

THE GARLAND SPOHR

by Keith Warsop

Selected works of Louis Spohr: Ten volumes edited with introductions by Clive Brown
(Garland Publishing, New York)

Volume 1. *Faust* (edited by Jonathan Stracey)

Volume 2. *Jessonda* (reprint of Peters 1881 score)

Volume 3. *Pietro von Abano* (facsimile of composer's autograph)

Volume 4. *Die letzten Dinge* (reprint of Novello 1881 score)

Volume 5. *Des Heilands letzte Stunden* (reprint of Novello 1884 score)

Volume 6. Symphonies (1, 2 and 5) (ms copies and reprints)

Volume 7. Concertos (Violin/Cello WoO.11, Violin No.10, Op.62, Violin No.12, Op.79)
(facsimile of composer's autographs)

Volume 8. The Complete Lieder Sets (reprints of earliest available editions)

Volume 9. Chamber Music for Strings (String Quartets Op.4/2, Op.29/1, Op.29/2, Op.30, Op.45/1, Op.45/2, Op.58/2, Op.82/2, Op.141; String Quintets Op.33/2, Op.69; Sextet Op.140; Double Quartets Op.65, Op.77, Op.136) (facsimile of composer's autograph, ms copies and reprints of Payne's 1888 miniature scores of the Double Quartets)

Volume 10. Chamber Music with Piano (Trios Op.119, Op.123, Op.124, Op.142; Quintet Op.130) (reprints of earliest available editions)

(Volume 8 and Volume 9 are issued in two parts, one upright and the other oblong; volume 7 is oblong; all the others are upright)

To the above the following should be added (also from Garland):

The Symphony 1720-1840: 550 full scores of works by 244 composers in 60 volumes. Editor-in-chief Barry S. Brook.

Series C: Germany. Volume 9: Louis Spohr, Three Symphonies edited by Joshua Berrett (No.4 *Die Weihe der Töne*; No.6 *Historical*; No.7 *Irdisches und Göttliches im Menschenleben*) (reprints of the first editions)

(All available from Garland Publishing Inc., 136 Madison Avenue, New York NY10016. Telephone (212) 686-7492. Telex Garland 424588. European Representative, 10 Storey's Gate, London SW1P 3AY)

THIS series of publications from Garland at a stroke puts a large corpus of Spohr's works back into print as well as including some compositions which are printed for the first time or appear for the first time in score. The sheer magnitude of the achievement, however, presents the problem for the individual of which volumes to select, especially if the whole set is beyond one's pocket. Obviously, this restriction does not apply to major libraries and so the set will be of immense value to scholars.

For others, surely the most important volumes here are those devoted to the Lieder. It makes immediately available for singers more than 90 Spohr songs and has the advantage that the music is instantly performable – unlike the other issues in the set where parts must be prepared or hunted down.

The two volumes offer much more than the title – the Complete Lieder Sets – implies. All the big sets with opus numbers are here but in addition Clive Brown has reprinted every separate Spohr song he has been able to find, as well as the vocal duets, the songs with four-hand piano

accompaniment and those which include obbligato instruments¹.

The volumes include a few autograph facsimiles and many reprints of original editions which have reproduced beautifully. Now these two volumes must be promoted for all they are worth and we hope that Garland will perhaps consider separate paperback issue. Clive Brown offers a wide-ranging introduction which discusses every Spohr song and its provenance. This is now surely the definitive survey of the subject and is bound to become a handy crib sheet for the rest of us.

Other specially attractive volumes in the series are those which are made up of Spohr's autographs in facsimile – the opera *Pietro von Abano*, the Concertos, and the oblong volume of Chamber Music for Strings. The Concerto volume has a further attraction as it includes the early Concertante in C major for violin, cello and orchestra, WoO.11 of 1803 which has never been published before (even in piano reduction) as well as the original version of the Tenth Violin Concerto whose slow movement might be considered better than the one Spohr used when the work was published, the Adagio from the early A major Violin Concerto. Completing a trio of autographs in this volume is the Twelfth Violin Concerto alias the First Concertino.

The choice of *Pietro* in autograph facsimile is really a matter of Hobson's choice as the other autographs of Spohr's mature operas were all destroyed in the 1943 bombing of Kassel.

The Chamber Music for Strings includes facsimiles of five quartets and one quintet in the oblong volume while the upright volume reprints the Payne scores of three of the Double Quartets, modern handwritten scores of the Sextet and the B minor String Quintet, and four string quartets in handwritten scores of the 1890s from the Boston Public Library Spohr collection.

The autographs are excellently reproduced as are the volumes which reprint the fine 19th century editions of *Jessonda* (Peters) and *The Last Judgment* and *Calvary* (both Novello).

Perhaps the biggest disappointment is the Chamber Music with Piano volume which has not reprinted as successfully as the others and is consequently more difficult to read.

The Symphony volume offers violent contrasts with No.2 in a first-rate modern handwritten score, No.5 in a fine reproduction of the original edition, and No.1 in a less distinct handwritten score of 1871 from the Liverpool Public Library collection.

We have already mentioned Clive Brown's comprehensive introduction to the songs; in fact his introductions in general are models of their kind, well worth reprinting on their own when the time comes for an edition of his "selected essays".

The article on the Chamber Music for Strings is especially good and he puts his finger unerringly on the reason why Spohr's string quartets do not stand out in his oeuvre in the way such works do with the great classical masters:

"The more often he tackled the same type of composition the more difficulty he seems to have had in bringing anything fresh to it. This is most obviously true of the quartets, where, having solved to his own satisfaction the problems of the medium that had troubled him in his earliest efforts, he found it increasingly hard to achieve the spontaneity and vitality that distinguishes his more experimental work."

At another point, he says:

"In the long term, the widening gap between the reactionary and progressive in Spohr's music laid him open to the danger of stylistic disharmony. The clarity and balance of his structure is often at odds with the lyrical and rhapsodic potential of his material, and for all his later experiments with programmaticism and superficially unconventional forms, Spohr was unable to disguise his basically Classical approach to form. This conflict in Spohr's musical nature, which was never satisfactorily resolved, helps to explain both his enormous influence on his contemporaries and the subsequent decline of his reputation; it allowed

him to present bold harmonic progressions, complex chromaticism, and affective melody in a context which made them more easily digestible to the majority of his contemporaries, but prevent him from realising some of the possibilities latent in these ideas. Nevertheless, the best of Spohr's compositions are highly effective and strikingly individual works of art."

(In this volume, incidentally, we must draw attention to the omission of the coda to the Scherzo of the B minor String Quintet on Page 177 of the upright format while, on Page 154, the work is entitled String QUARTET.)

Dr Brown has similar perceptions to offer in his other introductions, especially to the Chamber Music with Piano where he notes:

"Whereas pianist composers made the instrument sound brilliant without creating undue difficulties for the player, there are passages in Spohr's trios that both sound and are difficult. Nevertheless, his relative unfamiliarity with the piano had one notable benefit; his textures and general treatment of the instrument have a freshness and inventiveness which stem directly from the fact that it was his brain rather than his fingers which determined what he wrote for it."

The development of Spohr's violin style is detailed in the Concerto volume where Dr Brown proposes that good modern editions of the scores of the Ninth and Eleventh Concertos are long overdue. It is a pity that this collection could not have included them, but Dr Brown is certainly the person to undertake the task in the future.

There is an explanation of the involved history of the tenth Violin Concerto and Spohr's hesitations over a definitive version of its slow movement; which to us poses the question as to why Spohr was so uncertain here when he seems to have had full confidence elsewhere. The Twelfth Concerto, or First Concertino, is compared to the formally similar Eighth (*Gesangszene*); it is categorised as less overtly dramatic, more subtle in its use of the orchestra and more pervasive in its chromaticism.

Clive Brown's introduction to the Symphony volume compares the popularity of Spohr's symphonies with that of other composers of the period:

"Beethoven's symphonies were performed far more often than those of any other composer. Mozart's last four symphonies seem, in most places, to have come next in popularity with a selection of Haydn's trailing in third place; symphonies by most contemporary composers came and went, rarely receiving more than one or two performances except where their composer was a local celebrity ... However, during the first half of the century only symphonies by Spohr (from 1811) and Mendelssohn (from 1842) attained a more regular place alongside those of Beethoven, Mozart and Haydn."

The introduction to the two volumes of oratorio must be read together as must those to the operas. In the *Last Judgment* volume, Dr Brown opens with a substantial survey of German oratorio in the early nineteenth century, before relating Spohr's own works to this tradition.

The details of Spohr's relationship with Rochlitz, author of the text of the two oratorios reprinted here, are given fully, in particular Rochlitz's much-appreciated advice during the composition of *The Last Judgment* and the disagreement between the composer and author over the setting of *Calvary*. Dr Brown also attempts to clarify the complicated publication history of *The Last Judgment*, particularly the confusion over the correct metronome markings.

Turning to the operas, the *Faust* volume had not been published at the time of writing but it is obvious from the introductions to *Jessonda* and *Pietro von Abano* that Dr Brown is engaged in a broad survey of Spohr's operatic output. Both of the two published volumes include detailed synopses of the plots, while the *Jessonda* volume also includes the text of Spohr's article "An

Address to the German Composers” (in the 1823 English version from *The Harmonicon*), which appeared a few weeks before the premiere of the opera and expounds Spohr’s credo for the composition of German opera.

The introduction to *Pietro von Abano* picks up and concludes the story of Spohr’s operas after *Jessonda*. Of *Pietro* itself, Dr Brown covers the problems of getting the opera staged caused by its “gruesomeness and abnormal sexuality”. It should be mentioned that because *Pietro* is published in a facsimile of Spohr’s autograph, and “since German handwriting at this period is only legible to specialists I have made a complete transcription of the text, stage directions etc as contained in the autograph ... I have added the (spoken) dialogue to my transcription enclosed in square brackets.”

Something remains to be said about the volume of symphonies edited by Joshua Berrett in the Garland series “The Symphony 1720-1840”. The works themselves are facsimiles of the first editions and therefore pose no major problems but Dr Berrett is sometimes guilty of rather ingenuous sociological remarks in his introduction. He makes much of Spohr’s lineage which “helps to explain the subsequent tenor of his life”.

That tenor, according to Dr Berrett, shows Spohr as “the sober bourgeois rather than the spleen-venting alienated artist, a man who, in his overriding concern for job security, chose to work for most of his life under the patronage of the courts of Brunswick, Gotha and Kassel, all of which fall within the relatively circumscribed area of Saxony, Thuringia and Hesse.”

To which we would ask: When J.S. Bach chose to work in such areas or when Haydn signed his contract with the Esterhazys or even when Beethoven did his best to urge his aristocratic patrons to settle pensions on him, was this “overriding concern for job security” or merely the sensible procedures of people who have to live in the world? Indeed, would Dr Berrett like to throw up his post as chairman of the Department of Music and Fine Arts at Mercy College, Dobbs Ferry, New York, and become a freelance musicologist? If not, does “job security” have anything to do with it? We have really never read such nonsense put forward in the name of serious scholarship.

On the musical front, Dr Berrett is much sounder:

“One may characterise Spohr as a Janus-like figure who looked back to the eighteenth-century spirit of Mozart, Cherubini and the French violin school, and forward to the world of Liszt and Wagner.”

The section on the symphonies themselves has some interesting comments about the evidence which the layout of the scores may provide on orchestral disposition at the time.

In his remarks on the Sixth Symphony, Dr Berrett prefers the translation “Historic” to the more usual “Historical” which perhaps puts a slightly different emphasis on the work’s title and makes it seem more pretentious.

A footnote on the first page of the slow movement also discusses the tempo marking *Larghetto* in the score and the *Adagio* that appears on the title page. There is really no ambivalence as *Adagio* was often a synonym for “slow movement” (Clara Schumann, in a letter to Brahms, refers to the *Adagio* of one of his Piano Quartets, whereas its score says *Andante*, while Bruckner was in the habit of heading his slow movements *Adagio* when they sometimes were given a different tempo marking).

The comments on the Seventh Symphony discuss its details but fail to point out that the work is really a symphonic poem in three sections which anticipates the “philosophical” symphonic poems of Liszt such as *Die Ideale* and especially *From the Cradle to the Grave*, rather than the “story-telling” symphonic poem.

Spohr’s originality here has never received credit and indeed Dr Berrett is often at pains to

point out Spohr's formal conservatism. However, despite his caveats, he does conclude:

“During the more than fifty years separating Beethoven's Ninth from Brahms's First Symphony there was no more compelling embodiment of the seriousness of German ideals than Louis Spohr.”

In looking back over this comprehensive collection and bearing in mind the works made available in the series published by the Internationale Louis Spohr Gesellschaft, Bärenreiter and Musica Rara, what still remains to be done in Spohr publications?

Perhaps most importantly, parts for the majority of the string quartets and quintets which are to be found only in old editions through secondhand dealers or photocopied from library collections. Secondly, a scholarly edition of the four Double Quartets, the autograph manuscripts of which all survive².

Thirdly, full scores of the mainstream violin concertos, of which only numbers Seven and Eight are available in this format. We suggest numbers Two, Five, Six, Nine, Eleven and the First Concertante for two violins and orchestra, Op.48.

Fourthly, a good selection of overtures of which only *Faust* and *Jessonda* seem to be available. *Die Prüfung*, *Alruna*, *Der Berggeist*, *Macbeth*, *Pietro von Abano*, *Der Alchymist* and the Concert Overture in C minor, Op.12, all have their attractions.

Of the operas, perhaps *Zemire und Azor* should be added to the three in Dr Brown's collection. Finally, and perhaps indulgently, full scores of the Third Clarinet Concerto, the Eighth Symphony and *The Fall of Babylon* would round things off nicely.

At the start of this review it was suggested that one might have difficulty in deciding which Garland volumes to go for so we end with our own recommendation: 1). The Complete Lieder Sets; 2). Chamber Music for Strings; 3). The Symphonies; 4). *Jessonda*; 5). *Des Heilands letzte Stunden*.

Notes

1. Dr Brown has now acquired early editions of the few missing songs, thanks to the assistance of Herr Herfried Homburg, secretary of the Internationale Louis Spohr Gesellschaft. Perhaps these may be made available in the future.
2. No.1 in the Peters Library, Leipzig; No.2 and No.3 in the German State Library, Berlin; No.4 in the Dresden Landesbibliothek.

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