

THEMATISCH-BIBLIOGRAPHISCHES VERZEICHNIS der Werke von LOUIS SPOHR

Dr. Folker Göthel, the foremost authority on the life and works of Louis Spohr, completed this crowning achievement to a life devoted to Spohr research in 1977. It was published by Hans Schneider of Tutzing in 1981.

The most reliable sources of information concerning Spohr's music have hitherto been as follows:

- A) Spohr's Autobiography, begun towards the end of his career and completed by his second wife, which refers to many of his important works and the circumstances surrounding them. Dr. Göthel's "LEBENSERINNERUNGEN" (Schneider, 1968) is the modern, annotated edition with much additional information.
- B) Spohr's own catalogue of his works begun during the Gotha period (1805-10) and continued until 1856.
- C) The catalogue of H.M. Schletterer, no. 29 in his series of Musical Discourses, edited by Paul Graf Waldersee, and published by Breitkopf und Härtel in 1881. The catalogue, reprinted in 1972 (Wiesbaden), lists 226 compositions and is prefaced by a lengthy essay on Spohr's personality and position in German musical life.

Needless to say, Dr. Göthel's new Verzeichnis is now the standard reference work for Spohr's music.

The main part of this new catalogue is divided into two sections: works with opus numbers, consisting of 154 compositions published during Spohr's lifetime; works without opus numbers (Werke ohne Opuszahl: WoO) consisting of 139 compositions, many of which are still in manuscript. Only two works, a trio for violin, viola and guitar (WoO 138) and a song (WoO 139) are considered spurious; a small number indeed when one considers the huge number of symphonies and masses, for example, attributed to other prolific composers such as Haydn and Mozart.

From the sequential list of works at the end of the catalogue we learn that Spohr's earliest surviving pieces are the 3 violin duos (WoO 21) dating from 1796, his twelfth year; his last composition, the song "Neue Liebe, neues Leben" (WoO 127) to a text by his wife, Marianne, was written in September 1852, a year before his death, in 1859, at the age of 75.

Spohr's Op.1 is the violin concerto in A major, composed during his first concert tour, to St. Petersburg in 1802, with his teacher, Franz Eck. The concerto was published in 1803 by Breitkopf und Härtel after the 18 year old composer had reluctantly agreed to their stipulation that he purchase 100 copies at his own expense. Spohr wrote bitterly, even years later in his Autobiography, of his first experience of the world of music publishing. Needless to say, his Opus 2, the violin concerto in D minor, was published elsewhere, by Kühnel, and it was to be more than 30 years before Spohr offered any more of his works to Breitkopf und Härtel. The list of the publishers of the first editions of Spohr's works reveals that at the top of the league, as it were, is Peters (56 works) followed by Simrock and Schuberth (19 works each) and Kühnel and Breitkopf (12 works apiece).

Amongst those works published in Spohr's lifetime are a handful that are firmly in the repertoire: the nonet Op.31, the octet Op.32 and the piano and wind quintet Op.52, the first clarinet concerto Op.26, the clarinet songs Op.103. However, it is high time that those works acknowledged by Spohr scholars to be his finest should be heard: the 7th violin concerto Op.38, the concertante for two violins and orchestra Op.48, the string quartets Op.29/1, Op.58/1 and Op.74/3, the string quintet in B minor Op.69, the four double string quartets, the 5th symphony Op.102.

Mention of the 5th symphony reminds that the first movement of this fine work was originally cast as a Fantasie-overture, "Die Tochter der Luft" (WoO 6) in 1836. In fact, Spohr's self-borrowings are few in number; I could find only two other examples, admittedly only after a brief search: the theme of the Adagio of the Notturmo for wind Op.34 is taken from the opera 'Alruna' (Gotha, 1808). This early opera, unpublished except for the overture (Op.21) also provided the theme for the 'Alruna' clarinet variations (WoO 15, 1809).

The section devoted to works without opus numbers reveals some Spohr rarities: the concertante for violin, cello and orchestra in C major (WoO 11), composed by the young Spohr in 1803 for an ill-fated concert tour with a cellist friend, Beneke, which was terminated on the outward journey when Spohr's Guarneri violin was stolen from their coach. Spohr lost contact with this work (the autograph is now in the Murhardsche Bibliothek, Kassel), and, according to his Autobiography, failed to recognise it when he heard it at a concert some years later. Also in Kassel is the autograph of Spohr's first oratorio, 'Das jüngste Gericht' (Wo 60), composed in 1812 for Napoleon's birthday celebrations in Erfurt. Spohr always remembered this first foray into a genre, with which his name was to become particularly associated in England, with affection. He was especially proud of the choral fugues and the dramatic, if operatic, part of Satan. So much so, that he considered revising the work at one stage.

Another unknown large-scale dramatic work of Spohr's is the cantata "Das befreite Deutschland" (WoO 64) for chorus (representing the German people and the French and Russian armies), five soloists and large orchestra. The cantata, written in 1814 for the celebrations surrounding the Congress of Vienna, consists of a powerful overture and eleven numbers, of which only the overture and the aria "Du schöner Stern" (no.4) were published. A similar fate befell Beethoven's Congress cantata "Das glorreiche Augenblick" (The Glorious Moment), the very existence of which I suspect is unknown even to seasoned Beethovenians!

Other works one is anxious to become acquainted with include a fine Concert Overture in F minor (WoO 1), written in Frankfurt in 1819, and taken to London by Spohr in 1820, following the invitation of the London Philharmonic Society. The overture was subsequently performed during the 1821 season of concerts; the autograph lies in the British Museum.

Perhaps one further intriguing work - a possible masterpiece - deserves mention here: Spohr's second setting of the Lord's Prayer, "Vater Unser", to a text by Klopstock (WoO 70). The work, for two male voice choirs, dates from 1838, and was published that year in an edition with piano accompaniment for the Frankfurt Song Festival. Spohr's original scoring was for a large wind band including bassethorns and ophicleide, yet an autograph score (Louis Spohr Gesellschaft, Kassel), dated January 1845, is for a large orchestra. Apart from the two best known oratorios, 'The Last Judgement' and 'Calvary', Spohr's choral works, 38 compositions mainly from the Kassel period (1822-57), are virtually unknown. The fine A cappella Mass for two choirs (Op. 54) has been recorded; some of the smaller-scale Psalms or male-voice songs would surely be within the scope of amateur choirs.

Of course, many significant works, some quite well-known now, were published after Spohr's death: the 3rd and 4th clarinet concertos (1821 and 1823); the 1804 A major violin concerto (WoO 12) published by Bärenreiter in 1955 in an edition by Dr. Göthel, and a number of violin and harp pieces, some of them substantial concertante-sonatas. Finally, there is the handful of late works dating from 1856-8 that the composer, tired and disillusioned, but with the urge to create even sterile music the only reason to go on living, soon became bitterly dissatisfied with: the last two string quartets in E flat major and G minor (WoO 41 and 42), the 10th symphony (WoO 8) and the unfinished Requiem (WoO 74).

One could go on. Dipping into thematic catalogues has long been my most rewarding reading - my Köchel is much-thumbed, heavily annotated and somewhat battered - and, I submit, as informative for musicologist and music-lover alike, as any biography. Perhaps more so, for with rare exceptions (Mozart, and probably Beethoven) there is little of significance to be learned from the chronicle of a composer's life or speculation on his personality that is not there in abundance in the music for those with ears to hear. By Wagnerian standards, Spohr's life seems dull and routine (so does Brahms' for that matter); he simply WORKED HARD, and played an active role in the cultural life of his country for more than 60 years. That much is testified to by the sheer size of this present thematic catalogue! Dr. Göthel has completed his mammoth task with his usual painstaking attention to detail, with formidable energy and - I suspect - with love.

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