

# SPOHR AT THE BRISTOL MUSIC FESTIVAL

by Peter Skrine

ON Tuesday 21 October 1873 the doors of the Colston Hall in Bristol opened for the city's first Music Festival. Reporting the event the next day, the *Clifton Chronicle and Directory* told its readers with some complacency that 'The Bristol Music Festival commenced yesterday, and with the exception of most unfavourable weather, the promoters and the public have good reason to be satisfied' (p.5), while the *Bristol Daily Times and Mirror* more realistically observed 'the day was miserably wet', but went on to claim with satisfaction: 'Certainly never in the musical history of Bristol or Clifton has such a vast audience assembled before.' Indeed the significance of the occasion was not lost on *The Times*, which devoted over half a column in its issue on Wednesday 22 October to a report on the new Festival. Despite the unpropitious weather, it told its readers, 'not far short of 1,800' people found their way to the Colston Hall, and were 'recompensed by a very fine performance of Haydn's oratorio, *The Creation*, under the direction of Mr Charles Hallé — with chorus of over 300 and an orchestra (Mr Hallé's own long famous Manchester orchestra) upwards of 80 in number'.

Hallé had brought his orchestra to Clifton the previous winter and it had met with general approval, the *Daily Bristol Times and Mirror* tells us, and this trial run had no doubt been crucial in setting the Festival up and getting it off the ground. The paper also obligingly provides details of the orchestra's composition at the concert at which the Festival made its one attempt at presenting Spohr as a symphonic composer: it consisted of 16 first and 14 second violins, 10 violas, 10 cellos and 10 basses, and comprised 'upward of' 80 players in all (i.e. 20 woodwind, brass and timpani). The *Bristol Mercury* complements these statistics in its adulatory article welcoming the Festival on 25 October 1873. 'Hallé's band of 81 artistes contributed materially to the success of the Festival,' it writes, adding that the chorus comprised '80 sopranoes [sic], 60 altoes, 80 tenors and 80 basses', and that the 'acceptableness of the festival music' was evident from the applause they earned. 'Such a congregation of musical talent has never been seen before in Bristol' (the principal soloists were, as we shall see, singers of the first rank). The only misfortune connected with the festival was the bad weather. 'Most of the performances', we read, 'began and ended in rain.'

The opening programme was significant as a declaration of intent. Like the other great English music festivals of the nineteenth century, the Bristol Music Festival, which was to continue at more or less three-yearly intervals until 1912, was essentially a choral event which drew on the active but unfocused enthusiasm for choral singing in the Bristol region but relied heavily for its orchestral component on Hallé's Manchester orchestra, whereas Manchester, though a far more active musical centre, had no regular festival of its own during the late Victorian era. Haydn's great oratorio symbolised the situation and Bristol's musical aspirations to emerge from musical chaos to the organised unity and confident purpose of 'Sing the Lord, ye voices all!' By the end of the century it could claim with justification that it had achieved its aims: it had put Bristol on the musical map of Britain and had offered its audiences a broad and well-planned survey of the development and continuing vitality of English and European choral music, while at the same time allowing some space for orchestral music in the 'miscellaneous concerts' which were part of its overall programme from the start.

Oratorio provided the major part of most music festival programmes, as was to be expected in provincial cities in the later nineteenth century, and Bristol Music Festival was no exception. The shared experience of an oratorio performance, in which aesthetic pleasure was fused with moral uplift and religious fervour, was integral to the period's conception of public art and to its awareness of music's ability to bring all sectors of society together in a common and 'higher' purpose. On this score the *Bristol Mercury*, a decidedly lower middle-class newspaper, voiced admiration tempered with some critical reservations not as regards the quality of the performances but concerning the social dimension. 'In the evenings the hall was a blaze of colour, as the whole of the audience were in evening dress', it wrote — a touch of descriptive colour which was followed by the statement: 'It is only to be regretted that it could

not be made possible to have one performance at which the prices would have given the masses an opportunity of showing their love of music, and, at the same time, their sympathy with the institutions in behalf of which the festival has been held,' an allusion to the Festival Committee's avowed intention to devote any profits the Festival made to the city's medical charities. The 1873 Festival was certainly orientated towards oratorio. It opened with Haydn's *Creation*, continued on the Wednesday afternoon with *Elijah*, concluded with *Messiah*, and took in Rossini's *Stabat Mater* and Mendelssohn's *Hymn of Praise*, that effectively hybrid masterpiece in which symphony blossoms into oratorio. Contemporary music was not forgotten either. The Festival had commissioned a choral work from George Alexander Macfarren (1813-87), who was shortly to be elected William Sterndale Bennett's successor as Professor of Music at Cambridge: Macfarren obliged with *St John the Baptist*, and its enthusiastic reception by the Festival audience was decisive in placing the Bristol Music Festival in the front rank of English music festivals because, as the programme for the Second Festival proudly tells us in 1876, 'it was acknowledged the finest oratorio of recent date.'

Haydn, Mendelssohn, Macfarren, Rossini and Handel: one looks for Spohr's name in vain. Yet Spohr, too, featured in the programme of the first festival, though not as a large-scale choral composer. That was to come in 1876. In 1873 his music was represented by the *Andante* from the Fourth Symphony, 'Die Weihe der Töne', which was included in the second half of the Tuesday miscellaneous concert (the first half had been taken up with Rossini's *Stabat Mater*). This second half had opened with the Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; then came 'Soave sia il vento' and 'Tom Bowling', two nautical items calculated to appeal to the taste of the ship-builders, merchants and seafarers in the audience at a time when Bristol was still a major sea-port. Then came Spohr's orchestral contribution, immediately followed by 'Great God of Love', the most famous 'madrigal' by Bristol's most distinguished musical son, the Clifton-born Robert Lucas Pearsall, a composer and musicologist closely associated with the founding of the Bristol Madrigal Society in 1837, and with whose work in Germany in the domain of sacred music his contemporary Spohr may well have been acquainted.<sup>i</sup> Mozart's 'Non più andrai' and 'Invano il fido' from Meyerbeer's *Robert the Devil* then led on to 'Sigh no more, ladies', 'The Harmonious Blacksmith', 'Mezzanotte' from Flotow's opera *Martha* (delightfully set in Richmond, Surrey) and finally (the evening was by now getting late!) Weber's suitably nocturnal *Freischütz* overture.

The programme was devised with skill and a sense of fun, no doubt by Charles Hallé in collaboration with Alfred Stone, the choir-master whose presence behind the scenes did much to get the Festival off the ground, and it gives us a rare opportunity to see Spohr in context. The *Andante* from 'The Power of Sound' [sic] was, one may assume, the Second Movement of the symphony, which is marked *Andantino*. A delight on the ear, but a challenge to conductors and performers, it is a piece by no means out of place in this musical context. Its intricate fusion of different tempi, rhythms and orchestral colours in order to depict in sound the sequence and interplay of childhood, youth and courtship in the rich fabric and harmony of human life come at an appropriate moment in a concert which began at 8 p.m. with the music of a dream, dwelt on the various aspects of love, and ended with Weber's romantic musical nightmare.

The predominance of German music is evident at once in the programme of the 1873 Bristol Music Festival, and was characteristic of musical taste in Britain at the time: so, too, is the alternation in the 'miscellaneous concert' of vocal and orchestral items, the inclusion of English favourites, and the imposition of Italian texts on nineteenth-century French and German operatic arias. A closer look at Spohr's place in the Festival programmes can tell us a good deal about public and critical responses to his music in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and is all the more worth undertaking because the Bristol Music Festival is one of the least known and certainly the least researched of all the great English civic music festivals. It was founded relatively late, and well after its principal competitors, the Norwich Triennial Festival (1824), with which Spohr had a particularly close personal relationship,<sup>ii</sup> the festivals at Birmingham (1768) and Leeds (1858), and of course the Three Choirs Festival (1724). Its duration

was relatively short: like the Birmingham Festival it last took place in 1912 (its 13th meeting). Yet for 50 years its importance was widely recognized and its achievements admired well beyond its own area.

Spohr's name and music were associated with the Bristol Festival from the start. As a record of changing musical tastes and fluctuating reputations, the programmes of the 1873 and subsequent Bristol Festivals therefore provide an interesting background to the changes which Spohr's own reputation was undergoing. A closer examination of his contributions to the later festivals can give us a first-hand insight into the changing attitudes to his music at a time when, as Clive Brown observes, he was still 'conventionally included in a list of the greatest composers in history', but 'a gathering cloud of dismissive criticism was gathering round his works.'<sup>iii</sup> The treatment he received from the Festival's promoters and planners and from the journalists and critics who reviewed its concerts can tell us much about the shift in critical and popular response to his music between 1873 and 1882, and illustrates the ambivalent attitudes towards his art which have always characterized its reception and which makes him one of the most fascinating and controversial of major composers.

By the time the Second Festival took place in October 1876 (its patron was now Queen Victoria herself, and the Duke of Beaufort, the leading local nobleman, had to content himself with its presidency), the critic of *The Daily Bristol Times and Mirror* could write as follows:

'The Festival of 1873 will be historical as having produced the finest oratorio of recent date, professor M's *St John the Baptist*, and although this year the society has not been instrumental in adding a new work to the long list of oratorios, it has done something towards giving the public a better knowledge of the beauties of neglected works, and we hope to see the run which has led to the resuscitation (for so it may be termed) of Spohr's *Fall of Babylon* extended by the production at some future day of the same composer's *Crucifixion*, a work of equal breadth and beauty. At the same time the committee has wisely met the public taste in giving again the familiar works, 'The Elijah', 'The Messiah', and the 'Hymn of Praise', for people generally like to hear most what they know best, and these works have become so familiar to the public that no Festival could hope to succeed which did not include them in its programme.' (Wednesday 18 October 1876)

The 1876 Festival marked the apogee of Spohr's musical prestige in Bristol. The concert on the second night, Wednesday 18 October, went on 'till nearly twelve' (*Daily Bristol Times and Mirror*), which must have been rather hard on him, because it ended with a performance of the overture to his most successful opera, *Jessonda*.<sup>iv</sup> More importantly, the second Festival presented eight major choral works (in four days!): *Elijah* and *The Hymn of Praise*, Beethoven's now semi-forgotten but then much appreciated *Engedi* or *Mount of Olives* and *Choral Fantasia*, Handel's *Israel in Egypt* and *Messiah*, Verdi's *Requiem* — and Spohr's *The Fall of Babylon*. The performance of *The Fall of Babylon* took place in the afternoon of Thursday 19 October at 1 p.m., and its juxtaposition with Verdi's new *Requiem* was picked on by the critic of the *Daily Bristol Times and Mirror*. Speaking of Spohr's oratorio, he writes:

'The production of this great work was one of the features of the Festival week, and next to Verdi's *Requiem* it has commanded the greatest amount of preparation from the Festival Choir [Mr Alfred Stone trained the chorus: he was the chorus master for the first two festivals]. It is new to the present generation of Bristol musicians, for although it has been performed in Bristol before, it is more than thirty years ago, and it is therefore regarded with all the interest of a new work. Its appearance in the programme in 1876 is creditable to the taste of the committee, for this oratorio only requires to be better known to be more widely appreciated. It abounds with choral beauties, and the solo music is of a very striking character'

Both works were 'new' as far as Bristol was concerned, the *Requiem* because it had never been heard there before, and was being given only two years after its premiere in Milan in 1874 and within a year of its introduction to London audiences at the Albert Hall in 1875, the oratorio because it had been forgotten (six public performances had taken place in the Victoria Rooms in Clifton in 1846, and it had of course been given in Norwich, London, Manchester and Hereford). The perceptive critic of the *Daily Bristol Times and Mirror* homed in on the implications of the juxtaposition of the two works: 'It has

become the fashion of late to keep on adding to our extensive repertoire of sacred compositions while a large tract of the old oratorio music still remains unexplored and neglected.' In so doing he was already anticipating the keynote of the Spohr revival in the our own time. But what did he and his contemporaries make of Spohr's oratorio when they heard it in 1876? Its revival prompted some long and detailed comments ranging from the detailed report on the performance itself in the *Clifton Chronicle and Directory* on 25 October to the critical appreciation carried by the *Daily Bristol Times and Mirror* on 18 October and the long essay devoted to it by *The Times* on the same day. These responses will now be cited and considered in some detail.

As one would expect of a local newspaper, the *Daily Bristol Times and Mirror* provides a lively account of the performance, opening with a remark which deserves attention nowadays, when such nineteenth-century niceties tend to be forgotten as churches actually promote themselves as multifunctional community centres rather than as houses of prayer:

'The *Fall of Babylon* has some resemblance to the oratorio of *St John the Baptist*. It could not be performed at the Three Choirs Musical Festival, or in any place where the festival meetings are held in a cathedral. Some of the scenes are quite unsuitable to a place of worship, introducing, as they do, bacchanalian songs and military marches. In this respect the Bristol Festival has the advantage of being held in the Colston Hall.'

A full summary of the work is given. We are then also told that 'The listener cannot fail to be struck by the dramatic character of the *Fall of Babylon* and the great beauty of some of the orchestral effects.' The second scene, in which a Jewish mother sings as she watches over her sleeping child, is described as 'undoubtedly one of the most picturesque in the work'. The performance was apparently a good one, for the Festival had engaged the 'Welsh nightingale', Edith Wynne (1842-97), a soprano admired for her 'passionate expression and the simplicity of her pathos'. Adding a rare touch of colour to its description, the paper adds that 'Attired in a handsome dress of marone [sic] velvet', Madame Wynne 'won all hearts'. The scene, 'sung in the sympathetic style of Mme Edith Wynne', created a profound impression, the critic recalls; he later comes back to what must have been the highlight of the performance to reiterate that it was sung 'with such intensity of pathos that many were moved by it'. From these remarks it is clear that, like the Bristol critic, most people in the audience were in 1876 still susceptible to the appeal of Spohr's characteristic vein of *Innigkeit*. The male soloists were good, too. High praise is given to Mr Maybrick as Cyrus, a part which suited his voice and style better than some of the solos in *Elijah*: Michael Maybrick (1844-1913), the composer of 'The Holy City', was a well-known baritone. No such praise is given to the exponent of the role of the Babylonian king; we are merely told that 'Mr Henry Pope, a local singer, was Belshazzar.' It was a point on which the *Clifton Chronicle and Directory* was to take a different view, as we shall see. The article sums up its evaluation by describing *The Fall of Babylon* as 'one of the most dramatic oratorios ever written, but adding: 'perhaps it would be more fitting to call it a sacred drama'. The overall picture emerges of an artistic and musical success. The audience may have been smaller than that at some of the other concerts (attendances at *The Fall of Babylon* were 839 secured seats and 1,141 unsecured, giving a total of 1,980,<sup>vi</sup> but at the close it 'applauded very heartily'. In the view of the *Daily Bristol Times and Mirror*, Bristol could be proud of its treatment of Spohr: 'It is questionable whether a body of singers of the same strength as the Bristol Festival Chorus could be found in all the country to perform the music of such a formidable programme as perfectly throughout. [...] In bringing off the *Fall of Babylon* so satisfactorily the choir have passed the Rubicon of their difficulties.'

Readers of the *Clifton Chronicle and Directory* on 25 October 1876 were also treated to a review of the performance of Spohr's oratorio, though this newspaper otherwise fails to report on the Festival. Perhaps Mr Pope, rather than Spohr, had something to do with this? It gives more details about the singers than its rival, but one suspects that this is because its report is based on a copy of the programme and fired by local patriotism:

‘The fourth oratorio in this year’s Festival, that performed on Thursday, was Spohr’s *Der “Fall Babylons”* [sic], first produced at a Norwich musical festival, and one of the composer’s most attractive works [...] with Madame Edith Wynne as the Jewish mother and Mr Cummings, tenor, as the prophet. The chorus throughout were most effective, and the trio, “Lord, acclaim,” for contralto, tenor, and bass, sustained by Madame Patey, Mr Harper Kearton. and Mr Maybrick, was one of the features of the performance. Mr H. Pope, and a local bass of much promise, as Belshazzar, delivered, “Slaves, do you dare,” in an excellent manner, and Madame Patey, as Nicotris [sic], his mother, shared the duets “Forbear, my son,” with him. Mr Maybrick also contributed to the success of the oratorio, which is one of Spohr’s best instrumental works.’

Here, too, a favourable response is given both to the work itself and to the performance, while more information is provided about the performers. We learn that the role of Belshazzar’s mother, Nitocris, was taken by Janet Monach Patey, née Whytock (1842-94), Britain’s leading concert contralto in the 1870s and 1880s, while that of the Prophet Daniel was taken by another highly acclaimed singer, the tenor William Hayman Cummings (1831-1915), who was shortly afterwards to become Professor of Singing at the Royal Academy of Music. An even clearer impression emerges that the Bristol Festival revival of Spohr’s *The Fall of Babylon* was of the highest quality England in the 1870s could provide.

Finally, we come to the long review carried by *The Times* on Friday 20 October. Because of its importance and complexity it deserves to be quoted in full:

‘All the mannerisms distinguishing Spohr’s earlier epoch, mannerisms that go far to disfigure even *The Last Judgment*, his shortest and happiest effort in that higher branch of artistic development to display excellence in which was ever his earnest, though for the most part vain, desire, are in this oratorio manifested to such a degree that before the second part has proceeded half-way the ear of the devoutest listener begins to tire, and long before the end is reached has lost by slow degrees its faculty of appreciation. Yet, after its first performance, at the Norwich Festival of 1842, although Mendelssohn’s *Paulus* had been given to the world three years previously, the *Fall of Babylon* was, by some admiring critics, pronounced “the grandest work since Handel” [...] Opinions have materially changed since then, and the *Fall of Babylon* is now consigned to its legitimate place, as comparatively the least successful effort of the composer in the direction of his highest aspirations. That it contains many expressive passages, many phrases of true melodic beauty, and not a few evidences of marked dignity and power, none can deny. Nor can there be two opinions about the masterly way in which the voices are written for, whether alone, as in song, variously combined, as in duet, trio, and quartet, or employed simultaneously, as in chorus. The scoring for the orchestra, too, is masterly, if now and then so overdone that its sustained harmonious richness becomes more or less what Mendelssohn used characteristically to describe as “cloying”. The dressing up, however, is simply a mechanical process. In looking for the absolute idea we are at a loss to understand why such studiously gorgeous attire should be required for it. Spohr’s predilection for chromatic harmony is in this oratorio indulged to so great an excess that one feels irresistibly moved, from time to time, to mutter — “Oh, for a half-dozen bars of genuine Handel! Oh, for some diatonic progressions!” It has been suggested, not without a fair show of reason, that Richard Wagner, when, with his accustomed force, he hurled his terrible anathema against the “tyranny of the tone-families”, was in a measure influenced by the chromatic fever prevalent in his younger days, the chief source of which was to be found in the music of Spohr — so little resembling that of Beethoven, Weber, Schubert, Mendelssohn, and Schumann, Spohr’s contemporaries. [...]

The oratorio of the *Fall of Babylon*, however, like all that Spohr has left us, is welcome enough on occasions, and at the respectable age of 34 may be considered legitimately entitled to its “passe partout”. But a performance of it entire, even so generally admirable as that of today, under the direction of Mr Hallé — a performance almost inducing us to overlook the want of contrast, which is one of its special failings, and to believe that the “captive Hebrews, the luxurious Babylonians, and the Persians in their pride of conquest”, were each and all endowed with characteristic

colouring, instead of being all monotonously “Spohrish”, should constitute exclusively the entertainment. After such a feast no more is wanting.

If, after an attentive hearing of the *Fall of Babylon*, anything would bring consolation, Beethoven’s *Mount of Olives* was precisely the work. All the essential qualities wanting in Spohr are in this single oratorio of the greatest among poetical musicians found in ripe luxuriance. [...] Long as was the programme, the sense of weariness faded away to the light [tight?] and vigorous music of Beethoven [...] Spohr and Beethoven were placed side by side, and an example afforded of how an oratorio produced when Beethoven was comparatively young could totally eclipse one of much more ambitious character written by Spohr after almost a lifetime’s experience.’

This is criticism of another order, and the major assessment of Spohr’s achievement to have come out of the Bristol Music Festival. In the main, it is also one with which the modern listener may concur. Though not without his idiosyncracies, the anonymous reviewer is discerning. With the oratorio’s penultimate chorus, ‘Lord, thy arm hath been uplifted’, and its calculated juxtapositions of ‘cloying chromaticism’ and evenly progressing Lutheran chords still sounding in his ears, he is already beginning to voice the twentieth century listener’s reservations. Like the many listeners who greeted *The Fall of Babylon* with enthusiasm at its first performance in Norwich in 1842, he is however still fully appreciative of the way Spohr writes for voices and full of admiration for his masterly orchestration; he is also alive to the contrast between Spohr’s music and that of his now better-known contemporaries, and senses the ambivalent relationship of Wagner to them and him. Though unaware of the irony in his preference for Beethoven’s *Mount of Olives*, the work which followed *The Fall of Babylon* at the same Thursday afternoon concert after an interval of 20 minutes, and which has since fallen out of the repertoire and public awareness in much the same way as Spohr’s own, he makes a valuable point when he plays Spohr off against the Victorians’ favourite oratorio composer, Mendelssohn, whose religious music, so long confidently dismissed as ‘cloying’, is now once again recognised as intellectually stringent and harmonically robust. The reappraisal of Mendelssohn since the 1970s should at least allow Spohr to resume his place as one of the nineteenth-century’s greatest masters in the romantic manner, a manner all too easily trivialised as sentimental because, thanks to Walton and his *Belshazzar’s Feast* (1931), we have lost the sense his 1876 reviewer still had for the less audible but no less complex ironies, both harmonic and emotional, of German romantic music. Like Spohr’s contemporaries, his 1876 Bristol audience heard *The Fall of Babylon* with different ears and with a different attitude towards sacred music. Only thus can we account for the particular esteem in which his music was held by those admirers of modern German culture in England and elsewhere who appreciated its qualities.<sup>viii</sup> But when the reviewer exclaims ‘Oh, for a dozen bars of genuine Handel!’ he gives voice to a longer-lived and truer sense of English musical values.

There is no mention of the first evening concert of the Second Bristol Festival in the article in *The Times*. Presumably, therefore, its author had not had the rare opportunity of submitting himself to the most startling comparison the Festival’s bold programming offered: Spohr’s *Fall of Babylon* and Verdi’s *Requiem*, a work totally devoid of the ‘Spohrish’ monotony of which he complains. Or was it the same reviewer who on Thursday 19 October wrote the *Times* review of the *Requiem* in which we are informed to our bewilderment that Verdi’s choral pieces are ‘easier-going than Mendelssohn’ and that there is no more to be said [about the *Requiem*] than has been said on various occasions, only to be told that ‘the unanimously favourable reception of [the *Requiem*] may, it is hoped, encourage the most popular of living composers to advance further on the new path he has struck out for himself.’ Perhaps the weather was to blame? The *Bristol Daily Times and Mirror* records that at the Verdi concert the room was oppressively hot: ‘Not only were the audience and the performers in great discomfort the whole of the evening, but the heat had an effect upon the strings of the instruments, which kept snapping throughout the performance’ (Wednesday 18 October). When in doubt, blame the weather and spare the Italian! Reading the reviews of the 1876 Bristol Musical Festival and the attitudes to Spohr they convey, the modern reader is astonished to find that its daring juxtaposition of Spohr and Verdi in the context of

Handel, Beethoven and Mendelssohn should have attracted no critical response. Can the critics really have been deaf to the enormous emotional, spiritual and artistic contrasts between them? Or is there perhaps a greater affinity between the composer of the *Requiem* for Manzoni and the composer of *The Last Judgment* and *The Consecration of Sound* than our inherited musical prejudices would suggest?

The first four Bristol music festivals demonstrate that, contrary to superficial received opinion, Victorian musical taste was as eclectic as its architecture (Pevsner describes the façade of the Colston Hall, built in 1867, as being in a 'vaguely Byzantine manner').<sup>viii</sup> Provincial English audiences were as open to novelty and innovation as those of any other period. However it also shows that the core canon of choral works in the active repertoire was gradually taking shape. Thus the Fourth Festival in 1882, at which Spohr's music was last heard, was built around *Elijah* and *Messiah* (now almost obligatory for the last concert), but also included performances of Beethoven's *Mass in D* and Rossini's *Moses in Egypt*, which, thanks to its sacred subject, was able, when disguised as an oratorio, to delight parts of the Victorian public which Italian opera could not reach. At the same time it also showed it was in the van of progress by featuring Gounod's sadly neglected first oratorio, *The Redemption*, which was premièred at the Birmingham Festival and also performed in New York in the same year, but did not reach Paris until 1884. Its other 'contemporary' offering was *Jason*, a cantata by Alexander Mackenzie, one of the towering figures of the Victorian musical establishment and Macfarren's successor at the Royal Academy of Music. Bristol introduced it to the public, but it sank without trace: the *Times*'s comment on *St John the Baptist* holds good in this case, too: 'How many such essays have been made and how few have survived (or had any chance of surviving) the brief hour of their temporary vogue, need hardly be said. Perhaps one out of a hundred would be a not unfair estimate.' (The *Times*, 22 October 1873). Only the fittest oratorios survive. When evaluating Spohr's achievements in this area we should never forget that no other musical genre has proved as subject to Darwinian law as oratorio.

The Second Bristol Music Festival marked what was probably the final triumph of Spohr on the large-scale musical scene in England. His music did not figure in the 1879 Festival, which featured amongst other works Mendelssohn's *The First Walpurgis Night* and *Elijah* and Brahms's *Rinaldo*, and which ended with a performance of Beethoven's *Choral Symphony*. But Spohr's name reappeared for one last time in 1882 at the Fourth Festival. This time he did not figure as the composer of a major choral work. But in the miscellaneous concert given on the evening of Wednesday 18 October the programme included the aria 'Der Kriegeslust ergeben' from *Jessonda*, an opera which Brahms greatly admired, and which kept Spohr's memory alive among music-lovers during his long years of virtual oblivion. It was sung by Charles Santley, the great baritone for whom Gounod had written 'Even bravest heart' ('Avant de quitter ces lieux'), the Act II aria sung by Valentine for the 1863 London première of *Faust*, his version of an operatic subject which had first been brought to fame by Spohr himself.

#### Notes

- i Both Spohr and Pearsall published overtures to *Macbeth*, Spohr in 1825 and Pearsall in 1839. Both composers took a lively interest in the revival of the tradition of a *cappella* singing. Whether they ever met or corresponded has not been ascertained.
- ii See Chris Tutt, 'Spohr and the Norwich Musical Festival', in *Spohr Journal* 5 (1976), pp. 9-11.
- iii Clive Brown, *Louis Spohr* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 342.
- iv See Celia Skrine, 'Jesondia in London', in *Spohr Journal* 16 (1989), pp. 20-24.
- v *The Fall of Babylon* had been revived at the Norwich Festival in 1869. See Tutt, loc.cit. p.10.
- vi With the enlargement of the Colston Hall with side galleries prior to the 1873 Festival, it could now hold 3,000.
- vii I refer to my article 'English nightmares and German aspirations: the background to Spohr's *Fall of Babylon*', in *Spohr Journal* 13 (1986), pp. 1-5
- viii Nikolaus Pevsner in *North Somerset and Bristol*, in the 'Buildings of England' series (Harmondsworth, 1986), p. 416 (first published 1958).