

# SPOHR'S CLARINET CONCERTOS: THE TRANSMISSION OF THE TEXT

by Keith Warsop

## Introduction

**T**ODAY Spohr's four clarinet concertos are ranked with the acknowledged masterpieces for the instrument; even those who criticise Spohr's "violinistic" writing for the clarinet are drawn by the beauty of the music and the challenge it poses for the clarinetist. For instance, the German clarinetist Dieter Klöcker, in his booklet notes for the Orfeo CD C213901A (1990) writes: "Even today, some of his clarinet pieces seem to have been written against the instrument; nevertheless, the quality and richness of the music keeps drawing musicians into 'Spohr-some adventures.'"

The concertos were composed for the Sondershausen virtuoso Johann Simon Hermstedt (1778-1846) as follows:  
No.1 in C minor, Op.26 (composed Gotha, autumn 1808; first performed Sondershausen, January 1809; published 1812 in parts only, by Kühnel. Full score first published 1957).  
No.2 in E flat major, Op.57 (composed Gotha, spring 1810; first performed Frankenhausen July 22, 1810; published 1822 in parts only, by Peters — the successor of Kühnel. First publication of full score forthcoming)  
No.3 in F minor, WoO.19 (composed Gandersheim, May 1821; first performed Alexisbad, July 27, 1821; published 1885 in piano arrangement only, by Breitkopf. Full score unpublished)  
No.4 in E minor, WoO.20 (composed Kassel, August 1828; first performed Nordhausen, June 12, 1829; published 1885 in piano arrangement only, by Breitkopf. Full score first published 1976)

While these four concertos are now part of the repertoire of international soloists (among others, John Denman, Emma Johnson, Thea King, Colin Lawson, Karl Leister, Ernst Ottensamer, Antony Pay and Gervase de Peyer) it took a long time for this to happen — many years after the concertos of Mozart and Weber had been established. For an explanation of this mystery (for such it is in view of the hold many of Spohr's other works had on the repertory in the 19th century) we have to consider problems caused by the transmission of the text.

## Concerto No.1

Spohr relates the circumstances surrounding the composition of the concerto (*Autobiography* 1865 English translation page 123): "In the winter of 1808-9, I arranged some subscription concerts in the town [Gotha, where Spohr was orchestral director] for the benefit of the court orchestra ... At one of these concerts, Herr Hermstedt, director of the Harmonie-Musik to Prince Sondershausen, appeared as clarinet player and attracted much attention by his admirable performance. He had come to Gotha to request me to write a clarinet concerto for him, for which the Prince, upon the condition that Hermstedt should be put in possession of the manuscript, offered to pay a handsome gratuity. To this proposal I gladly assented, as from the immense execution, together with the brilliancy of tone, and purity of intonation possessed by Hermstedt, I felt at full liberty to give the reins to my fancy. After, that with Hermstedt's assistance, I had made myself somewhat acquainted with the technique of the instrument, I went zealously to work and completed it in a few weeks.

"Thus originated the Concerto in C minor, published a few years afterwards by Kühnel as Op.26, with which Hermstedt achieved so much success in his artistic tours, that it may be affirmed he is chiefly indebted to that for his fame. I took it over to him myself to Sondershausen, at the end of January, and initiated him in the way to execute it." In a preface to the first edition of 1812, Spohr also states: "I entrust here to clarinetists a concerto which I wrote two years ago for my friend Herrn Musikdirector Hermstedt of Sondershausen. Since at that time my knowledge of the clarinet was pretty nearly limited to its range and I therefore paid too little attention to the weaknesses of the instrument, I have thus written much that will appear to the clarinetist at first sight as impracticable. Herr Hermstedt, however, far from asking me to alter these passages, sought the more to perfect his instrument and soon, by continuous industry, arrived at the point where his clarinet had no faulty, dull, uncertain tones. In later compositions for him I could therefore let my pen run freely and did not need to fear that I should write something impracticable for him." Spohr then appends a list of the improvements Hermstedt made to his clarinet "without which this concerto cannot be properly played" and adds that passages beyond the ordinary compass of the instrument are altered in small notes in the solo part for those who do not possess the extended range.

As Spohr makes clear in his comments on the composition of the concerto, the agreement involved Hermstedt acquiring the autograph manuscript. What happened to it later is not clear. If it remained among Hermstedt's effects at his death in 1846 then, like the autograph of the fourth concerto, it may well have found its way into a private collection though, if so, it is not known whether it still survives or was destroyed through the hazard of war. There is, however, a different possibility. It will be noticed that the concerto was not published until after the composition of

No.2; likewise the second concerto was not published until after Spohr had written No.3. In each case it is possible that part of the deal involving the new work was that Spohr should receive the older one back in order to sell it to a publisher. This was quite a normal procedure with regard to virtuosi of the period; the publicity value of being able to advertise a new work as "from MS" lent credence to its novelty. It also meant that earlier works could be capitalised on by making them available to publishers when they were replaced by newer compositions (Spohr did this with his violin concertos). If this is in fact what happened, then it is most probable that it was the autograph full score which provided printer's copy and afterwards may have been cleared out as waste paper.

As can be seen from the publication information given above, none of the concertos appeared in score in the 19th century or, indeed, during the first half of the present century, although handwritten scores did circulate. The Royal Academy of Music in London holds the scores of the first two concertos written by the clarinet virtuoso Henry Lazarus around 1830 (title pages inscribed "Henry Lazarus; 2, Neville Terrace; Brompton SW") while Spohr's pupil and later colleague Moritz Hauptmann mentions in a letter to his friend Franz Hauser dated December 22, 1844: "In my earlier days I used to make scores from the parts of Spohr's Symphony in E flat major, his C minor Clarinet Concerto, and many other things. It was purely a labour of love." (*The Letters of a Leipzig Cantor*, London 1892).

So when Bärenreiter Verlag published the first-ever score of a Spohr clarinet concerto in 1957 and chose No.1 in C minor, the editor, Friedrich Leinert, had to undertake his work without knowledge of the autograph. In his preface Leinert gives information about his source material as follows: "This edition [the first one of 1812] appeared in parts, not in score. Since the above edition exhibits a great many obscurities it had already years ago been compared with the manuscript parts — presumably not dating from Spohr's time — in the former Prussian State Theatre in Kassel, which was destroyed by the accident of war. But this material also shows a number of inaccuracies. As a final comparison, the Friedrich Demnitz edition of the piano score (C.F. Peters edition No.6553) was used." The Demnitz editions for clarinet and piano of the first two concertos came out in 1882 and it is not known whether he had access to further now lost material to help with his editorial work.

#### Concerto No.2

Spohr's comments in the *Autobiography* on the composition of this concerto are brief: "I was now obliged to lay aside for some time the work I had begun [on the opera *Der Zweikampf mit der Geliebten*] for Hermstedt urgently besought me to write another new clarinet concerto for him, to play at the [Frankenhausen Musical] Festival. Although sorry to be disturbed in my studies, I allowed myself to be persuaded, and finished it in sufficient time for Hermstedt to practise it well under my direction" (English translation Page 140). We have seen in studying the first concerto that No.2 was published soon after the composition of the third. As with No.1, it is not known what happened to the autograph but it is quite likely that our speculation with regard to No.1 can also apply to No.2; ie that it survives in a private collection or was destroyed during the war or was scrapped by the publisher after the printer had done with it. However, this is not the whole story. There exists in the possession of the Internationale Louis Spohr Gesellschaft in Kassel a 19th century handwritten orchestral score which shows a significant difference in the concerto's opening bars. The well-known entry of the solo clarinet early on is here given to the orchestral oboe. Actually, this makes musical sense as the oboe and the flute exchange this figure. The provenance of this score is not clear but it raises a number of speculative points:

1. Was this how Spohr first conceived the concerto in 1810 and was it Hermstedt who introduced the early entry for the solo part? If so, then Spohr adopted it for the first publication.
2. Alternatively, was the solo entry there from the first and did Hermstedt delete it in order to delay his entry until the close of the first tutti in order to "make 'em wait" — always a credo with many virtuosi. That would mean that the score in question has descended from Hermstedt's estate. Some circumstantial evidence that this may have been the case comes from the third and fourth concertos where the full scale opening tuttis before the entry of the solo go counter to Spohr's development in his other concertos. However, if this is so, then Spohr stuck to his original thoughts when it came to publication.
3. Does this score have anything to do with Hermstedt or Spohr at all. Perhaps it stems from a later clarinetist who also wanted to "make 'em wait".

Whatever the answer, there is no doubt that the version everyone plays is to be preferred (so that Spohr admirers will want to give the Master credit for this idea). The forthcoming full score (the first-ever of this concerto) edited by Maurice Powell, which is based on the Peters' parts of 1822, retains this version.

#### Concerto No.3

We have seen that Spohr was able to get his first two concertos published. It was otherwise with the third and fourth concertos. Spohr relates in his memoirs that the autographs remained in Hermstedt's possession. Of No.3, he records: "[In 1821] I received a letter from my old friend Hermstedt in which he invited me on the part of the directors of the baths of Alexisbad in the Harz, to give a concert in the course of the approaching season. He offered at the same time to make all the necessary arrangements beforehand so that I should not require to stay there longer than a few days. He also urgently pressed me to write a new clarinet concerto for him and promised, if he received it sufficiently early, to

play it for the first time at the Alexisbad concert. As I liked to write for Hermstedt, who at that time was without doubt the first of all living clarinet virtuosi, I consented to his proposal and set to work immediately. After despatching to him the new concerto in F minor I wrote for myself and my wife another potpourri ... Of this excursion [to Alexisbad] I have now but very faint reminiscences. I neither know what we played at the concert, nor how the new clarinet concerto pleased, and the less so, that since that time I have not heard it again; for it has remained altogether in Hermstedt's hands, and has never been published."

That first publication came in 1885, thanks to Spohr's pupil Carl Rundnagel, who prepared an edition for clarinet and piano. Rundnagel had obviously known the work for some time as, in 1877, he had published the Adagio only in his arrangement for clarinet and string quartet. It was no doubt Spohr's centenary year of 1884 which gave the incentive to publish previously unknown works. Another Spohr pupil, Hans Michael Schletterer, provided an introduction to the 1885 edition in which he stated that it had been Hermstedt's intention to publish both the third and fourth concertos but his death prevented this plan being carried out.

It is not known whether Rundnagel had Spohr's autograph available, used a copy of the score or worked from a set of parts. However, although Breitkopf published the work in the clarinet-piano arrangement only, they did also offer handwritten parts for hire. Soon after this a handwritten conducting score was in circulation which did not reflect Spohr's usual orchestral practice. Nevertheless, what does appear to be an authentic copy is now in the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna in what is obviously a late 19th century hand. Whether the unauthentic full score (which can now be heard on the Naxos recording) was based on this is not known nor whether it emanated from the Hermstedt estate. Additions include a fanfare heralding the first movement recapitulation, expansion of timpani rolls into rhythmic patterns and much doubling of cellos by horns. Perhaps the reason for its existence is that it attempts to produce sonorities better suited for the larger halls and orchestras prevalent by the 1880s and as such may have been compiled in house by Breitkopf staff copyists.

To date no full score of the third concerto has been published nor are there any plans to do so. As for the autograph, as that for the fourth concerto was found in a private collection some 30 years ago, there are still hopes that No.3 may also be turned up though, again, the accident of war may have brought about its destruction.

#### **Concerto No.4**

Spohr says little about the composition of this concerto (English translation Page 167): "My new clarinet concerto in E minor which I had written for Hermstedt for this musical festival [Nordhausen, June 4-5 1829], met with no less approbation [than Maurer's Concertante for four violins which, 'as we had practised together that celebrated piece of music very assiduously, the applause was quite extraordinary'], but it is no longer in my possession, neither do I now know whether it is still in existence." The subsequent story of the Fourth Concerto is very similar to that of No.3 with the important difference that the autograph was tracked down in the 1960s. As with No.3, the concerto appeared in an arrangement by Carl Rundnagel for clarinet and piano in 1885 and Breitkopf also had handwritten parts available on hire together with an unauthentic conductor's score which includes four horns and three trombones compared with Spohr's original of two horns and one trombone. Presumably its provenance is the same as that for No.3. The title page gives the editor's name as Rischka of Leipzig, possibly a Breitkopf house arranger.

It was Dr. Herbert Motschmann, director of the Gotha State Museum, who was successful in finding the autograph in a private collection in the 1960s and the owner made a photocopy available as the basis for Heinrich Geuser's edition of the full score which was issued in 1976 by Hans Schneider of Tutzing as a volume in the *Neue Auswahl der Werke*. Finally, in 1993 the Internationale Louis Spohr Gesellschaft acquired the autograph itself. The discovery and publication of the autograph enabled comparisons to be made with Rundnagel's arrangement which is generally faithful to Spohr and therefore points to similar rectitude in his edition of the Third Concerto. The most noticeable change comes in bars 115-117 of the finale where Spohr originally gave the solo clarinet part to Clarinet I of the orchestra but later changed his mind and transferred it to the soloist. Rundnagel reverts to Spohr's first thoughts here, keeping the solo paused. Another important change comes in the closing stages of the first movement when Spohr has the solo clarinet join the violins for the final bars but Rundnagel keeps it silent from bar 315 to the end. Some variants and *ossia* passages in the solo part in the autograph are presumed to be in Hermstedt's hand. In bars 129-130 of the finale Spohr originally gave material to the soloist but he then changed this, moving it to the flute and oboe, thus providing a woodwind exchange with the soloist who has the same music in bars 132-133.

Generally, there are few problems with Spohr's autograph score. As Heinrich Geuser notes in his editor's preface to the published score: "The task of arranging this for the requirements of a modern full score was made easier because Spohr's manuscript is particularly clear and reliable. The discrepancies in expression and phrasing marks, a feature of Spohr's early manuscripts, were hardly met with here."

#### **A footnote on the alleged "Konzertstück"**

Much confusion has been caused by claims that the *Recitative and Adagio* of Spohr's Sixth Violin Concerto, composed early in 1809, was based on a *Konzertstück* for clarinet and orchestra written in 1804 or 1805 for the Brunswick clarinetist Tretbach. The origins of these claims go back to Schletterer's introduction to Rundnagel's edition of the

Third Clarinet Concerto in 1885. However, Rundnagel later established that this claim was erroneous (manuscript note in Rundnagel's own copy of this edition now in the Murhard Library and the Landesbibliothek in Kassel).

The mix-up has also been developed by the fact that versions of this movement did appear in arrangements for clarinet and orchestra and were reviewed as early as the 1820s. Further confusion ensued when the violin virtuoso Ernst (1814-1865) utilised the *Recitative* as the introduction to his own *Elegy* for violin and piano, published in 1846, for arrangements of this for clarinet and piano soon followed. One such was by Busoni, made especially for his father who was a clarinet virtuoso, and this arrangement has been included by Dieter Klöcker on the Orfeo recording mentioned in the introduction to this article.