

An autograph manuscript of an unfinished aria by Mozart

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Aria “In te spero, o sposo amato” (fragment), K. 440. Vienna, ca. 1782. 9 1/2 inches x 12 1/4 inches (241 x 311 mm), 4 pages.

From his earliest years as a child prodigy touring the courts of Europe to his death and burial at the age of 35, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was a legendary figure. He was one of the most striking examples of artistic genius in human history. The composer’s extraordinary musical gifts, expertly cultivated by his musician father, achieved an unparalleled fullness of expression in works that combine depth and fluidity with a seemingly effortless grace.

Printed scores, however faithful to the original, are stripped of the personality of the composer and immediacy with the moment of creation that characterize an autograph manuscript. To reach the wellsprings of Mozart’s genius one must turn to his musical manuscripts. Their assured, almost calligraphic appearance, reflecting the fact that the music was apparently composed mentally before Mozart put pen to paper, enables the reader to follow the score with ease. The manuscript is made of the oblong-format paper (*querformat*) characteristic of Mozart and other composers of the period. The paper was mechanically ruled with twelve staves, as is typical of manuscripts from Mozart’s Vienna years.

This incomplete aria was probably written in April or May of 1782. The text is from the opera *Demofonte* by Metastasio (Act I, Scene 2), and Mozart wrote it before his August 4 wedding that same year to Constanze Weber. (Although not considered as talented as her sister Aloysia, Constanze was an accomplished singer.) In 1799, after Mozart’s death, she offered this attractive manuscript to Breitkopf & Härtel for publication.

This manuscript from the Library of Congress is bound in blue paper. In 1857 it was presented by Mozart’s son Karl to the Italian singer Natalie Frassini Eschborn in Milan, according to the inscription on page two. It was acquired by the Library of Congress during World War II.

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