

MUSIC REVIEW

Selected Works of Louis Spohr, Volume 1: Faust (edition and editorial matters by Jonathan Stracey; Introduction by Clive Brown). Garland Publishing, 136 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, March 1990. Price \$155 in preliminary announcement in 1986. We have not been informed of the present price.

The final volume to be published in Garland's ten-volume selection of Spohr's works is the one scheduled as Volume One. This new edition of Faust goes much further than other volumes in the series which were either facsimiles of the composer's autographs, reproductions of early printed editions or in a few cases facsimiles of modern scores made from early sets of parts. Here we have a genuinely critical edition which presents both Spohr's original text of 1813 and his revised version with recitatives of 1852 in such a clear way that it would be possible to perform either version from this score.

In fact, the phrase "two versions" rather begs the question as, quite early on in Faust's stage life, alterations were made which it became commonplace to use. For the Frankfurt performance of 1818 Spohr added the well-known aria "Liebe ist die zarte Blüthe" as well as lifting the scena and aria "Ich bin allein" from his earlier opera, *Der Zweikampf mit der Geliebten*. Spohr gave later authority to them by utilising them for his 1852 Grand Opera version. The volume also includes facsimiles of the printed German libretti of both the 1813 and 1852 versions although the point is made that the spoken dialogue was almost always modified from production to production.

Jonathan Stracey must firstly be congratulated on the beautiful calligraphy of his score which looks almost too perfect to be handwritten! He adds to this an exemplary editing technique, usefully sorting out the authentic sources (Spohr's own autograph score was almost certainly destroyed in 1943 when the Kassel opera house was bombed) and what was sung in which early productions.

Clive Brown's introduction covers Spohr's operas: *Die Prüfung* to Faust (his introductions to the Garland editions of *Jessonda* and *Pietro von Abano* complete the story) as well as giving a detailed resume of the plot and how it relates to the musical numbers.

Dr Brown makes a strong case for Spohr's use of leitmotif in this opera which he calls "highly innovative." Many previous composers had used musical reminiscence during the late 18th and early 19th centuries but few before Faust had developed it into a technique foreshadowing that of Wagner. However, Dr Brown does not go over the top with this thesis; he rightly says that the main themes are "partly genuine leitmotif" and "partly simple reminiscence."

Dr Brown also emphasises the seriousness of Spohr's aims in Faust: It "contains no comic characters and there is almost no relief of tension." Elsewhere, he says: "Exceptionally for an opera libretto of the period, the ending of Faust is totally tragic; there is not a crumb of comfort for any of the characters left alive."

Let us hope that now we have this magnificent conclusion to the Garland Spohr project, the availability of the score will lead to performances and recordings of the opera which dates from Spohr's best period of composition - when the freshness of inspiration had not faded, yet with the added maturity which followed his contact with the classical Viennese school.

KEITH WARSOP