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December 17th, 2014

A Celebration of Music: A Bravo-Worthy Sale of Manuscripts and More

by Jeanne Schinto



Profiles in History, Calabasas, California

Photos courtesy Profiles in History

A single-owner sale called A Celebration of Music was conducted (no pun intended) by Profiles in History on December 17, 2014, in Calabasas, California. The 165-lot auction featured autograph letters signed, musical quotations and scores signed —by just about every figure in the classical music pantheon. The list includes everyone from Beethoven to Bernstein and from Georges Bizet to George Gershwin—everyone, that is, except Bach and Chopin. I was able to ask the anonymous collector about those two gaps, sending my question via Marsha Malinowski, the auction house's historical consultant. She said on his behalf that he was never able to find anything by either of them that met his high standards. "The collection wasn't assembled with a checklist. There was such substance," Malinowski told me. "Examples [of Bach and Chopin] that were brought to his attention were both expensive and devoid of significant content, and he didn't want just a signature."

Of the collector in general, Malinowski added, "It is very rare to see such a disciplined collector. Usually collectors stray a bit, because they can't help themselves. They're compulsive a bit. They see something, and it's outside the scope of their collection, but they just have to have it. Not this man."

Until this sale, the most recent comparable single-owner music sale at a major auction house was conducted by Sotheby's in Paris on October 16 and 17, 2012, when the collection formed by the French-born American investment banker and financier André Meyer was sold. In that case, the nearly 500 lots, which included mostly printed music along with drawings, paintings, and sculptures of great composers, musicians, and singers, brought the equivalent of \$4.3 million (including buyers' premiums). The far smaller-scale Profiles in History sale realized \$879,741 on the 102 lots that it sold on auction day, a respectable enough figure, but then there was an encore. A phenomenal 11 post-auction sales came through in the 24 hours after the auction ended. One of them fetched \$209,000, making it the sale's top lot. The item, featured on the catalog cover, was an autograph manuscript of part of Mozart's Serenade in D Major for Orchestra, K. 185. That and the other post-auction sales, which were calculated with a 10% premium instead of 20% (25% for Internet purchases), brought the grand total to a bravo-worthy \$1,208,091.

The bidding pool for this or any musical manuscripts sale is not large. Granted, there are huge numbers of people who are passionate about music, but what they love is sound, recordings, live performances. Only a subset of that group will be able to appreciate musical "paper" enough to collect it.

When dinner guests walked into the dining room of this collector and his wife, Malinowski said, they would see the Mozart in a frame hanging on the wall. It was surrounded by framed pieces of many other gems from the collection. "He was the one who was writing the checks, but they both loved and lived with the material," she said.

A significant number of Asians vied for this material, which the collector began acquiring in 1981. "We were so lucky getting the Asians," Malinowski said. "The Asian factor was huge, and if we hadn't had it we would have been in trouble," considering the "upheaval in the European market." She was referring to the news that broke in mid-November about what is turning out to be one of the biggest scandals to hit the rare books and manuscripts market in recent memory. France's anti-fraud brigade suspects Gérard Lhéritier, founder of a company called Aristophil, of running a colossal Ponzi scheme.

For years now, Lhéritier has been spending enormous amounts in the market on behalf of thousands of investor-clients. Many of the pieces they have bought are displayed in a so-called museum, Musée des Lettres et Manuscrits, that Lhéritier has created; others are in his storage facilities; still more have been lent to public museum partners. But according to the French press, the operation is believed to be a scam, and both the museum and the offices of Aristophil have now been raided by the French government, together with Lhéritier's home and his accountant's office in Nice. Is Lhéritier the Bernie Madoff of the antiquarian book and paper trade? It's a legitimate question to be answered in the future.

Meanwhile, Malinowski wisely made the decision to try "getting as much Asian interest as possible, to balance out what was happening in Europe." She said: "I really pushed hard for us to get some publicity in Asia and was able to get a bit."

An Asian paid \$96,000 (est. \$80,000/120,000) for the second to top lot of the sale, an autograph letter signed twice by Ludwig van Beethoven. The subject of the single page in German is the composer's nephew Karl. "Beethoven had a nasty custody battle with his sister-in-law after his brother died," Malinowski explained. "Karl was torn between being with his uncle and being with his mother. He was nine years old." The letter, undated but after 1816, is a request presumably addressed to a government official for something for Karl. "It may have been something to do with his education or with military," said Malinowski. "[Beethoven] attached something that we don't have."

An American private collector, bidding on the Internet, paid \$87,500 (est. \$40,000/60,000) for another of the sale's standouts, a leaf from the opera *Carmen* by Georges Bizet. The autograph manuscript, signed and dated May 18, 1875, is Act I, Scene 10, "The Seguidilla." "I think he probably wrote this out for someone, because usually when we see works in progress, they're more amended," Malinowski said. "It was probably the most glamorous lot in the sale," she added. "It was a show-stopper. If anyone wanted a Bizet, this could not have been a more perfect example."

The item also had great provenance, having come from the collection of Rudolf F. Kallir (1895-1987). An Austrian-born antiquarian who immigrated to the States in the 1930s, Kallir not only amassed a collection of musical autographs and manuscripts, but also published articles on the subjects of his collection and served as a consultant on musical acquisitions to major institutions. Only one other leaf from this opera has been sold at auction since 1975. That one was a lengthy quotation from the "Flower Song" that sold at Sotheby's in London on December 1, 2005, for £24,000 (\$41,482).

Another lot whose provenance included ownership by Kallir was a six-page autograph musical manuscript signed in three places by George Gershwin. The music is for "By Strauss," a satirical waltz composed by Gershwin in 1936 for *The Show Is On*. The first page has the handwritten lyrics composed by his brother Ira. The price realized was \$90,000 (est. \$75,000/125,000), a good result driven in part by rarity. According to Profiles in History, the last Gershwin autograph music of comparable length was sold at auction over 25 years ago.

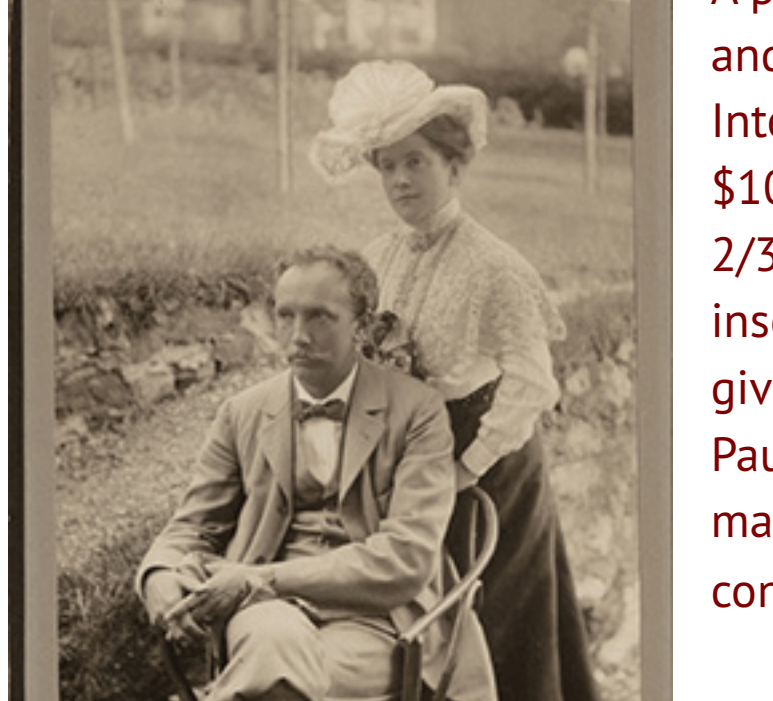
An autograph manuscript signed by Franz Schubert came from Kallir's collection too. It sold in a post-sale deal for \$82,500 (est. \$75,000/125,000). The single page, written on April 16, 1825, is the complete Waltz in G Major for piano, D. 844. The *Albumblatt* (album leaf) was written in the album of Fräulein Anna Höning (later Frau Mayerhofer von Grünbühel). It was illustrated in Kallir's book *Autographensammler—lebenslanglich*, published in 1977.

"I always spend a lot of time wondering about results and what can we learn from these going forward," Malinowski said. It was no surprise that material fresh to the market, in good condition, with interesting content and provenance did well. But what about the material that met all those criteria and still didn't make it?

"I do feel that having the last sale in the season is not the best thing in the world," she said. "That has to be factored in. So I think it was a combination of the sale being so close to the Christmas holidays and also [the fact that] people were sitting on their hands a little bit, wondering how the sale was going to do. Afterwards, I told the consignor that we were going to do a fire sale, because the material was terrific and would never lose its value."

That's when those post-sale bidders came forward, spending almost \$300,000. In addition to the Mozart cover lot, five pieces of first-edition printed music by Mozart got sold. Printed music was what the collector bought last, said Malinowski, "when he had practically everything else that he wanted. It was the perfect segue."

For more information, phone the auction house at (310) 859-7701 or see the Web site (www.profilesinhistory.com).

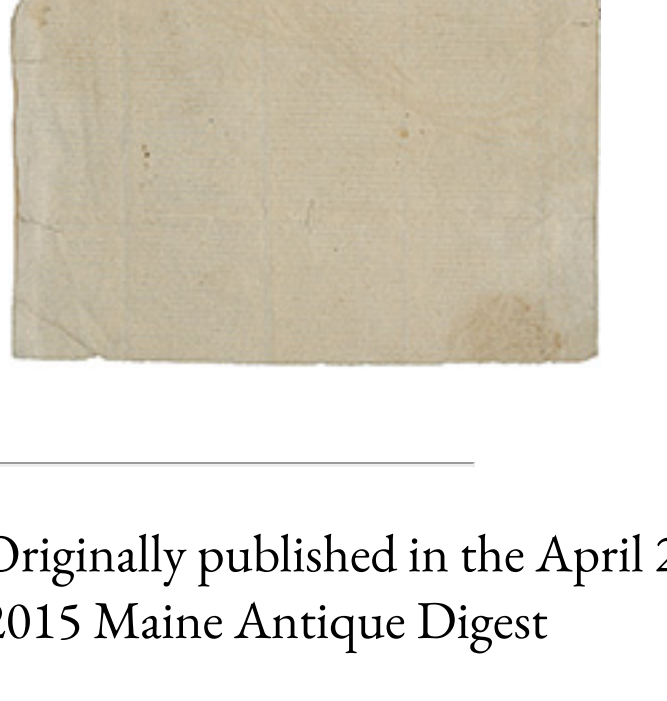


An autograph letter signed twice by Ludwig van Beethoven sold for \$96,000. The one page in German, approximately 8" x 10", was written to an unidentified official on behalf of Beethoven's nephew Karl. It is apparently unpublished.

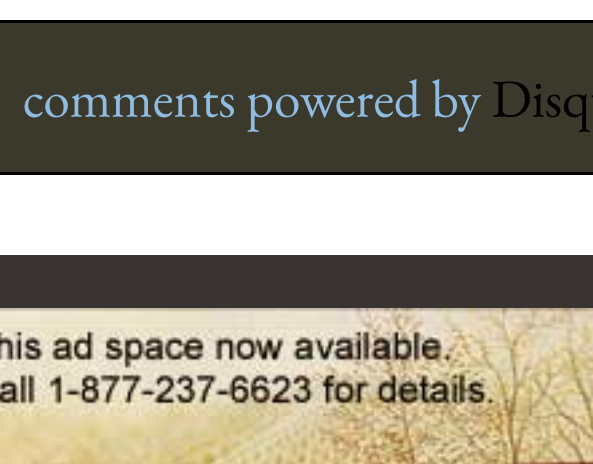


A one-page typed letter signed by Sergei Rachmaninoff sold for \$7200 (est. \$1000/1500). The addressee is "Michael." It was written in Lucerne on August 29, 1937. The subject is his ideas on variations of his

Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini. Also in the lot was a 6" x 5" photograph signed and inscribed in English, "To Mrs. Clifford Ellison."



A photograph of Richard Strauss and his wife, Pauline, went to an Internet bidder for \$4062.50 (est. \$1000/1500). The approximately 6 2/3" x 4 2/3" image is signed and inscribed in German. The catalog gives this translation: "To Frau Paula Wolfsohn...the thankful married Strausses when **not** on concert tour!"



An undated autograph letter signed in Italian by Franz Joseph Haydn with a great association fetched \$46,875 (est. \$20,000/30,000). The single page, 7 1/4" x 4 1/2", was addressed to Haydn's friend Dr. Charles Burney (1726-1814) of England, the foremost music historian of his time, who was also a composer and musician.



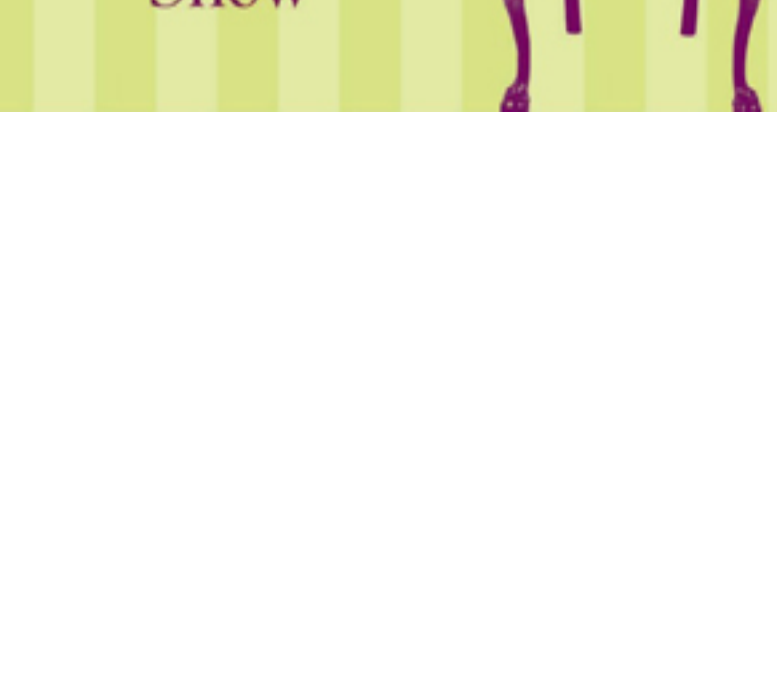
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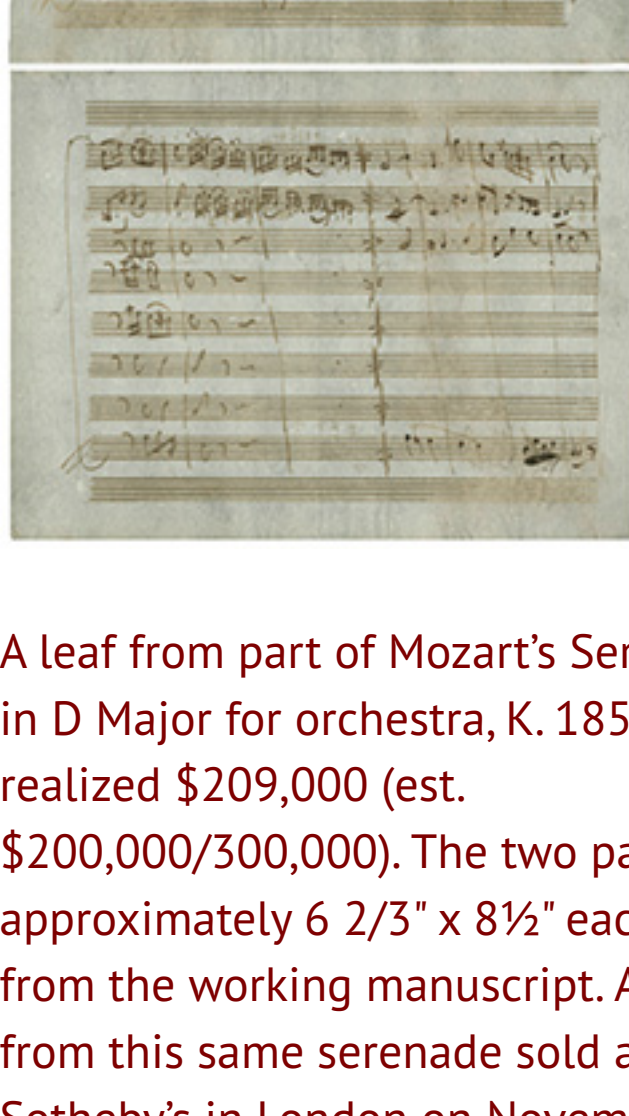
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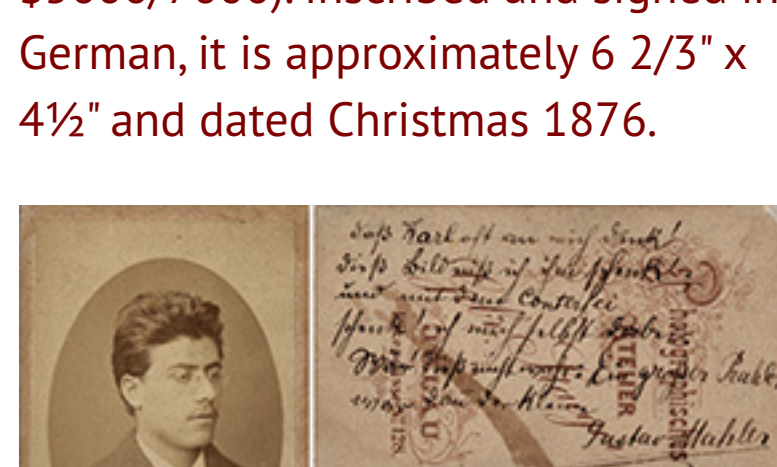
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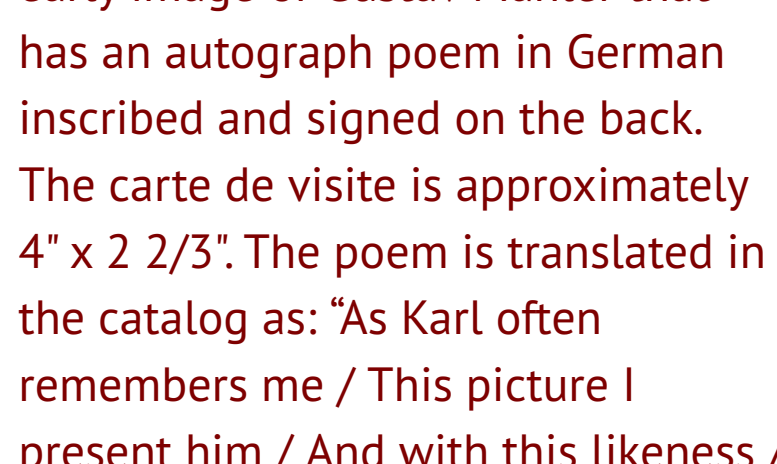
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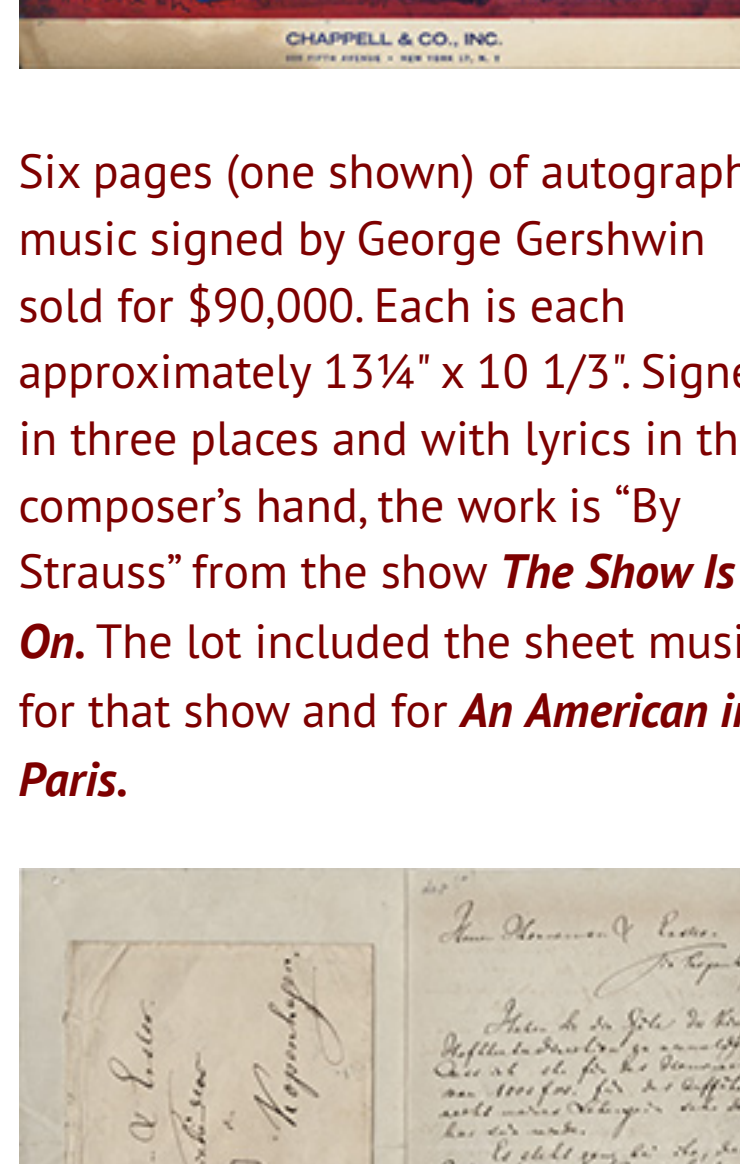
A leaf from part of Mozart's Serenade in D Major for orchestra, K. 185, realized \$209,000 (est. \$200,000/300,000). The two pages, approximately 6 2/3" x 8 1/2" each, are from the working manuscript. A leaf from this same serenade sold at Sotheby's in London on November 27, 2013, for £200,500 (\$325,111).



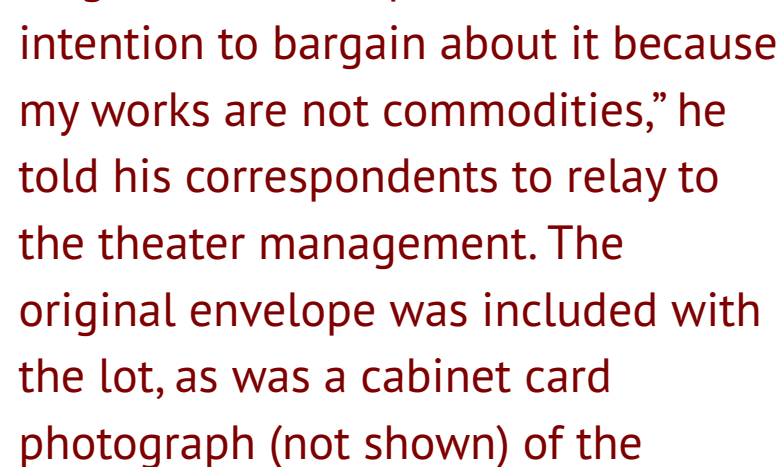
A cabinet card photograph of a youthful Johannes Brahms sold to an Asian bidder for \$11,400 (est. \$5000/7000). Inscribed and signed in German, it is approximately 6 2/3" x 4 1/2" and dated Christmas 1876.



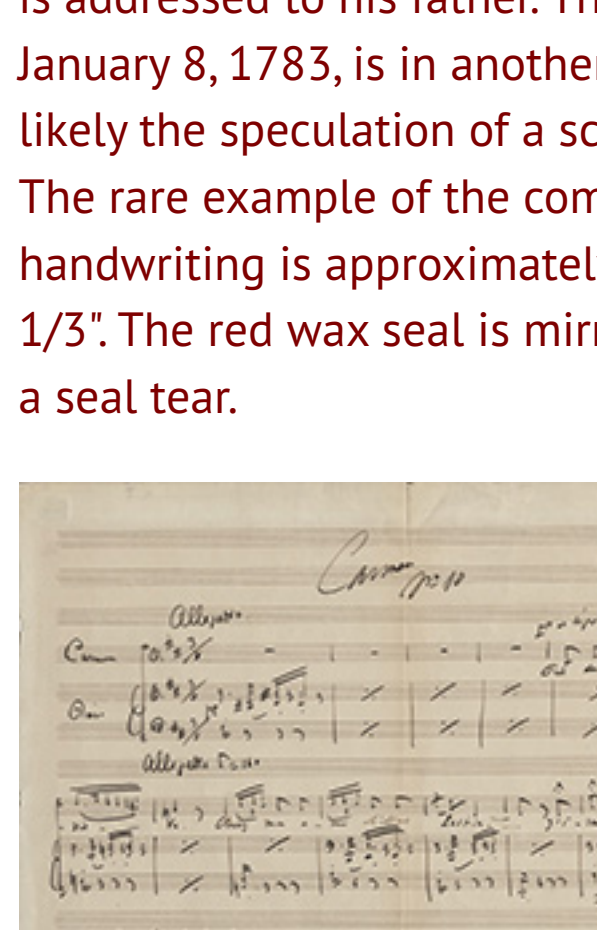
An Asian bidder paid \$30,000 for this early image of Gustav Mahler that has an autograph poem in German inscribed and signed on the back. The carte de visite is approximately 4" x 2 2/3". The poem is translated in the catalog as: "As Karl often remembers me / This picture I present him / And with this likeness / Present myself as well / Were this not true: a great braggart / would be little Gustav Mahler."



Six pages (one shown) of autograph music signed by George Gershwin sold for \$90,000. Each is each approximately 13 1/4" x 10 1/3". Signed in three places and with lyrics in the composer's hand, the work is "By Strauss" from the show *The Show Is On*. The lot included the sheet music for that show and for *An American in Paris*.



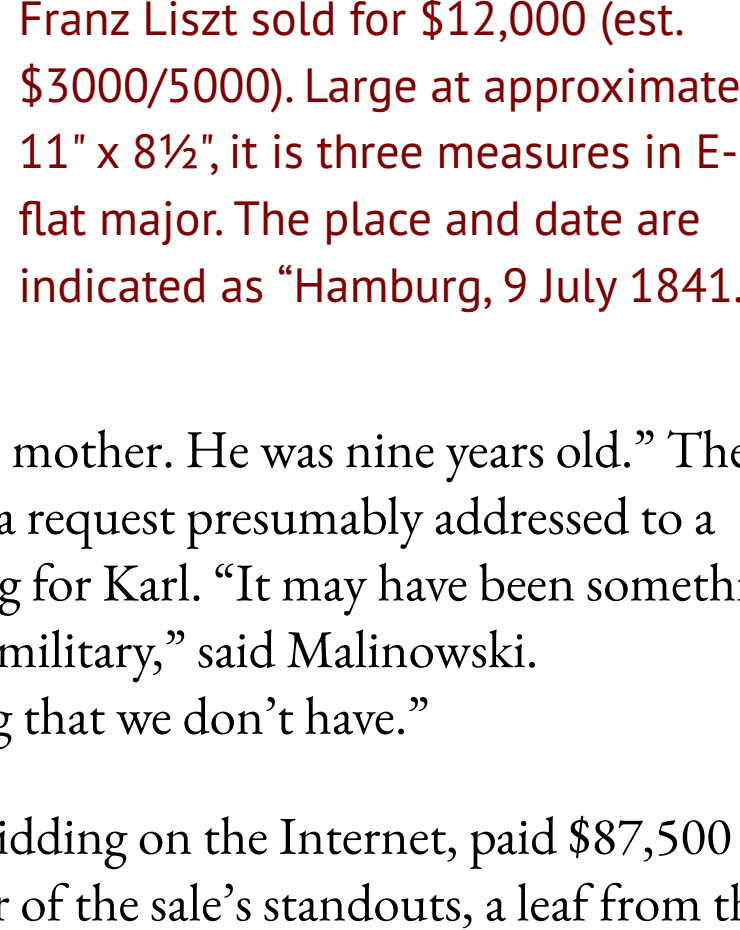
An autograph letter signed by Richard Wagner sold for \$15,000 (est. \$6000/8000). The two pages, 7 1/4" x 5" each, in German, bear the date June 3, 1869. The subject was *Lohengrin*, specifically a proposed performance of it at the Royal Court Theatre in Copenhagen and what Wagner would be paid. "I have no intention to bargain about it because my works are not commodities," he told his correspondents to relay to the theater management. The original envelope was included with the lot, as was a cabinet card photograph (not shown) of the composer.



An autograph envelope by Wolfgang Mozart fetched \$72,000 (est. \$50,000/75,000). Written in French, it is addressed to his father. The date, January 8, 1783, is in another hand, likely the speculation of a scholar. The rare example of the composer's handwriting is approximately 7 1/4" x 4 1/3". The red wax seal is mirrored by a seal tear.



A leaf from the opera *Carmen* by Georges Bizet fetched \$87,500. The autograph manuscript, signed and dated May 18, 1875, is Act I, Scene 10—"The Seguidilla." Signed in full, the single page is 10 3/4" x 13 3/4".



An autograph musical quotation by Franz Liszt sold for \$12,000 (est. \$3000/5000). Large at approximately 11" x 8 1/2", it is three measures in E-flat major. The place and date are indicated as "Hamburg, 9 July 1841."