capabilities of most of the singers and many of the instrumentalists; many of them had been his personal friends from at least the end of 1777, and some for much longer. Mozart's attitude towards writing for singers and instrumentalists coloured the way he composed. It is possible to show, both from documentary accounts of the composition of *Idomeneo* and from an examination of Mozart's earlier encounters with the same performers, how the strengths and prejudices of the artists played a role in shaping the work.

Table 3.1 gives the cast-lists both for the Munich performances of *Idomeneo* and for the 1786 Vienna revival (see chapter 2, above). It also includes the singers' ages at the time of the performances and their dates.

Table 3.1. Cast-lists for *Idomeneo*

	Munich, 1781	Vienna, 1786
Idomeneo	Anton Raaff (sixty-six) (1714-97)	Giuseppe Antonio Bridi (twenty-two) (1763-1836)
Idamante	Vincenzo dal Prato (twenty-four) (1756-1826)	Baron Pulini
Ilia	Dorothea Wendling (forty-four) (1736-1811)	Anna von Pufendorf (twenty-eight) (1757-1843)
Elettra	Elisabeth Wendling (thirty-four) (1746-86)	Maria Anna Hortensia, Gräfin Hatzfeld
Arbace	Domenico de Panzacchi (forty-seven) (1733-1805)	
High Priest	Giovanni Valesi (forty-five) (1735-1816)	

The cast was a highly varied group. Beside the 'stars' already mentioned, there was the castrato Vincenzo dal Prato (Idamante) who

was relatively inexperienced, and little is known about Domenico de Panzacchi (Arbace). Giovanni Valesi (High Priest) was recognised more as a teacher, his pupils including Johann Valentin Adamberger, the first Belmonte in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, and Carl Maria von Weber.<sup>8</sup> Panzacchi, Valesi, dal Prato, and Elisabeth Wendling were not very familiar to Mozart, although he had heard the latter as Anna in Holzbauer's *Günther von Schwarzburg* in November 1777 at Mannheim.<sup>9</sup> Valesi may have sung in the première of Mozart's *La finta giardiniera* in Munich on 13 January 1775.<sup>10</sup> Dorothea Wendling and Raaff were old friends of Mozart. As long ago as 19 August 1763, Leopold Mozart had written to his landlord, Lorenz Hagenhauer, from the summer residence of the Elector of Mannheim to praise the orchestra, and singled out Dorothea's husband Johann Baptist Wendling as a strikingly talented flautist. A week after his arrival in Mannheim in 1777, Mozart was taken to meet Wendling (letter of 8 November), and, despite the difference of thirty years in their ages, they developed a very close relationship. Wendling was in Paris at the same time as Mozart in the spring of 1778, and they remained in contact at least until October 1790, when they met in Frankfurt-am-Main. Mozart was close to the whole family, and wrote music not just for Johann Baptist and Dorothea but also for their daughter Elisabeth who, as Mozart told his father (twice) had been the Elector's mistress.<sup>11</sup>

The other senior figure in the Mannheim–Munich orchestra in whose company Mozart spent much time was Christian Cannabich, the leader of the orchestra, whom the family had known since 1766.<sup>12</sup> Cannabich was the first person to whom Mozart was taken when he arrived in Mannheim (letter of 31 October 1777), and five days later (4 November) he reported to his father that he was with Cannabich every day. Mozart wrote no music for him; of all the colleagues he encountered in Mannheim and Munich, Cannabich was the composer to whom he was closest, and this may well account for the fact that Mozart was reluctant to write for him, for as leader of the orchestra, his virtuosity lay as much in direction as, in the case of Wendling, for example, in execution.<sup>13</sup>

### **Anton Raaff**

Raaff was another close friend; on the day that Mozart first met Cannabich in Mannheim, he also met the famous tenor, and Raaff was to remain close to Mozart and his family for several years.<sup>14</sup>

Unlike the unstinting praise offered to most of the Mannheim-Munich singers and instrumentalists, the respect Mozart had for Raaff was qualified by serious musical reservations. Raaff had taken the tenor role in the same performance of *Günther von Schwarzburg* in which Mozart had heard Elisabeth Wendling in 1777; both Mozart and his mother wrote to Leopold about him. Maria Anna Mozart generously observed that he must have been a good singer in his time but that his voice was beginning to fail; she compared him unfavourably with the Salzburg bass, Joseph Meissner. Mozart was not only unimpressed with Raaff's performance but was prepared to joke about it with Wendling (letters of 14 November 1777).

But Mozart was a good critic. The letter he wrote to his father in Paris on 12 June the following year is partly about French tastes and the way in which he had carefully composed the symphony K. 297. Most of it, however, consists of a reasoned alteration of his views on Raaff, and as a major composer's considered opinion of an important singer it is a significant document. Mozart first of all relates his previous objections to Raaff, and begins to give the singer the benefit of the doubt: he had only heard Raaff in a rehearsal of the Holzbauer opera 'with his hat on and a stick in his hand', and he admits that many of Raaff's characteristics may stem from the fact that he trained with Bernacchi whose school was not, as Mozart also admits, to his taste. His comments are based on a performance Raaff gave at the 'Concert spirituel' on 28 May of J. C. Bach's aria 'Non so d'onde viene', a text that Mozart was to set for Aloysia Weber later that year and for Ludwig Fischer in 1787 (K. 294 and 512).<sup>15</sup>

Mozart's letter continues with a more detailed comparison between Raaff and Meissner, although – as he had not heard either in their prime – he makes it clear that he is talking in general terms rather than about their specific effect. On the whole, he prefers Raaff to Meissner except in cantabile, and he notes that Raaff indulges too much in this style – even though it must have been effective in his youth.<sup>16</sup> He points to a variety of strengths in Raaff's execution: bravura singing, diction, chest voice, and his manner of singing short andantino movements. In the light of the well-documented statements by Mozart that he regarded the duty of a composer as making the music fit the singer like a suit of clothes, it is therefore not surprising that it is possible to follow through all these observations into acts of compositional choice eighteen months later when Mozart came to write Raaff's arias for *Idomeneo*.

## Example 3.1

a No 30a

Adagio

10

b K.295

Adagio

12

One of these, 'Torna la pace' (No. 30a), has striking similarities with the concert aria 'Se al labbro mio non credi' (K. 295), composed for Raaff three years earlier in Mannheim.<sup>17</sup> Both exploit the cantabile that Raaff loved so much, and both employ what by c.1780 was an archaic structure: a ternary plan with a central  $\frac{3}{8}$  allegretto. This is surely the type of andantino movement to which Mozart was referring in his letter from Paris. Daniel Heartz has clearly shown how the model for both these arias is Metastasio's favourite composer, J. A. Hasse (1699–1783), and how the opening theme from 'Torna la pace' is derived from a cadential formula in 'Se al labbro mio non credi'.<sup>18</sup> Ex. 3.1 compares the opening of the two arias (note the same tempo marking and key).

The various stages in writing Raaff's Act III aria posed substantial problems both for Mozart and especially for Varesco, who

was repeatedly asked for a suitable poem. At one point in the transactions, Mozart and (indirectly) Raaff concentrate at length on the problems of the last two words of the first line of one of Varesco's poems, 'Il cor languiva ed era', in terms that make Mozart's claims about Raaff's diction ring true. Even Leopold was prepared to concede that Varesco's lines were severely problematic.<sup>19</sup>

Raaff had already asked Mozart to shorten the first version of 'Se al labbro mio non credi' (letter of 28 February 1778). Both versions survive, and it is clear that Mozart fulfilled Raaff's wishes. The Act II aria for Idomeneo, 'Fuor del mar', is a bravura aria designed to exploit another of Raaff's strengths that Mozart identified in the letter of 12 June 1778. The longer version (12a) is replete with elaborate coloratura that is intensified in the reprise (the shorter version (12b), which eliminates all the bravura material, was written for the Vienna performance of 1786: see chapter 2, p. 46 above). Nevertheless, it is clear from Mozart's work with Raaff that the composer handled the singer's range with great care. Quite why Raaff asked Mozart to shorten 'Se al labbro' is uncertain; the elaborate coloratura in 'Fuor del mar' was either not a problem or one that Raaff (and implicitly Mozart) could not acknowledge. Questions of range, however, were different. Figure 3.2 gives the ranges of Raaff's arias from *Idomeneo* compared with the aria Mozart heard him sing at the 'Concert spirituel' and the one he had already written for him.

Figure 3.2

J. C. Bach, 'Non so d'onde viene' (1762): 

'Se al labbro' K. 295 (1778): 

'Vedrommi intorno' (No. 6, 1781): 

'Fuor del mar' (Nos. 12a and b, 1781-6): 

'Torna la pace' (No. 30a, 1781): 

Worth noting is the contracting range in the *Idomeneo* arias. The pitch a' is only found once in Raaff's solo arias, and that is as an appoggiatura in 'Torna la pace' (No. 30a, bar 35); the exposed and repeated b♭ of 'Se al labbro' is completely absent.

Of all the materials surviving from *Idomeneo*, one of the most interesting documents that betray Mozart's working methods is the vocal draft for 'Torna la pace'.<sup>20</sup> It consists of the aria for voice and bass except in orchestral passages where violin 1 and bass are given. Clearly not a composition sketch, it is probably a draft for Raaff's approval and from which he could learn the aria. It seems highly likely that, as Heartz proposes, the arias to Act I were drafted in this form before Mozart left Salzburg.<sup>21</sup> Only a week after Mozart reached Munich (letter of 8 November), he claimed that Dorothea Wendling was 'arcicontentissima' with her Act I *scena* (R. 1, No. 1). A week later Mozart was able to report that both Wendlings were well pleased with their arias, and Raaff was happy with 'Vedrommi intorno' (letter of 15 November).

### Dorothea Wendling

Mozart could only work in advance with any conviction because he knew the singers so well and had written for most of them before. Raaff, although problematic, was a known quantity, and Mozart had already written 'Basta, vincesti' – 'Ah, non lasciarmi, no' K. 295a for Dorothea Wendling; this dates from the same time as 'Se al labbro', February 1778.<sup>22</sup> And exactly in the same way that he modelled Raaff's Act III aria on the 1778 concert aria, so he modelled Dorothea Wendling's *scena* on 'Basta, vincesti'. Both arias are cast in flat-side keys, and a comparison of ranges between 'Ah non lasciarmi' and Ilia's *Idomeneo* arias shows no detectable difference. The 1778 recitative is substantially less elaborate than the one from *Idomeneo*, but even in the earlier passage, changes of tempo are mixed with harmonic twists such as the fifth and sixth bars, as can be seen in Ex. 3.2. This example also compares the very similar openings of the two recitatives; note especially the identical tempo indications. While Mozart would hardly have been insensitive to the correspondence between the characters of Dido and Ilia, it was certainly the extraordinarily elaborate recitative that earned Dorothea Wendling's approval. With its mixture of accompanied and simple recitative and its rapid shifts of tempo and mood, it represents a massive scaling-up of the 1778 model to six times its length. When

## Example 3.2

a

**R. 1**

*I Ilia*

Continuo

$\frac{7}{5}$  — 6

**Andantino**

*strings*

*p*

b

**D**

*Didone*

**Andantino**

*p*



Mozart came to negotiate the shift from recitative to aria, he chose similar techniques: a short three- or four-bar introduction leading straight into a presentation of the soloist with the first theme. An opening on the dominant of the mediant (V of G minor within the domain of E $\flat$ ), and shifts to V $\frac{6}{5}$  of the tonic with a change of dynamic, are clearly mirrored in the deceptive cadence and diminished seventh of the *Idomeneo* introduction. The two passages are compared in Ex. 3.3.

### The woodwind quartet

From the context of Mozart's comments to his father on 8 November 1780, it is clear that although most of the first act was already composed in one form or another, one of the most interesting numbers from the point of view of the performers was still in gestation. While asking Varesco to rewrite the text of Ilia's Act II aria to eliminate the aside (see chapter 2, p. 28, above), he adds that 'we have agreed to introduce here an aria andantino with obbligatos for four wind-instruments, that is flute, oboe, horn, and bassoon'. The aria was, of course, again written for Dorothea Wendling, and we can be certain of the players' names of three of the four solo instruments: Johann Baptist Wendling (flute), Friedrich Ramm (oboe), and Georg Wenzel Ritter (bassoon). The horn player could have been any one of Georg Eck, or the two Lang brothers, Franz Joseph or Martin Alexander.<sup>23</sup>

This was not a new team. Not only had they been playing together in Munich since 1778, but Wendling and Ramm had been stars of the Mannheim orchestra. Ramm was the inspiration behind Mozart's Oboe Quartet K. 370, and had been an enthusiastic proponent of the Oboe Concerto K. 314, which he had performed five times between early November 1777 and February 1778. Mozart

## Example 3.3

a R. I

Adagio

sbra-na-te si      sbra-na-te si quest' in-fe-li-ce

strings

p

No. 1

Andante con moto

co-re!

Pa - dre, ger-

strings + bassoons

p      p

- ma - ni, ad - di - o voi fa - ste, io vi per-[dei]

fp

b K.295a

14 Andantino

Didone

strings con sordini

Fl.

p

f

+ horns, bassoons

p

Ah, non la - sciar - mi, no\_\_.

may also have started a concerto in F for him (K. 416f), of which only a fragment remains. Much more significantly, Mozart had encountered all three players in Paris in the spring of 1778.

Jean-Joseph Cambini and the *Symphonie concertante* were all the rage when Mozart was in Paris. Mozart announced his determination to contribute to the genre in a letter to his father (5 April 1778), and not only named the three players he would meet again in Munich, Wendling, Cannabich, and Ritter, but claimed that probably the finest player in Europe, the travelling virtuoso Giovanni Punto, would take the horn part. The subsequent intrigue resulted in the four players indeed performing together, but in a work by Cambini.<sup>24</sup> The confusions and contradictions in Mozart's correspondence with Leopold (1 May 1778) may hide nothing more than a straightforward struggle that Mozart lost. The important links between the *symphonie concertante* that Mozart wrote for these players and 'Se il padre perdei' are stressed by Robert Levin, who believes that the work survives in part as the Sinfonia concertante in E♭ K. 297b: an important part of Levin's evidence is a comparison between the woodwind writing in K. 297b and 'Se il padre perdei'.<sup>25</sup>

### Vincenzo dal Prato

In Mozart's letter to his father from Paris where he revises his view of Raaff's singing, he admits that he had not seen him act either in *Günther von Schwarzburg* or, of course, at the 'Concert spirituel'. Subsequent events might have made him wish that he had. His first impression of Raaff in Munich was his inability to act: 'Raaff is like a statue' (8 November 1780). His response to this problem was simply an exercise in damage limitation. On 19 December 1780, he wrote to his father asking Varesco to shorten both the dialogue in which Raaff figured with dal Prato in Act I and with Panzacchi in Act II: 'They would certainly bore the audience, particularly as in the first scene both the actors are bad, and in the second, one of them is.' Mozart adopted exactly the opposite procedure when he felt that the acting skills of the singer were being underused; a fortnight earlier, he had requested that Arbace's recitative in Act III should be extended, mostly because the effect that Panzacchi was likely to make on the stage would be favourable.

The scene in Act I between Idomeneo and Idamante described by Mozart in the same letter was played by the oldest and youngest

actors on the stage. The picture Mozart painted of dal Prato could not have been bleaker: he was no better actor than Raaff, and he was a lamentable singer.<sup>26</sup> Although Mozart did indeed cut the Idomeneo–Idamante recitative in the first act, much of what appears in the correspondence between Mozart and his father may have been motivated by other considerations. In the letter of 8 November, his first from Munich, Mozart claims that dal Prato's breath gives out in the middle of the aria, and he further alleges that he has no stage experience. But these comments are prefaced by an admission that Mozart had not met dal Prato, and that he is depending on reports from third parties. On the strength of those reports, he suggests that dal Prato is worse than Francesco Ceccarelli, the Salzburg castrato, who was a close friend of the Mozarts.<sup>27</sup> When Mozart writes to his father on 13 November 1780, he lists the names of all those who congratulate Leopold on his name day; he includes dal Prato at the end – but only because he happens to be in the room. Judging from Mozart's subsequent comments, the only reason that he was likely to be in a room with Mozart was because the latter was functioning as his *répétiteur*: Mozart reported on 15 November that he would have to teach the castrato the whole opera, and a week later (22 November) complains that he has to teach him his whole part 'as if he were a child. He has not a farthing's worth of method.' Mozart's report on dal Prato's performance in a concert on 21 November is blunt: he sang disgracefully and is rotten to the core.

On the strength of Mozart's comments, dal Prato is occasionally described as a novice. But he had made his debut in Fano in 1772 at the age of 16 and had sung at Stuttgart for the future Tsar Paul I a year before Mozart met him.<sup>28</sup> Dal Prato had shared the stage with Valesi at the Teatro San Benedetto in Venice in 1773; the two singers participated in a production of Giacomo Insanguine's *La Merope*.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, Raaff himself, in a letter to Padre Martini less than a year later, described dal Prato as 'a learned youth, diligent, with the most honest character and the best morals'.<sup>30</sup> This evidence certainly conflicts with Mozart's comments. There is a possibility that, however bad dal Prato may have been (and he may well not have been in the same league as the rest of the cast), Mozart's view of him may have been coloured by his anxiety to promote his friend Ceccarelli; in the letter of 15 November, he even suggests that Ceccarelli might take over dal Prato's position when the latter's contract expired at the end of the year.

**Vienna 1781–2**

Mozart's first year in Vienna was crowned with the success of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* on 7 July 1782, and he had been occupied with this work since the very end of July 1781. However, it was not until the première of *Die Entführung* that he finally gave up the hopes that he had been nurturing since his arrival of putting on a production of *Idomeneo* in Vienna. His thoughts about such a course of action were largely determined by the singers available at the Burgtheater. As early as 24 March 1781, Mozart had written to his father about his desire to discuss with the emperor plans to mount a production in Vienna, and by 12 September he was in a position to tell Leopold that Antonia Bernasconi, Ludwig Fischer, and Josef-Valentin Adamberger would be happy to sing in it. Mozart's hopes of putting on a production of *Idomeneo* in German were raised by the translation of Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride* performed at the Burgtheater on 23 October 1781; the abilities of the translator, Johann Baptist von Alxinger, impressed him. In fact, not only was *Iphigenie auf Tauris* scheduled for the autumn, but also a performance in Italian of Gluck's *Alceste*. Mozart reports in the letter of 12 September that although one Gluck work might have opened up a gap for *Idomeneo*, two effectively closed the door in his face. Apart from Mozart's own testimony that he intended Fischer to take the role of Idomeneo, and that Bernasconi and Adamberger were also to be included, any thoughts on a cast-list must be conjectural. Adamberger may well have been intended for Idamante, and Bernasconi for Ilia. Aloysia Lange is another possibility for the latter role, while Caterina Cavalieri would have been more than eligible as Elettra.<sup>31</sup>

Mozart's subsequent endeavours with *Idomeneo* took a slightly different course. At the suggestion of Countess Thun and Adamberger, he began to think of selecting the best numbers for inclusion in concerts (see chapter 2, p. 44, above).<sup>32</sup> In January 1782, he was contemplating works for his forthcoming concert in Lent. The following year, he wrote to his father on 29 March with the programme for his concert that had taken place six days before, including 'Se il padre perdei' performed by Aloysia Lange. Mozart's enthusiasm for a production of *Idomeneo* in what was an increasingly hostile environment for *opera seria* had already waned, however, and in the same letter he told Leopold that he was sending the score of *Idomeneo* back to him in Salzburg.

### Vienna 1786

The final chapter in the story of the relationship between Mozart's performers and *Idomeneo* concerns the production at the Auersperg Palace on 13 March 1786. The Auerspergs' private theatre had been used by a professional company between 1776 and 1781, and in 1786 was one of only four private theatres in Vienna.<sup>33</sup> The repertory at the Auersperg theatre included German and French comedies and opera, among them Pergolesi's *La serva padrona* and Grétry's *L'Ami de la maison*. There is no doubt about the casting of major roles (see Table 3.1, p. 49 above). This cast is radically different to those of the Munich or the hypothetical 1781 Vienna productions: the major protagonists were mainly aristocrats and very young. Aristocratic and amateur does not necessarily mean inexperienced, however. Maria Anna Hortensia, Gräfin Hatzfeld, for example, had sung at the Auersperg Palace in Righini's *Armida* in 1782, and in *Alceste* under Gluck's personal direction only a few weeks before *Idomeneo*. A review of the performance in the short-lived periodical *Pfeffer und Salz*, which was in general critical of the work, observed that it succeeded through the merits of Gräfin Hatzfeld's singing – not vice-versa – and suggested her as a rival to Nancy Storace.<sup>34</sup>

The main changes involved recasting the role of Idamante for tenor (Baron Pulini). This entailed rewriting the ensembles and composing the two new numbers entered into Mozart's catalogue three days before the performance: the duet No. 20b and a scena con rondò No. 10b. The latter involved an elaborate accompanied recitative and a substantial instrumental obbligato. Mozart's compositional appetite was now whetted not by the Mannheim woodwind but by his violinist friend Graf August von Hatzfeld, probably Maria Anna's brother-in-law.<sup>35</sup> His skill had been noted by Graf Zinzendorf a year earlier at a performance at the residence of the Gräfin von Thun.<sup>36</sup> The violin writing in Mozart's rondò requires an accomplished soloist in a movement that probes cantabile playing within an andante tempo and bravura passagework in the allegro moderato.

The history of the first performance of *Idomeneo* is in the first instance the history of fitting music to performers, players, and singers who were acquaintances if not firm friends. Its subsequent history is as much the history of fitting players and singers to music. Despite obvious setbacks and failures, especially in Vienna, these experiences stood Mozart in good stead for his work on *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* and the ultimate triumph of the da Ponte operas and *Die Zauberflöte*.