

A POSTSCRIPT TO GLENEWINKEL

by Keith Warsop

IN the history of the decline and fall of Spohr's reputation, a significant rallying point was reached with the 1912 publication of the doctoral dissertation by Hans Glenewinkel (1880-1955) dealing with Spohr's chamber music for strings. Here was a critic prepared to stand out against the prejudice and received opinions established by various music dictionaries and encyclopaedias of his day. Indeed, the high value of Glenewinkel's work cannot be exaggerated; for the first time, he subjected Spohr's complete large-scale output of chamber music for strings to a microscopic examination and pronounced his findings with such authority that his judgment and views on Spohr's individual works and general development have taken their place in the accepted picture of the composer. In addition, he formulated many of the criteria on which later attempts to revive and re-establish Spohr were based. His authority stemmed partly from the thoroughness with which he argued his case and partly from his acceptance of and discrimination against the weaknesses of a certain percentage of Spohr's oeuvre.

But, just as Glenewinkel writes that Spohr "stayed put in the mentality of the 1810-1830 epoch; trapped in the values of those days", so from our own vantage point of 1997 we can see that these very words apply to Glenewinkel himself in relation to the 1890-1910 epoch. Without reducing in any way the importance of Glenewinkel's positive contribution to Spohr scholarship, we have to take him with that "grain of salt" which he himself refers to in making his point that Spohr "the early innovator and revolutionary developed into a conservative and reactionary". Glenewinkel, in his efforts to re-establish Spohr's reputation, is at pains to point out where he foreshadows Wagner or comes closest to Beethoven. To Glenewinkel and his age these are the two great German musical heroes in the historical development of the art. Seen in this light, Spohr's veneration of Mozart was an artistic handicap which prevented him from going along with "the further development of romantic music which was associated with names from Chopin, Schumann and Mendelssohn to Berlioz, Liszt and Wagner". Mozart was, of course, along with Haydn, one of the conventionally great Viennese classical trinity which also included Beethoven but at that time he scarcely ranked as the supreme master of present-day evaluation. Many of his works (and Haydn's too) were considered too "pretty" and rococo by far, except with a few discerning musicians such as Tchaikovsky and Richard Strauss, and it was the daemonic or proto-romantic Mozart of the minor key works, *Don Giovanni* and the Requiem who was revered. So, in holding Mozart to be the pinnacle of the art of music, Spohr was more forward-looking than Glenewinkel could know and to some degree therefore "built into" his music the opportunity for revival; the Mozartian elements in his works speak to us with far greater force than they did to Glenewinkel's time. What Glenewinkel and scholars of his period thought was "form for form's sake" in some of Spohr's compositions no longer inhibits our enjoyment because we can accept and appreciate the subtleties within that form which

⁴ *Gesammelte Schriften* V, 106

Spohr introduces in similar ways to Haydn and Mozart; whereas in Glenewinkel's time, Beethoven's forms were seen as an "evolutionary and revolutionary" advance on his predecessors and as a staging-post on the road to the symphonic music drama of Wagner. In this aspect, Glenewinkel saw Spohr as "behind the times."

It will be noted too that in his list of the romantic composers with whom Spohr did not advance, the name of Brahms is conspicuously absent. In fact Brahms is the "invisible man" of Glenewinkel's dissertation who appears only when he lists composers who had written sextets or quintets with two violas, apart from one footnote in which Brahms, referred to as "another North German artist", is said to have created something analogous to a passage in the *Andantino* of Spohr's E major quartet, op.82/1 in the slow movement of his A major violin sonata, op.100. Yet, according to another important Spohr scholar, Clive Brown in his 1984 critical biography, a number of Spohr's works look ahead to Brahms, something to which Glenewinkel seems oblivious except in the above-mentioned footnote. Our opinion that we must accept Glenewinkel as "a child of his time" applies here. In the great battles between the Wagnerites and the Brahmsians we would suggest that Glenewinkel adhered to the former camp (though not, perhaps, virulently) and, although Brahms had been dead for 15 years at the time the Spohr dissertation appeared, the battle to establish him as one of the great composers was not completely over. This failure to consider the Brahms dimension is, to our view, partly the reason for Glenewinkel's negative evaluation of the great majority of Spohr's works which followed the Third Double Quartet of 1832-33.

To Glenewinkel's credit, he was not just a musicologist but also more practical; for his study of Spohr's chamber music he wrote out his own scores from the parts-only published editions and performed them all so that his knowledge of them stemmed from this experience as well as theoretical study. But he was not content only to write analyses of and play through Spohr's works; he also had a definite objective in view, namely to reinstate Spohr in the repertory and so he tried valiantly to put a case for the best of his music to be performed. He had to tread carefully, however, in view of the anti-Spohr prejudice of the time. If he had argued that every chamber composition by Spohr was a masterpiece which deserved reinstatement he would have been thought of as a crank or a "mad Spohrist". By hitting hard at Spohr's perceived weaknesses, being outspoken in his criticism and pointing firmly to those works he recommended as "the best" he was able to claim credence for the ones he did champion. From his perspective, those works which he thought came close to Beethoven or gave hints of Wagner had the best prospect of attracting interest. Today, though, we can accept other works which do not fit this category as being equally valid examples of Spohr at his best, works which Glenewinkel did not put forward for revival because they "deviate too much from the norm". We refer to such quartets as op.27, op.30 or op.58/2 which have virtuoso first violin parts but no lack of general musical interest; to the late quartets op.141 and op.146 with their Brahmsian pre-echoes; to the Fifth Quintet about which Glenewinkel is surprisingly ambivalent; and to the Second Double Quartet which Glenewinkel is alone among commentators in ranking below the other three.

Even though Spohr's string chamber music was his chosen province, Glenewinkel also offered magisterial judgments on the works in other genres and his opinions tended to harden into critical orthodoxy for later scholars. Certainly we can say that the works he ranked in or close to the first class have stood up well to revival in concerts, broadcasts or recordings so although we may feel justified in expanding his list somewhat, his core group of Spohr masterpieces remains to delight us and his dissertation still stands out as the most important survey ever made of the subject.