

SPOHR'S EARLY E MINOR VIOLIN CONCERTO (WoO.10) of 1803-04

by Keith Warsop

Introduction

IN ADDITION to the 15 numbered violin concertos published during Spohr's lifetime, three early works remained in manuscript. The G major concerto (WoO.9) composed around 1799 when Spohr was 15 was probably considered by him to be juvenilia and therefore of biographical interest only. It had long been assumed, based on Spohr's comments in his memoirs, that he began composing an unpublished concerto, in E minor (WoO.10), soon after he finished No.1 in A major, Op.1 during his study journey to St. Petersburg with Franz Eck in 1802-03, completed it during the summer of 1803 in Brunswick and subjected it to revision plus the substitution of a new slow movement in Magdeburg in the autumn of 1804 during Spohr's concert tour. Another concerto in A major (WoO.12) was thought to have been composed just before the D minor, Op.2 in 1804 in preparation for Spohr's winter tour that year (it was eventually published in 1955 edited by Folker Göthel)¹. The *Adagio* from this work was later used by Spohr in the published version of No.10 in A major, Op.62 in 1824 which indicates that by then Spohr obviously felt that he had moved so far beyond the style of the earlier work that he rejected it for complete publication.

However, stylistically the E minor seems closer to the D minor than WoO.12 (indeed some parts of it are also close to the B minor, Op.10, composed early in 1805, especially the *Rondo* finale) so evidence discovered by Franziska Rinckens, a research assistant for the Internationale Louis Spohr Gesellschaft, in Leipzig City Library in 1992 produces a much neater chronology². This set of manuscript parts of WoO.12 not only contains autograph material but is clearly older than the previously known set of parts in the Murhardt Landesbibliothek in Kassel. It shows that WoO.12 was in fact originally written possibly as early as 1802-03 and could have been the concerto Spohr began during his St Petersburg journey after the completion of Op.1. In fact, Spohr's memoirs are somewhat contradictory anyway about the chronology of the concertos as he writes about his stay in Magdeburg in October-November 1804: "At this time...I occupied myself with the remodelling of my last concerto but one, in E minor", indicating that its immediate successor was the D minor³. On the other hand, Spohr's own catalogue of his compositions has the E minor as entry No.3 while WoO.12 is entry No.6 but this catalogue was not started until some time after the completion of these two concertos and the early entries must have been made retrospectively. Spohr also notes that the diary he kept during his journey with Eck, referring to their stay in Königsberg from October 20 to November 18, 1802, "speaks of composing. From a remark about the polishing down of a concerto it is evident that at that time I did not understand how to work of a piece."⁴ This entry post-dates the completion of Op.1 (Strelitz June-July 1802 with a substitute slow movement on August 18) so could refer to a first version of either WoO.12 or the E minor. Later, Spohr certainly returned to work on WoO.12 at various times and it is quite likely that the material in Kassel represents a revision made after the first version of the E minor had been completed. The fact that WoO.12 is nearer to the Viennese classical style now becomes easier to understand in view of its revised chronological position which places it closer to the first two violin duets of Op.3 which also show the strong influence of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven.

The Early Concertos

Spohr's first fully mature violin concerto was No.2 in D minor, Op.2 composed during the summer of 1804 and performed to great acclaim during his winter tour later that year. It is the work Clive Brown considers Spohr's first masterpiece⁵ and the first which the composer himself sold to a publisher. Therefore we can consider that the four earlier surviving concertos were understood by Spohr to be "apprentice works." As a young student Spohr composed a number of violin concertos, according to his memoirs⁶, but the only surviving one is that in G major, given a date of about 1799 by Folker Göthel. This indeed may have been the work which Spohr describes as performing before the Duke of Brunswick in 1799 as an "entrance exam" towards gaining a position in the ducal orchestra⁷. If this theory is correct it would explain why Spohr allowed this manuscript alone to survive among his juvenile concertos.

The Concerto in A major which Spohr composed in 1802 during his tour with Eck was published by the composer as No.1, Op.1 but he had to pay for its publication and no doubt saw it as his "graduation piece"; certainly it shows the young composer's familiarity with the textbook "rules" of concerto form — the "masculine" first subject, "feminine" second theme, a development which makes great play with the first subject, and a regular reprise. Indeed, at 381 bars, it is the longest of all Spohr's concerto first movements. There is, however, some awkwardness; Clive Brown notes "In the Polonaise...there is an abrupt switch from A minor to F major, which can be seen as a rather naive precursor of a device he was subsequently to handle much more effectively"⁸. Quite possibly, Spohr may have later

regretted that he had not withheld it from publication just as he did with its two immediate successors, WoO.10 and 12. However, he had already asked the Duke's permission to dedicate the work to him and so was committed — even when the publisher Breitkopf demanded a fee to publish the work.

The A major, WoO.12 marks a diversion in his progress. In this work Spohr seems to be injecting a greater degree of influence from the Viennese classical school with its symphonic slow introduction and, in contrast to the march-like first movements of nearly all concertos of the French school, the 3/4 time signature for the *Allegro* with its reminiscences of Mozart's E flat symphony, K.543. The *Rondo* finale of WoO.12, too, is more in the style of Haydn or Mozart with its hunting horn rhythms and only in the technical area of the writing for the solo violin is the influence of Rode to be felt strongly.

In one respect, WoO.12, the E minor and the D minor share something in common which differentiates them from the earlier Op.1 — the condensed first movement form which starts the recapitulation with the second subject. Although this is a definite Mannheim trait with an ancestry going back to the symphonies of the founder of that school, Johann Stamitz, yet the line to Spohr is more direct, stemming from his teacher Franz Eck and the concertos of Viotti, Kreutzer and Rode. For Spohr, this type of recapitulation remained only one of the available options, utilised effectively in both his seventh and eleventh concertos but rejected in the fifth and ninth whose powerful tutti openings provide a more dramatic return at the point of recapitulation.

The E minor concerto

The present location of Spohr's autograph score of this concerto is not known, or indeed whether it has survived. A set of parts in the hand of more than one copyist plus autograph amendments is found in the Murhardt Landesbibliothek in Kassel under Signatur 2° Mus.231 immediately following similar material for WoO.12 (Signatur 2° Mus.230)⁹. This collection most probably comes from the inheritance of Carl Rundnagel (1835-1911), a pupil of Spohr and later court organist in Kassel, who received many of Spohr's manuscripts from the composer's widow, Marianne Spohr. The parts are designated as follows:

Violino prinzipale	
Flauto	Violino Primo
Clarinetto 1 in A	Violino 1 ^{mo} Rip.
Clarinetto 2 in A	Violino 2 ^{do}
Fagotto 1 ^{mo}	Violino 2 ^{do} Rip.
Fagotto 2 ^{do}	Viola
Corno 1 in G	Violoncello et Contrabasso
Corno 2 in G	Basso Rip.

The ripieno instruments play only in the orchestral tuttis; it can be presumed that first desk strings accompany the solo violin, rather than solo strings — this can be inferred from the fact that the viola part contains some passages which are obviously *divisi*. In the central *Romanza* the ripieno and wind instruments are silent.

The Violino prinzipale part is marked to play throughout the tuttis doubling the Violino Primo. It should not be assumed, however, that Spohr would have been content to have been just another member of the orchestra at these points; it is more likely that Spohr "played only occasionally and for the rest of the time [during the tuttis] he held his violin under his arm and gave the beat with motions of his bow, also he gave a sign whenever there was an entry of a new section to show where it should begin" as the *Leipziger Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* as cited by Clive Brown¹⁰ described his performance as leader in London in 1820.

There is also a possibility that the Basso ripieno part is in fact a basso continuo, even though there are no figures in the part. However, North Germany was musically conservative and when Spohr took over at Gotha in 1805 he found that the veteran Kapellmeister to whom he was nominally junior did indeed accompany vocal music in such a role at the pianoforte.

In his Editor's Report to his Bärenreiter score of WoO.12, Folker Göthel makes a number of points about inconsistencies in the source material for that work which also apply to the E minor. He says (translation kindly provided by Celia Skrine):

"In compiling the score it became apparent that there were very few mistakes in actual notes in the copies [of the parts] but the phrasing is very approximately done. There is no doubt that Spohr always paid attention to the bowing indications for the strings, sticking to the principles of natural bowing and general ensemble, especially in unison passages and where the instruments are doubled by wind. Most of the mistakes observed fall foul of these rules. They mainly concern legato bowings which are either forgotten, unusual or downright wrong or inaccurately drawn. We should, however, bear in mind that Spohr's markings were not at all schematic. It is not infrequently to be observed that he indicates different bowings for the soloist and the orchestra in reprises and parallel passages from the ones indicated

when such passages occurred for the first time. Furthermore, the individual voices often diverge from each other in phrasing in string or wind ensemble writing. No doubt Spohr was here guided by the aim of allowing special details of harmony or part-writing to come out...In large sections, dynamics are inserted in the orchestral parts only sparingly, e.g. in the alternation between tutti and solo passages the necessary *p* marking only appears in one orchestral part. Evident discrepancies, such as contradictory markings in different parts, are rare...The solo part too contains only the essential dynamics, though Spohr was famous for his variety of expression in performance and there is no reason to suppose that dynamics were absent in this case"¹¹.

Certainly, the solo part in the E minor concerto is very sparingly marked and a performer preparing the work would need carefully to follow Spohr's usual practice over the introduction of the necessary dynamic and expressive indications. A particular example of divergent bowing in parallel passages mentioned by Göthel can be found in the second subject of the first movement, in which the orchestral introduction's version should be compared with the soloist's and then again with the recapitulation.

The music

The major influences on the concerto can clearly be heard as those of on the one hand Mozart and on the other the French violin school. In the case of Mozart, the opening theme of his G minor Piano Quartet, K.478 is reflected in Spohr's first subject, announced *ff* by the orchestra, and elsewhere, especially the closing material of the exposition. The *Romanza* too is delicately poised between the typical Mozart movement of this type and the lyric interlude favoured by Viotti. An eight-bar *minore* section is perhaps influenced by the central part of the *Romanza* in Mozart's D minor Piano Concerto, K.466; such contrasts rarely appear in the slow movements of Viotti. This section also looks ahead to the *Adagio* of Spohr's Clarinet Concerto No.2 where a greatly expanded version makes a more memorable impression. The passagework is very much of the Viotti-Kreutzer-Rode stable as is the dotted *Allegretto* theme of the *Rondo* finale. It should be borne in mind that most of Viotti's later concertos — those written for the Haydn-Salomon concerts in London — did not appear in print until 1804 onwards so unless Spohr had access to manuscript copies or heard other violinists play them, his studies would have been limited to Viotti's Parisian works, those up to Concerto No.19.

One particular Spohr fingerprint is worth pointing out, showing his interest in chromaticism at this early stage in his career; the chromatic run in semi-quavers across two bars (58-59) to lead back to the main tune in the finale, but only after a full silent bar intervenes. The effect is repeated later to move from the E major contrasting section back to E minor and the main theme (bars 177-178). The orchestration is on the light side during the solo episodes (no doubt, as a work planned to be taken on tour, Spohr was making allowances for the variable quality of the orchestras he might meet) but there are some nice touches — for instance, when the soloist uses double stops in the E major part of the finale, there are delicate echoes from the horns.

As in most of Spohr's concertos there are no cadenzas — even this early in his career, despite his ambition to win fame as a virtuoso, he declined to stoop to showmanship.

The first movement *Allegro moderato* (311 bars) follows the standard classical tutti-soli divisions, ie. T-S-T-S-T. Unlike the A major concerto WoO.12, the march-like first movement of the French violin school is in evidence here, a *ff* motive being answered *p* by first violins only. The standard tutti "filling-in" hustle and bustle of the typical Viotti concerto follows but some poetic touches in the woodwind produce a more restrained atmosphere as the second subject is announced *dolce* (bar 44). A closing theme *ff* is based on the "Mozart piano quartet" reminiscence of the first subject, there are dramatic dynamic contrasts and a *ff* outburst is followed immediately by a *pp* figure on the first violins with an echo on cellos and basses as the soloist enters with a two octave descent E-E. The first solo covers bars 87-183, finishing with the usual cadential trill. The 23-bar closing tutti of the solo exposition offers a new presentation of earlier material before the solo returns with 19 bars of genuine development, succeeded by passagework leading to the recapitulation, launched in E major with the second subject at bar 228. The closing tutti of the solo exposition returns at bar 288 to round off the first movement.

The 63-bar *Romanza* has no other tempo marking and is a simple A-B-A structure as befits its title. After 24 bars of the opening lyrical theme in 6/8 time comes an eight-bar *minore* section marked *Risolto* in the solo part. A decorated version of the first theme covers bars 32-63. Throughout, only first desk strings accompany while the soloist is active in every bar.

The soloist also dominates the finale *Rondo Allegretto* (272 bars); the tutti is called on for only 34 bars in all. After the soloist's presentation of the 24-bar *Rondo* theme, there is a catchy little tutti refrain of nine bars before the soloist's first episode at bar 33. At the point where we would expect the tutti refrain to reappear, Spohr springs a surprise; it does come back but as part of the solo (bars 96-109). The return of the main *Rondo* theme follows and finally the tutti makes an appearance (bars 131-148), first with the *Rondo* theme, then with the little refrain. A decrescendo and a general pause herald a solo episode in E major featuring double stopping (bars 148-180). E minor returns with a broad repetition of material first heard from bar 91 (it is at these points that the chromatic slithers referred to earlier occur).

Passagework is extended, working up to a crescendo before a dramatic eight-bar tutti intervenes, ending on a general pause. The soloist presents the *Rondo* theme one final time, leading up to passagework and a cadential trill (bar 258). The ending is another surprise; the soloist is given the little refrain *p*, he echoes it *pp* and a two-bar tutti *ff* fanfare concludes the proceedings emphatically.

Conclusion

Spohr tells us that the E minor concerto “remained unpublished because it no longer pleased me after I had adopted Rode’s style of execution. Nevertheless I played it several times with great applause in the Winter Concerts [in Brunswick late 1803].”¹² He performed the revised version for the first time at a concert in Magdeburg on November 10, 1804, again in Halle on November 23 and in Leipzig on December 10 (the concert which produced the “rave” review from Rochlitz and established Spohr’s reputation in Germany). The planned recording of the concerto in the complete cycle by the violinist Ulf Hoelscher for the CPO label will enable all Spohr lovers to discover a work which will prove as delightful as the A major WoO.12 and be seen as the “missing link” between that concerto and the Violin Concerto No.2 in D minor, Op.2

Notes

1. Bärenreiter Verlag (Kassel 1955); Miniature score TP24; violin/piano reduction BA2309a; performing material BA2309.
2. Compact Disc CPO999145-2 (1993). Insert booklet notes by Hartmut Becker, p.11 (English translation by Susan Marie Praeder, p.24)
3. *Louis Spohr's Autobiography* (English translation, London 1865); p.69
4. *Autobiography*; p.32
5. Clive Brown. *Louis Spohr; A Critical Biography* (Cambridge 1984); p.28
6. *Autobiography*; p.6 ‘I now frequently played solos at the subscription concerts and generally some of my own compositions’; also pp.12-13 ‘One day...I tried a new concerto of my own...Engrossed with my work which I heard for the first time with the orchestra’.
7. *Autobiography*; pp.10 ‘[The Duke of Brunswick] said: “I have enquired about your abilities from your last teacher Maucourt and am now desirous to hear you play one of your own compositions” ’.
8. Brown; p.19
9. We acknowledge the friendly co-operation of Martin Wulfhorst and the Murhardt Landesbibliothek in providing microfilm copies of the material.
10. Brown; p.132
11. TP24; pp.9-11
12. *Autobiography*; p.63