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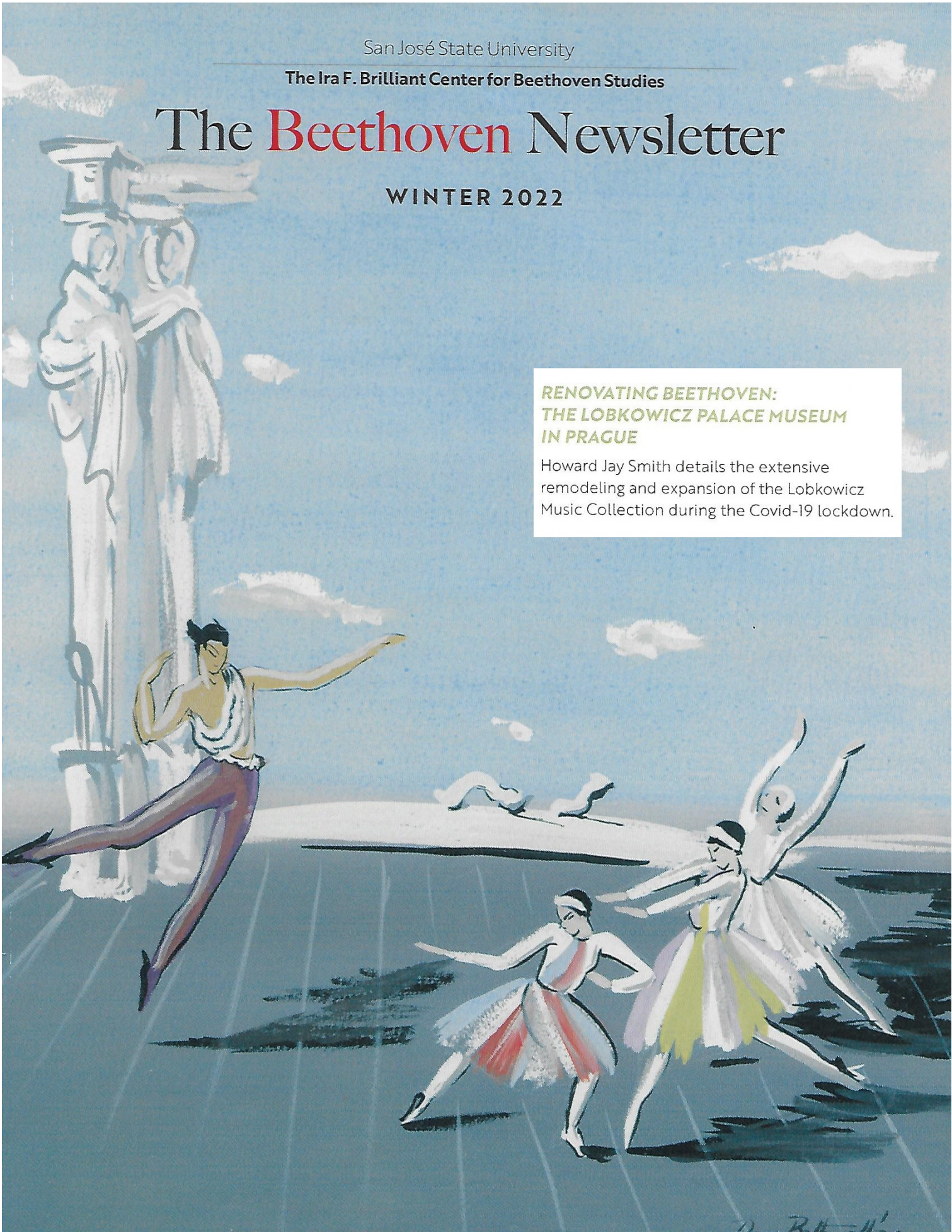
The Ira F. Brilliant Center for Beethoven Studies

The Beethoven Newsletter

WINTER 2022

**RENOVATING BEETHOVEN:
THE LOBKOWICZ PALACE MUSEUM
IN PRAGUE**

Howard Jay Smith details the extensive remodeling and expansion of the Lobkowitz Music Collection during the Covid-19 lockdown.



IN THIS ISSUE

The Beethoven Newsletter // Winter 2022

4 **RENOVATING BEETHOVEN: THE LOBKOWICZ PALACE MUSEUM IN PRAGUE**

Howard Jay Smith details the extensive remodeling and expansion of the Lobkowitz Music Collection during the Covid-19 lockdown.

8 **"THE BONN MASTER-BAKER GOTTFRIED FISCHER'S REMINISCENCES OF BEETHOVEN'S YOUTH"**

An extract from Susan Cooper's new translation of this important historic document from Beethoven's time in Bonn.

12 **BEETHOVEN AUCTION AND ANTIQUARIAN MARKET REPORT, MARCH TO AUGUST 2021**

Director emeritus William Meredith shares details of the latest Beethoven sales, including the fascinating provenance of the drawing and watercolor of Franz Lachner playing the piano with Beethoven by Moritz Ludwig von Schwind.

17 **BEETHOVEN BOOKS AND SCORES 2019-- 2021**

Many of the new publications that appeared during Beethoven's 250th anniversary year are surveyed by Center curator, Patricia Stroh.

30 **"WITH SINCEREST SINCERITY YOURS": A SPECIAL RECENT ACQUISITION FOR THE BEETHOVEN CENTER**

Patricia Stroh describes an exciting new addition to the Center's collections: a letter from Beethoven to his publisher Sigmund Anton Steiner.

32 **CD REVIEW**

Charles Timbrell reviews new recordings of four much-loved late-Beethoven piano sonatas by Nicolai Lugansky and Sunwook Kim.

RENOVATING BEETHOVEN: The Lobkowitz Palace Museum in Prague

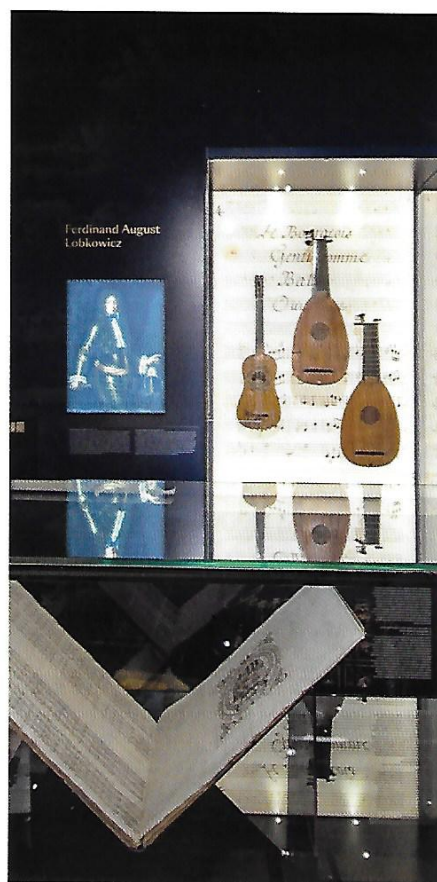
By Howard Jay Smith

Several years ago, in Volume 33 of the *Beethoven Journal*, I reported on “Meeting Beethoven in Prague: the Lobkowitz Palace Museum Collection,” which contains many hand-annotated original scores and documents by Beethoven, making it one of the most significant archives of the composer’s papers.¹

During the global Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns, William Lobkowitz, the current head of the family, and his museum staff used the opportunity created by the closure of their facility to undertake a complete renovation and expansion of their Music Room Collections. Their efforts were designed to both upgrade and double the size of their exhibit space while concurrently making their materials even more accessible to the public and scholars.

The Lobkowitz Music Collection, comprising about 5,000 items, was originally assembled over three centuries by principal members of the Lobkowitz family who were not only music patrons, but also enthusiastic collectors, performers, and composers. The family’s personal tastes and affinities are reflected in the collection, which, in addition to its Beethoven scores, include eighteenth-century lute tablatures, oratorios and operas in manuscript and early prints, and scores and performing parts for symphonies and quartets—some with hand-written annotations—by Mozart, Haydn, and Gluck.

In my earlier article I had noted that when the young Beethoven left Bonn for Vienna in 1792, among the more valuable possessions he carried with him were letters of introduction from Count Waldstein to his friends, the music-loving aristocracy of Vienna. One of the most important connections Beethoven made was the one with Josef František Maxmilián, the seventh Prince Lobkowitz (1772–1816). Their nearly twenty-five-year friendship would prove to be among the most enduring and significant of the composer’s life. Beethoven named the prince as the dedicatee to seven of his original opuses, second only to the Archduke Rudolph. Those dedications include the groundbreaking *Eroica* Symphony, the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, the Opus 18 String Quartets, the Triple Concerto, and Beethoven’s great song cycle, *An die ferne Geliebte*. Although the family was frequently in residence at their palace in Vienna—one of more than a dozen the family owned throughout central Europe—the Lobkowitz



Lutes, detail, Baroque Music Room,
Lobkowitz Palace

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Eleonore Carolina
Lobkowitz

Anna Maria Wilhelmina
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Eleonore Kinsky, musicologist of the Lobkowitz Collections installing violin (by Johann Ulrich Eberle), Beethoven Room, Lobkowitz Palace

family's primary residence was at their castle in Prague.

Beethoven's most historically significant stay in Prague occurred in 1812, just days before he wrote his "Immortal Beloved" letter at the spa in Teplitz, northwest of the city. My intent in visiting Prague was to see many of those sites associated with Beethoven, as well as to take in a production of Mozart and Da Ponte's opera, *Don Giovanni* at the Estates Theater, the very venue where it premiered with Mozart conducting from the keyboard in 1787.

Having arrived in Prague a few days before the performance from Vienna, where I was completing research on my novels about Beethoven and Mozart, I used that time to explore the city. After touring the old town center, I went across the Vltava River to the Lobkowitz Palace, which sits adjacent to the Prague castle. The palace is one of the most significant cultural sites in the Czech Republic and the only privately owned building in the Prague Castle complex, which is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Through the centuries, the palace has witnessed some of Bohemia's most important historical events in addition to becoming the modern repository for a wealth of Beethoven scores and related materials.

The palace came into the possession of the Lobkowitz family through the marriage of Zdeněk Vojtěch, the first Prince Lobkowitz (1568–1628) to Princess Polyxena. In the centuries following that marriage, the family consolidated its influence and the palace took on a more formal, imperial role. It served as the Prague residence when the family needed to be present for

political and ceremonial purposes.

The property was confiscated from the family by the Nazi powers in 1939 following the German occupation of Czechoslovakia, and remained in state control under the subsequent communist regime. Following the Velvet Revolution of 1989 and a twelve-year restitution process, William Lobkowitz and his family once again became the rightful owner of its palace in 2002. After more than four years of planning, restoration and refurbishment, the palace, which hosts their museum, was opened to the public in 2007. That initial renovation not only revitalized an important cultural site but also dramatically expanded the Lobkowitz family's ability to make their collections accessible to the public. This included the Beethoven Room, which—due to its small size—was only able to display a handful of the most important of the family's artifacts and scores.

Josef František Maxmilián, the seventh Prince Lobkowitz, was clearly the family member who had the greatest impact on the history of Western music. A talented singer, violinist, and cellist, the prince was a lifelong patron of Beethoven. Perhaps even more significantly, it was the annual stipend provided by the prince, along with those from Archduke Rudolf and Prince Kinsky, that allowed Beethoven the freedom to compose without dependence on commissions or time-consuming teaching. In turn, Beethoven dedicated many of his major works to the prince. As William Lobkowitz previously noted, "I have to admit, to enormous family pride, that my ancestor made it possible for such music to be written."

One of William's goals as part of this past year's renovation, was to double the exhibit space. Czech architects Martin Hrdina and Michal Pavlík, supported by a team of over eighty people, envisaged a unique concept for the remodeled spaces. The floor plan was redesigned into the shape of a Baroque guitar, creating the impression of walking through a musical instrument. Overhead, a copy of the ceiling painting of the Vienna Lobkowitz Palace concert hall recreates the atmospheric setting in which the first rehearsals and private performances of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony took place in 1804.

After months of renovation, the palace reopened in May of 2021. The new exhibit spaces invite visitors to explore over 300 years of rich musical heritage through state-of-the-art audio-visual technology that adds an interactive element to the galleries. Visitors can browse through musical scores and manuscripts on touch screens. They can explore new archival material hidden in drawers

like secret compartments, or get lost in the music of Beethoven streaming from one of the sound showers while surrounded by portraits of musical luminaries.

Digital projections also illuminate the space with seventeenth-century operatic scenes, such as an animation of Mozart's adaptation of Handel's *Messiah*. This immersive musical experience is made complete with an audio guide narrated by William Lobkowicz and the rooms' curators, Vassar College associate professor of Music Dr. Kathryn Libin, and curator of the Lobkowicz Music Archive Dr. Petr Slouka.

Among the family's holdings now on display are even more period manuscripts and first editions of Beethoven's symphonies. There are also archival and accounting records, family correspondences, and other never-before-seen treasures that bring new musical context and life to the rooms.

Among the other highlights are Mozart's autograph revisions of Handel's *Messiah* as well as an unparalleled collection of musical instruments, manuscripts, and printed editions of scores, parts, and libretti dating from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. These include a rare collection of late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century lute, mandolin, and guitar scores, which is considered the world's largest private collection of Baroque music for plucked instruments.

Although the occasion of the 250th anniversary of Ludwig van Beethoven's birth occurred during the Covid pandemic when the palace was closed, the museum nonetheless celebrated the event by releasing a new volume of the Lobkowicz Collections Music Series on Beethoven, authored by Dr. Libin and publishing it to

coincide with the reopening of the new music rooms.

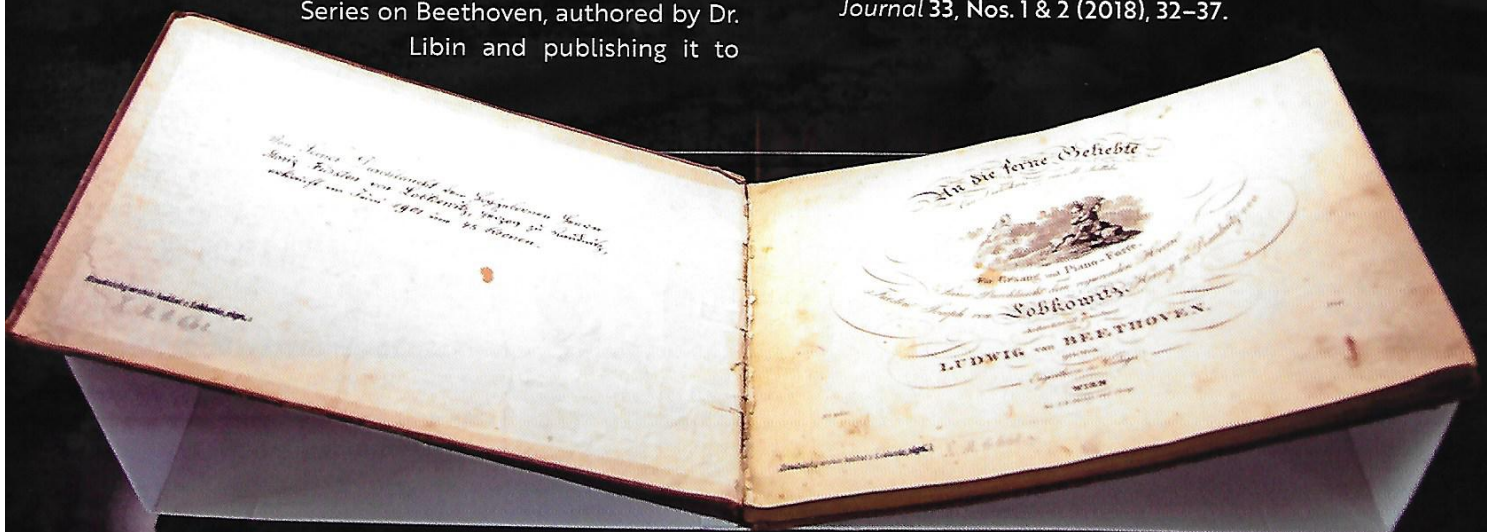
Even with the creation of the new public-facing Beethoven and Baroque music rooms, the family's extensive music archives were far too vast to be held at the Prague Museum alone. They are now housed in another of the Lobkowicz family estates, Nelahozeves Castle, about an hour north of Prague. The family has also been engaged in a project to catalogue the entire Lobkowicz Music Archive which was started in 1657. Their goal is to provide a wider breadth of musical content that could be more easily displayed.

Also of significant interest to music historians at Nelahozeves Castle complex is the Dvořák Birth House. The Lobkowicz family has plans to bring the house back to life with a new museum about the great Czech composer.

It is the great fortune of the classical music community that the Lobkowicz family remains dedicated to opening its properties, museums, library and archives to both the general public and scholars who are undertaking in-depth research to advance the knowledge and understanding of history, music and culture. Now, as the world begins to reopen to travel, I urge you to visit Prague and witness for yourself how the Lobkowicz family is *Renovating Beethoven*. You will not be displeased.

Endnotes

1. Howard J. Smith, "Meeting Beethoven in Prague: The Lobkowicz Palace Museum Collection," *The Beethoven Journal* 33, Nos. 1 & 2 (2018), 32–37.



The first edition of the song cycle *An die ferne Geliebte* (To the distant beloved), Op. 98

Among the most outstanding of Beethoven's compositions is a cycle of six songs with piano accompaniment composed for friends written by Moravian physician, writer and translator Alois Lobeck Kottick (1794–1836). This work is considered

První vydání písňového cyklu *An die ferne Geliebte* (Vzdálené milé), Op. 98

Mezi nepochybně nejvýznamnějších děl Beethovna je cyklus šesti písní s klavírním doprovodem se svou osobitostí. Tento