

# Mozart and the Bridi Gardens in Rovereto

In late 1769 Leopold took Mozart on their first trip to Italy. Among the first places in Italy at which they stopped is the area around Verona, including the smaller city of Rovereto, an ancient fortress town in the Vallagarina Valley of the Adige River, at the frontier between the bishopric of Trento and the republic of Venice.

Rovereto was the home of the Bridi family, first mentioned by Mozart in his letter of 10 November 1770, written in Milan: “Dr. Bridi of Rovereto is himself a good performer on the clavier,” probably referring to Antonio Giacomo Bridi (1721-1799).<sup>1</sup>

Antonio Giacomo Bridi’s nephew, Guiseppe Antonio, a talented singer, was born in Rovereto on February 1, 1763 to a family of prosperous silk merchants. At the age of 18 he moved to Vienna to found a bank, which became very successful. Vienna would open doors for him to invaluable connections to the intellectual and artistic realms, thus he frequented the most important salons of the aristocracy and nobility of the time. Between 1781 and 1786 he became acquainted with Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart—the beginning of an important friendship.

There are several connections between Bridi and Mozart. Bridi was possibly present for the famous competition that Joseph II arranged between Mozart and Clementi in Vienna in 1781, and may well be the “very good source” who mentioned that “the emperor was extremely pleased with me.” His *Brevi notizie* notes that the Emperor won a wager with the Grand Duchess Maria Feodorovna, wife of Grand Duke Paul of Russia, that Mozart would excel.<sup>2</sup> In 1786, Mozart wrote a shortened version of “Fuor del mar” from *Idomeneo* which was probably intended for Bridi.<sup>3</sup> And Mozart specifically mentioned Bridi when he wrote to Baron Gottfried Jacquin about the reception of Don Giovanni in Prague: “How I wish that my good friends, particularly you and Bridi, were here for just one evening in order to share my pleasure.”<sup>4</sup> A close friendship developed, and endured beyond Mozart’s death when Bridi provided financial assistance to Mozart’s widow Costanza and their son.

Further evidence of this friendship can be found in the correspondence between Bridi and Costanza’s second husband, Georg Nikolaus Nissen, who consulted with Bridi while writing his biography of Mozart.

## The History of the Bridi Gardens

While living in Vienna, Guiseppe Antonio Bridi acquired a large property in Rovereto called “La Palazzina,” probably from Count Lodron. When Bridi returned to his property in Rovereto, he dedicated the garden to his then-deceased composer-friend.

Bridi died of cholera and was buried in a common grave,

and left the property to the House of Charity. Since they could not afford to maintain it, however, in 1836 they sold it to the Masotti family, whose only daughter, Maria, married Francesco de Probizer. The de Probizer family has lived on the property since then.

## Points of Interest

Built upon an artificial knoll, the Temple of Harmony, designed by Rovereto architect Pietro Andreis, is the garden’s most striking feature, and was to give it the most prominent visual effect. It consists of a circular base in the Doric style, with seven columns symbolizing each of the notes of the musical scale. Each column also represents one of Bridi’s favorite musicians: Haydn, Handel, Palestrina, Sacchini, Gluck, Jommelli, and Mozart.

The fresco is the work of Crafonara, born at the end of the 18th century in Riva del Garda, and depicts Apollo, god of Music, and celebrates Mozart as the greatest composer. The fresco was just recently restored in late summer 2011. The Temple also shows a clear Masonic influence, representing the of harmony of architecture and music, and is surrounded by the flowers and the centuries-old trees of the gardens.

In a secluded wooded area of the park is the cenotaph which Giuseppe Antonio Bridi built in memory of his friend W. A. Mozart, engraved with “Herrscher der Seele durch melodischen Denk Kraft” (this ambiguous phrase might be translated something like “The power to think in

an harmonious way enabled [Mozart] to reign over souls”). This cenotaph is the oldest monument to Mozart, is made of tufa (a type of porous limestone), and provides a link between the more formal gardens and the less cultivated wooded area. Next to the monument, and placed against a wall of tufa stone in a semi-circular grotto is a marble urn intended for ashes.

Guiseppe de Probizer and Elizabeth Badia took over the family property in 2007; Guiseppe is a great-grandson of the first de Probizers to live on the property. They have transformed the original Orangerie into three bed-and-breakfast units, and are re-establishing the original connection between Bridi and his friend Mozart; see [www.relaismozart.it](http://www.relaismozart.it) for pictures of the property, and to make a reservation. MSA members will be especially welcome.

—Richard Benedum



1. Bauer-Deutsch 218: Emily Anderson, ed. and trans., *The Letters of Mozart and His Family*, 3 vols. (3rd ed., revised by Stanley Sadie and Fiona Smart, London, 1985), 170. “Dr. Bridi” is also mentioned in letters of 5 January, 2 February, and 18 August of 1771, Bauer-Deutsch 227, 230, and 241.

2. Letter of 16 January 1782; *ibid.*, 793.

3. Cliff Eisen and Simon P. Keefe, *The Cambridge Mozart Encyclopedia* (Cambridge, 2006), 228.

4. Letter of 4 November 1787: Anderson, *op. cit.*, 913.