

# GEORG NISSEN AND THE MISSING NOTEBOOKS

## Part II - *Così fan tutte* and the Subterfuge Plot (including a piano crate as accomplice)

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(This article appears in part from my 2009 book, *Echoes of a Distant Crime: Resolving the Murder Cold Case Files.*)



**Georg Nissen, left, and stepson, Wolfgang Xaver Mozart**

In Part I of my article, “Georg Nissen and the Missing Notebooks,” I uncover Nissen's scheme to expose Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's murder. He, with the cooperation of his step-son, Wolfgang, planned to make public an announcement which would, as Nissen wrote from Salzburg, “soon bring all justice here; it is well known in the Vienna surroundings.”

But Nissen's grand scheme, with witnesses laid by, such as the King of Denmark, Frederick VI (his sovereign ruler), came to naught. The blame falls squarely on his wife, Constanze [Mozart], who must have intercepted his mail, and discovered his

master plan. He was awaiting an urgently important letter from stepson Wolfgang, which would begin to set the wheels in motion for an announcement that would have shaken all of Europe to the core, and would have changed the course of music history as we know it, forever.

By mid-March 1826, Nissen was bedridden and dying. He passed away of heart disease on 26 March, without receiving a reply to his “solemn testament,” sent on 5 March to his stepson. That Wolfgang, who was extremely close to Nissen, who loved him as his own father, failed to bring to fruition Nissen’s most ardent request, is another mystery in the Mozart chronicles. But – it might be easily solved.

As Nissen was bedridden, in the last few weeks of March, Constanze opened all mail sent to their apartment on the first floor, Alter Markt 9, in the Tomaselli Cafe, Salzburg. She would have been horrified to intercept her son’s reply to his father-in-law, as she discovered Nissen and Wolfgang’s secret plot to expose Mozart’s death, behind her back – something that she had spent decades covering up.

Constanze obstinately refused to reveal any specific details, throughout her long life, about the death of her first husband. She willfully refused to explain why she never put a gravestone on Mozart’s “grave” in St. Marx, even in the face of unbridled public ire over what was seen as the actions of a callous, uncaring widow.

Constanze’s sister, Sophie Haibl, was present also, on the night Mozart died; her version to Vincent and Mary Novello in 1829, entails deliberate falsehoods.



**Sophie Haibl, as a young woman**

When the English couple, Vincent and Mary, visited Constanze in Salzburg in 1829, bringing a gift of 80 English pounds to the elderly Nannerl Mozart (from London aficionados), Sophie related this yarn to them, which Mary Novello recorded in her travel diary:

Madame Haibl accordingly obtained permission from her mother to remain all night with her Sister and Brother-in-law [Mozart]. Towards evening they sent for the Medical person who attended Mozart, but he was at the Theatre and, on receiving the message, merely said that he would come ‘as soon as the opera was over’.

Upon his arrival he ordered Madame Haibl to bathe the temples and forehead of Mozart with vinegar and cold water. She expressed her fears that the sudden cold might be injurious to the sufferer, whose arms and limbs were much inflamed and swollen.

But the Doctor persisted in his orders and Madam Haibl accordingly applied a damp towel to his forehead. Mozart immediately gave a slight shudder and in a very short time afterwards he expired in her arms. At this moment the only persons in the Room were Madame Mozart, the Medical Attendant and herself.<sup>1</sup>

Let us consider Sophie’s comment. For one, why did she think it was necessary to recount how many persons were in Mozart’s room when he died -- and secondly – Constanze was also in the room – yet Mozart died *in her sister’s arms*. Something peculiar is afoot here. According to Sophie, Mozart’s copyist, Franz Süssmayr, was also in the sickroom; in her letter to Nissen in 1825, she wrote, “As I came to my inconsolable sister, Süssmayr was by Mozart’s bed.”<sup>2</sup>

Nissen was compiling his massive *Biographie W. A. Mozarts*, and sought out reminiscences from people who had first-hand knowledge of the composer. Sophie wrote details in her letter of 7 April 1825, from Đakovo, Slavonia, to Nissen, relating her memories of that spine-chilling night. She recounted her yarn to the Novellos, but embellished it with more details, in her reply to Nissen. Fact and fiction seem to be woven together.

In Sophie’s letter, reading the original in German, rather than the version in English, which appears in Deutsch’s *Mozart: A Documentary Biography*, Sophie describes Mozart’s last night as *schauervolle* – “horrifying”. Her letter is reproduced in Nissen’s *Biographie W. A. Mozarts*. Her sentence alludes to the following morning after Mozart’s death, when throngs of mourners gathered in front of the apartment at 970 Rauhensteingasse:

If [Constanze's] pain would still be increased, it happened through this, that the day that followed that horrifying night brought people to her in droves and they cried and screamed loudly for him.<sup>3</sup>

Then Sophie makes an explosive comment; something that clung to her memory all her life, like a dark phantom: "I have in my life never seen Mozart irascible, and much less, angry." She uses the word *aufbrausend* in her letter to Nissen:

Ich habe in meinem Leben Mozart nie aufbrausend und viel weniger zornig gewesen.<sup>4</sup>

The German word for *irascible* that she choose, *aufbrausend*, means *boiling, seething, rising to a roar, flying into a rage*.

This runs incongruous with her description to the Novellos of the events of Mozart's last night, where she describes her brother-in-law's death as a peaceful occurrence.

Another anomaly is, that Sophie claimed that Mozart shuddered and fell unconscious. Yet, Nissen, probing his eyewitness, Constanze, writes in his biography, that, "Mozart remained completely conscious during his illness up until the end."<sup>5</sup>

More likely, Constanze's recollection is the truer version. If the powerful group closed in on the composer at one a.m. on 5 December, to dispatch him, it makes more sense that Mozart was awake and conscious right before the end; shouting out in terror and rage, as he was killed in front of his wife, sister-in-law and copyist.

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As I posit in Part I of the "Missing Notebooks," it was most likely a powerful group who was responsible for Mozart's murder. If it were a single person, they would not have frightened Constanze or Sophie into remaining mute all their lives.

If, however, the perpetrators were a powerful group, they could certainly threaten and intimidate Constanze and Sophie – eye witnesses – into remaining mum about their insidious activities on the night of 4 December, 1791 – Mozart's last night. They could have used Constanze's sons, Karl and Wolfgang, as leverage.

Constanze, most definitely, had knowledge of, and was present, on the night Mozart was killed. She knew, beyond doubt, of the alarming consequences should Mozart's murder, by a powerful group, come to public attention. She, most definitely, was involved in the massive cover-up of the crime; not of her own volition, but possibly to her advantage, in accruing benefits from the group, such as financial aid, and even possibly, discovering where Mozart was buried.

Constanze, in all probability, wrote to her son, Wolfgang, with admonishments of the severe danger that would befall him -- and possibly, herself and her eldest son, Karl -- should he follow through with his stepfather's most solemn request. And so, the plan came to nothing, and all was quiet; no major announcement came forth, and the truth was concealed.

But Nissen's plan was not defunct. It would resurface in a most uncanny way a few decades later, aided and abetted by Nissen's other stepson -- Karl Mozart.

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And so Nissen passed away, and his most urgent desire to see Mozart's murder brought to light, faded away. Constanze Mozart died in 1842, leaving her two sons. When the younger Wolfgang departed this earth in 1844 in Karlsbad without revealing Nissen's secret, only Karl Mozart remained, living in Mailand, Italy.



**Karl Mozart, in his elderly years**

The composition notebooks, mentioned in Nissen's letter, passed into Karl's possession after brother Wolfgang's death, from stomach cancer. (His grandfather, Leopold Mozart, died of the same disease.) The last surviving member of the Mozart family held the *Quartelbüchern* -- but he did not intend to keep them.

We can guess that Karl would be reluctant to harbor Nissen's burdensome secret, the *essential excerpts*, written and witnessed, in two small composition notebooks Nissen had mentioned in his will: "By the way, I have the essential excerpt, and signed for certain by witnesses, among my belongings here in two composition books which I have always recommended to your mother, which I believe also are deposited somewhere, and after my death, they will be sent to your mother, and after both our deaths, made available to you and your brother."

We can only wonder what Karl must have thought, when he received the two small composition books, sent to him in a parcel of items from Wolfgang's estate, at his brother's death in Karlsbad, on 29 July 1844.

He must have searched through the items lovingly, remembering his beloved brother, and perhaps, lost himself in reveries of the seven years spent with his father, Mozart. Coming upon two *Quartbücheln* – composition books, tied together with string, he may have discovered a note inside.

And what was written in that note, was a bombshell.

Karl took his time, mulling over the terrible secret preserved in the composition books. They contained the *essential excerpt*, for which Nissen had spent years laying witnesses aside; the excerpts were, in all probability, written testimonials of persons who knew the inside story about Mozart's murder. We can only imagine the look on Karl's face, as he realized the substantial burden that had been passed on to him, pondering what his responsibilities should be. He may have questioned himself: would it really be honoring his father, to expose such a starkly terrible crime?

For fourteen more years, Karl Mozart made not a move, in carrying out Nissen's public announcement. Nissen had been a devoted stepfather to Karl; something must have held him back from exposing his stepfather's revelation of Wolfgang Mozart's murder, to the public.

Perhaps, in that parcel from his brother's estate, in a note concerning Wolfgang's private instructions to his brother, a cautionary warning of highest danger, may have prevented him from proceeding. This, again, leads back to the threat of a powerful group, that may, or may not, still have existed so many years after Mozart's death.

But the very menace, the risk, of exposing such a hair-raising endeavor, must have put the brakes on the undertaking, as much as Karl, who was seven years old when his father died, must have yearned to do.

Karl pondered, thus, for fourteen years, until the threads of life dimmed for him, and he came, face to face, with his own mortality, at the age of seventy-four, living in the breath-takingly beautiful Italian village of Caversaccio, bordered by Lake Como and Lake Lugano.

In all those years, it is remarkable that the talented piano player, Karl Mozart, who revered his father, never brought the contents of Nissen's composition books to light. He wanted to become a musician, but was apprehensive about being compared to his father; Constanze warned her sons of the consequences of being a "mediocre" musician.

As Karl's days on earth dwindled, he prepared his estate, most of which was bequeathed to his good friend, Alois Taux, curator of the Mozarteum, in Salzburg. Karl gifted Mozart's fortepiano to the repository. Surely, Taux would be most touched by Karl's estate bequests.

Except for the bombshell, lying silently in wait, after so many years; hidden deep in the fortepiano crate that was delivered, one day, to the Mozarteum.

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Karl would leave the final decision about what to do with the dangerous *Quartbücheln*—as Nissen referred to the composition notebooks—to his dear friend and confidant, Alois Taux.<sup>6</sup> Karl bequeathed several of his father's compositions, instruments, and his father's fortepiano to Taux, whom he trusted implicitly. Taux would ensure that Mozart's beloved fortepiano, upon which he composed *Don Giovanni*, *Così fan tutte*, and the *Magic Flute*, among other magnificent works, would always be preserved, with the utmost care.



**Alois Taux, Director of the Mozarteum, as a young man. He was 22 years old when he was chosen for the prestigious position**

Karl Mozart realized that, once he was deceased, there would be no further direct line of family members, who could expose the truth.

Karl's testament reads:

I will to the Mozarteum in Salzburg, as my universal heir, the grand piano which is found in my apartment in Mailand, as well as the table-klavier and the instrument which is called the accordion, both of which are found in my house in Caversaccio; to the same institution, I bequeath all portraits which portray members of my family.<sup>7</sup>

A year before Karl died, he wrote to Taux: the fortepiano must have been sent off to Salzburg around this time.

Mailand, 31 December 1857 [my bolding]

To close, now I bother you with the request to make a search in the archives of the Mozarteum (as I have reason to believe) in the parcel of *musicalien* which by the occasion of the sending of the pianoforte in the crate, a thick, dark-covered piece of cardboard-bound book containing the clavier excerpt from *Cosifantutte* [sic] got attached somehow by mistake—and then, continuing—**one or perhaps two thin notebooks tied together in a light gray box, in which you should find the opera *Figaro*; in which case I would request of you to inform me (since these fragments would be of absolutely no advantage to the Mozarteum, whereas to me, are a perceptible lack and leave my collection incomplete), to inform me . . .**<sup>8</sup>





**Mozart's fortepiano, built by Johann Andreas Stein (Augsburg). It weighs 187 pounds. Today it resides in the Mozart *Geburtshaus*, Salzburg. The crate it was packed in must have been fairly large; it is 7 feet, 4 inches long.**

Wikipedia.org

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Photo: Gérard Janot, 28 May 2010

Karl also bequeathed a piece of jewelry to Taux; a pin; the letter “G” set in diamonds. This could only have come from one source: his mother, Constanze. The “G” in Freemasonry stands for ‘Geometry’. It must have belonged to Mozart. When Karl came of age, his mother may have sent the pin to him; he was the oldest son, and spent seven years living with Mozart in Vienna.



**The Freemason “G” in the square and compass, major Freemason symbols.  
Karl's brooch was a simple “G” set in diamonds**

Wikimedia Commons.org

Karl's will and testament entry reads:

“I leave to my friend Alois Tanz [sic], Master of the Chapel at the Cathedral and Mozarteum in Salzburg, the chest pin consisting simply of a G in diamonds.”<sup>9</sup> This piece of jewelry is not listed among Mozart’s estate items, assessed on 7 December 1791.<sup>10</sup> Constanze must have concealed it; the pin was probably one of Mozart’s prized possessions. Karl lists it in his will as among his “most precious items” – beyond a doubt, he must have cherished this link to his father.

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Sometime before his death, Karl conceived a plan. We don’t know if he wrote to Taux explaining everything. But the fact that Karl, spoke in a guarded tone, just a year before he died, in his letter to Taux, lays bare the facts that abject danger was pervasive in this undertaking, and all caution should be heeded.

This, again, leads back to my hypothesis of the powerful group; unrelenting guardians of their secrets, including the murder of Mozart – and why it was not wise to cross them.

While leafing through Deutsch and Bauer’s *Mozart: Briefe und Aufzeichnungen*, a compilation of Mozart family letters, at the St. John’s College library in Annapolis, Maryland, I stumbled upon Karl Mozart’s last letter to Alois Taux, and felt stunned at the secret reference to the *Quartbücheln*.

What a wonderfully intriguing idea, to imagine Karl Mozart, carefully and craftily concealing those fascinating composition notebooks “tied together in a light gray box” along with Mozart’s opera score, *The Marriage of Figaro*, and tucking them deeply inside the large piano crate. And to ponder Karl’s instructions to inform him, should Taux find them.

The act of disguising the composition books in a “light gray box,” along with the opera score, bespeaks of the highly necessary act of transporting the *Quartbücheln* with the *essential excerpts* in a way that would not draw any attention to them. Utilizing the massive piano crate, which would travel from Caversaccio to Salzburg – 363 miles, was the perfect camouflage.

Today, it takes almost six and a half hours to drive that distance; at any time, should interceptors be watching Karl’s home, they would have noticed the huge fortepiano crate being carried out, and placed on trains or wagons, to arrive at the Salzburg destination. It would have been so easy to capture and seize the crate,

where all items inside would be examined. The two composition books would have been confiscated, and most likely, destroyed.

We may never would have seen Mozart's fortepiano again. But the crate and contents arrived safely at the Mozarteum. We wonder; was the powerful group no longer...in power?

In 4 May 1826, just three weeks before Nissen died, Constanze wrote in apparent agitation a letter, (discovered in 1951), concerning business that "you, my dear Karl will have seen in green books, which to my dear Wowi [Wolfgang] are highly important, and I'm writing on account of this; today again I'm writing to him and don't hesitate to tell him that he should just drop everything in order to hurry here, and most certainly, it will be to his advantage. . . ." <sup>11</sup>

Apparently Constanze anticipated Nissen's death, and likely considered it wise if her youngest son was present at the death of his step-father.

Constanze then diverged from her obscure ramble, advising Karl that his brother would like to secure a position as *Kapellmeister* in Salzburg, because he wanted to get away from Lemberg, Ukraine. Was the green book one of the *Quartbücheln* Nissen mentioned in his will?

Was she alluding to a *green notebook*, which contained not only business matters, but also, possibly, the *essential excerpt* that Nissen specified? Unlikely. Karl Mozart described the notebooks as "thin, tied together," rather than as a green book.

Constanze referred, as well, to a green book in her diary, writing on 7 August 1827: "On 6 August have news from Schuller and Company, that they have received my money from Copenhagen through Herr Jenisch from Hamburg, which letter I will place as confirmation to the other in the green book."

Nearly a week later, she wrote again: "Today on 13 August I received news again from Schuller and Company that they purchased at 5 percent . . . bonds worth 500 f and have secured them for me. The number of the bond is 9712. I have entered everything together with the letter in the green book, see page 31." <sup>12</sup>

Evidently, Nissen and Constanze kept one or more business notebooks, one of which was the subject of an article in the 2002 *Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für Salzburger Landeskunde* by former Mozarteum director Rudolf Angermüller, and which might be the green book Constanze described to Karl. <sup>13</sup>

In 1951, Bernhard Paumgartner donated to the Mozarteum a 3.5" x 4.5" notebook, bound in green cardboard, that contains poems by Nissen and others; recipes for Constanze and homeopathic remedies for various ailments.

Speculating whether this green notebook might be the one in which Nissen had written about Mozart's death, I emailed the Mozarteum in December 2007, to ask whether a page or pages might have been torn from the notebook, and were missing. Geneviève Geffray, director of the Mozarteum library, responded that she would inspect the notebook, which was locked in a safe at the repository.

On 10 December 2007, she emailed: "There are no pages missing nor torn out, but a lot of blank pages. Only the written and readable ones have been transcribed by Angermüller. Some pages bear a few lines with pencil, but they are not readable."

Logic dictates that this green notebook was unlikely the one containing block-busting information for which Nissen wished to "lay witnesses by." Had Nissen written something that would "bring everything to complete justice" in Mozart's case, he would have done so in ink, rather than entering it carelessly in pencil.

Had Alois Taux discovered, in the items contained in the piano crate, a message that disturbed him—assuming he located the notebooks, as directed by Karl—he may have removed the pages, carefully, so as to leave no evidence that they were missing. But then, there would be no purpose to secrete the notebooks, and the Mozarteum would still have them – minus a few pages. It is thus more likely, that Taux either hid the composition notebooks, or destroyed them.

Without a doubt, Karl held Nissen's two composition notebooks in his possession. The notebooks contained crucial evidence as to what transpired at 970 Rauhensteingasse – Mozart's last apartment – on the evening of 4 December, 1791.

But he, as well, never went through with the public announcement that his stepfather had requested originally of his brother. In his last letter to Taux, clearly, Karl was alerting his friend that he had sent him the two precious *Quartelbüchern*, hidden in the box containing Mozart's score of *Don Giovanni*, cleverly tucked away in the fortepiano crate.

Karl realized that the notebooks contained potent testimony, yet he preserved them beyond his death. He entrusted Taux to make the best choice as to what should be done with such earth-shattering evidence. Karl could not bring himself to destroy them.

Taux, we can surmise, kept the notebooks privately, assessing that they were best left undisturbed for the time being. Or, perhaps he built a small fire in the backyard of the Mozarteum, and tossed the two trouble-making composition books into the blaze.

Karl Mozart died in Caversaccio, Italy, the next year, in 1858; Taux passed away on 17 April, 1861. To this day the *Quartbücheln* are still missing.<sup>14</sup> Alois Taux might have destroyed them. But equally likely—or perhaps more likely—Taux could have hidden them in the Mozarteum, or among family estate papers, where they might one day be found. It is significant, though, that even in 1858, by the time the dangers of the Viennese Freemasons had likely dissipated, he thought it wiser to conceal their contents from the public.

For, had all the facts come to light, they might have revealed to the world the shocking murder of Mozart, and the unbelievable cover-up of the tragic affair, possibly involving prominent Freemasons, among whom were aristocrats, whose family members still held high positions in the Viennese government.

We can hope, though, that Alois Taux hid the notebooks, rather than destroyed them -- surely, as a music historian, he recognized their immeasurable value -- and we hope they might still surface one day. When the *Quartbücheln* are found, dusty and yellowed by time, and carefully opened to Nissen's revealing excerpt, we will hear, undeniably, the echoes of a distant crime.

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<sup>1</sup> *A Mozart Pilgrimage: The Travel Diaries of Vincent & Mary Novello in the Year 1829*, Edited by Nerina Medici & Rosemary Hughes, London: Eulenburg Books, 1975, 215

<sup>2</sup> Nissen, Georg Nikolaus, *Biographie W. A. Mozarts*, Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1991 (Originally published in 1829 by Leipzig publishers Breitkopf & Härtel), 574.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 574.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 574-575.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 564.

<sup>6</sup> Taux was close to Constanze and Sophie Haibl in Salzburg. Karl's dear friend was buried in St. Sebastian's cemetery, where Constanze's sisters, Aloysia Lange and Sophie Haibl are interred. In 1895, all of their remains were exhumed and buried in the municipal cemetery. See Peter Clive, *Mozart and His Circle: A Biographical Dictionary*, 152.

<sup>7</sup> Associazione Cafe Mozart Centro Studi Mozartiano [Cafe Mozart Association Study Center], Karl Mozart's will, signed on 29 September 1856, "I Quaderni Ambrosiani" è dedicato a Karl Thomas Mozart, December 1998, Milan, pages 4 and 5: Under I: *Riguardo alla poca argenteria ed oggetti preziosi stabilisco quanto seque* [Regarding the small silverware and precious objects, I establish the following:] and K: *Circa gli altri oggetti di mia proprietà stabilisco quanto seque* [Regarding the other objects of my property I establish the following:] The title page of the article is a dedication, from the Associazione Cafe Mozart Centro Studi Mozartiano:

And to

The community of Valmorea

That without fuss

With discretion

And elegance

He wanted to remember his father

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

<sup>8</sup> Deutsch and Bauer, *Mozart: Briefe und Aufzeichnungen*, Band IV, 1787-1857, Kassel: Bärenreiter-Verlag, 1963, No. 1477, 524.

<sup>9</sup> See endnote 7, p. 4, Nr. 4, under I.

<sup>10</sup> For the complete list of Mozart's *Sperrs=Relation* - the Suspense Order of all of his itemized estate possessions, see O. E. Deutsch, *Mozart: A Documentary Biography*, Translated by Eric Blom, Peter Branscombe and Jeremy Noble,

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Stanford, CT: Stanford University Press, 1966, Appendix II: Documents Pertaining To Mozart's Estate, 583-604.

<sup>11</sup> Angermüller, "Aus dem Notizbuch von Georg Nikolaus Nissen und seiner Frau Constanze Nissen-Mozart," *Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für Salzburger Landeskunde*, 204.

<sup>12</sup> Angermüller, *TageBuch meines Brief Wechsels in Betref der Mozartischen Biographie (1828–1837)*, Germany: Bad Honnef, Karl Heinrich Boch Verlag, 1998. 162.

<sup>13</sup> Angermüller, "Aus dem Notizbuch von Georg Nikolaus Nissen und seiner Frau Constanze Nissen-Mozart," *Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für Salzburger Landeskunde*, Band 142, 2002, 203–19.

<sup>14</sup> Valentin, "Das Testament der Constanze Mozart-Nissen," *Neues MJ*, 1942, 167.