

THE BEGINNER'S SPOHR

THIS is not, despite the title, a list of Spohr's works to which newcomers to his music should listen; it is a brief survey of the basic literature on Spohr in English, directed at helping those who have just discovered his music and would like to find out more about him. Unfortunately, we believe that everything listed here is now out of print though a number of items are not too difficult to acquire from specialist secondhand music book shops.

The most important source book on Spohr is, of course, his much-quoted autobiography: *Louis Spohr's Autobiography* (London 1865; second edition 1878; reprinted by Da Capo Press 1969) translated from the original German edition of 1860-61. The English translation is somewhat abridged but not damagingly so. A more modern (American) English translation is *The Musical Journeys of Louis Spohr* by Henry Pleasants (University of Oklahoma Press 1961). Even though this is restricted to the subject matter of the title, as the first half of Spohr's career was practically one uninterrupted journey the majority of the most interesting pages of the original are here. For German readers we would especially recommend *Spohr's Lebenserinnerungen* (Tutzing 1968) which restores much which was cut from Spohr's original manuscript (because of censorship worries) and amplifies the text from letters and diary entries. The whole is extensively annotated by the editor, that supreme Spohr scholar, the late Folker Göthel.

A much simpler version of Spohr's life is *The Forgotten Master* by Dorothy Moulton Mayer (London 1959) which is a retelling of the material in the autobiography intermixed with the historical and political developments of the time. It is particularly valuable for English readers for its details of the various political events in Kassel and the state of Hesse which are not easily available in more general summaries of German history.

The most important modern book on Spohr is *Louis Spohr: A Critical Biography* by Clive Brown (Cambridge 1984) which is a wide-ranging "life and works" study and especially to be commended for its in-depth treatment of Spohr's reception in and relationship with England and also for its authoritative coverage and evaluation of all areas of Spohr's oeuvre.

Another desirable Spohr publication is *Louis Spohr: Bilder und Dokumente seiner Zeit* by Herfried Homburg (Kassel 1968). The author's portrait of Spohr's artistic personality is the most inspiring we have and the book's large collection of illustrations and facsimiles means that it is still worth acquiring, even by those with little or no German.

For correspondence, the most important book is in German only: *Louis Spohr: Briefwechsel mit seiner Frau Dorette* (Kassel 1957) but English readers will find much of value in *The Letters of a Leipzig Cantor* translated and arranged by A.D. Coleridge (London 1892). These are the letters of Moritz Hauptmann (Spohr's assistant in Kassel before he moved to Leipzig) to Franz Hauser, Spohr and others which contain much information about the day-to-day life in Kassel at the time.

Finally, for a complete knowledge of what music Spohr composed, *Thematisch-bibliographisches Verzeichnis der Werke von Louis Spohr* by Folker Göthel (Tutzing 1981) is the essential thematic catalogue on our composer.

There are, of course, many other books and articles on Spohr (though we would warn against accepting the biased viewpoints in older editions of Grove without knowing something of the musical polemics of the time) but by then one will no longer be a beginner in Spohr.