

# FOUR SPOHR MYSTERIES

by Keith Warsop

## Introduction

THE point has been well made by Dr Martin Wulforst<sup>1</sup> that we should realise “how much nitty-gritty research Spohr scholars still need to do – even after the new ground-breaking work of scholars such as Folker Göthel and Clive Brown. For many of Spohr’s compositions, chronology, motivation and genesis are still unclear”. This article looks at four such compositions; in two cases we are not even sure whether or not Spohr wrote them, another provides a mystery over its first appearance in print though it is hoped that this essay provides a solution; and yet another, now missing, offers a conundrum over why it has an opus number when it does not appear to have been published at all.

### 1. The Rondo for Violin and Harp, “Op.88”

SPOHR’S memoirs mention the composition of a Rondo for violin and harp “at the end of the year 1813” and he entered the incipit in his catalogue of his compositions which shows that the Rondo was prefaced by an *Adagio* introduction. This was one of the works he wrote as “therapy” for his wife, Dorette, for in the summer of 1813 she gave birth to a son who sadly died before reaching three months. Spohr wrote: “His poor mother sought and found relief in her harp; she practised with me the new Rondo for my benefit concert that was to take place in December.”<sup>2</sup> The concert took place in Vienna’s small Redoutensaal on December 19th, 1813, and was reviewed in the *Wiener allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* where the critic praised the Rondo and the performance, adding that it gave the work “the highest interest”. Later performances by the Spohrs which are on record were in Frankfurt on January 12th, 1816, and in the Leipzig Gewandhaus on November 29th, 1819.

This is almost our only knowledge of the Rondo for unfortunately this work is among those which are today listed as “missing”; that is, we are not sure whether they survive, perhaps in a private collection or misplaced in a library, or were destroyed, probably in the Second World War.

In his handwritten catalogue, Spohr left columns for details of publisher, place of publication and opus number. This often had to be completed retrospectively, sometimes many years after the year of composition as in the case of the three sonatas concertantes for violin and harp, Opp. 113-115 which were composed between 1806 and 1811 but not published until the early 1840s. The Rondo in which we are interested has entries in all three columns<sup>3</sup>. Under “publisher’s name”, the entry is “Gesellschaft zur Unterstützung fremder Hülfbedürftiger in London” (Society for the Support of Needy Foreigners in London); place of publication is “London”; and the opus number is “88”. However, no printed edition of this Rondo is known and, furthermore, Op.88 is the number of the published Concertante No.2 in B minor for two violins and orchestra, composed in Kassel in March and April, 1833.

Shortly after completing his opera *Der Alchymist* in 1830 and distracted by the events following the revolutions of that year, Spohr found it difficult to concentrate on original composition. Instead, he turned to the compilation of his “Violinschule”. His E♭ major *quatuor brillant*, written in August, 1829, shortly before work began on *Der Alchymist*, was published in 1830 as Op.83 and no further works with opus number appeared in print until 1833 (three motets, Op.85, composed 1831-32) so it is likely that it was around 1832 that Spohr was able to assign Op.88 to the Rondo.

The list of opus numbers and composition/publication dates for this period is:

- Op.83 *Quatuor brillant* in E $\flat$  ; composed August, 1829; published 1830
- Op.84/1 String Quartet in D minor; composed November, 1831; published 1834
- Op.84/2 String Quartet in A $\flat$  major; composed January, 1832; published 1834
- Op.84/3 String Quartet in B minor; composed March, 1832; published 1834
- Op.85/1 Psalm VIII; composed April, 1832; published 1833
- Op.85/2 Psalm XXIII; composed April-May, 1832; published 1833
- Op.85/3 Psalm CXXX; composed May, 1832; published 1833
- Op.86 Symphony No.4 in F major *Die Weihe der Töne*; composed July-October, 1832; published 1834
- Op.87 Double Quartet No.3 in E minor; composed December, 1832-January, 1833; published 1833
- Op.88 Concertante No.2 in B minor; composed March-April, 1833; published 1834

The likely sequence of events is that, following the enormous success of his oratorio *Die letzten Dinge* in Britain in 1830 and 1831, Spohr's rise to wider popularity prompted a London charitable society to request an autograph from him which could be used to raise funds, probably for refugees (or asylum seekers as they might be called today) from the various European revolutions of 1830. Either the society did publish the Rondo but only in a very limited edition which has not survived, or its plans to do so fell through, or Spohr misunderstood the request. In this last case, perhaps the society intended only to auction off the autograph to raise funds. In the first case, some record of the edition having appeared would surely have been noted so we can be fairly certain there was no publication; in the other two, the Rondo could still exist in someone's collection though, wherever it ended up, it could, of course, also have been a casualty of war.

Spohr composed his B minor Concertante for the Halberstadt music festival of June, 1833, and it was published in 1834, negotiations having been completed with Simrock by September, 1833. By then, Spohr must have realised that the Rondo was not to be printed and so was able to allocate Op.88 to the concertante but he did not alter the entry for the Rondo in his catalogue.

#### **Psalm XXIV, Op.97a**

ACCORDING to the entry in the *Thematisch-Bibliographisches Verzeichnis der Werke von Louis Spohr* by Folker Göthel (Tutzing, 1981), the first edition of the 24th Psalm was published by Friedrich Luckhardt in Berlin in 1890 with the plate number F.L.626. The title page was as follows:

The 24th Psalm/Der 24<sup>te</sup> Psalm/für/gemischten Chor und Solostimmen/mit/Begleitung/  
(der Orgel oder des Harmonium, oder kleinem Orchester, oder Streichquartett, oder  
Harmonium, oder Pianoforte/componirt/von/LOUIS SPOHR./Op.97a./Revidirt und  
herausgegeben/von/CARL RUNDNAGEL./Part. M. 1.80 Stimmen M. 1.20/Orch.-Part.  
& St. in Abschrift./BERLIN S.W./Verlag von Friedrich Luckhardt./New York, G.  
Schirmer./ Leipzig, Zürich, Basel, Straßburg I E., St. Gallen, Luzern, Constanz u.  
Feldkirch,/Gebr. Hug.

Carl Rundnagel (1835-1911), the editor of this publication, was a pupil of Spohr's who settled in Kassel after being appointed organist there. Spohr's widow, Marianne, gave him many of the composer's manuscripts, including much unpublished material which, presumably, included this Psalm setting. It is a through-composed piece totalling 158 bars with the tempo marking of *Andante* and featuring a central 24-bar alto solo to provide relief from the contrapuntal choral writing. It was written in Kassel in September, 1836.

But an earlier English edition published by Novello seems to have been overlooked by Spohr scholars. The title page reads:

Dedicated by permission to/The College of Organists./The 24<sup>th</sup> Psalm./THE EARTH IS

THE LORD'S, / COMPOSED BY / LOUIS SPOHR. / Adapted to the English Version from the Original German MSS. / by / W. T. Freemantle, / (organist & C.M. of St. Andrew's, Sharrow, Sheffield.) / AND REVISED BY / DR. S. S. WESLEY. / Ent. Sta. Hall. —★— Price 9<sup>d</sup> / Folio Edition 4/- nett. / London / NOVELLO, EWER & CO. 1, BERNERS ST. W. & 35, POULTRY, E.C. / SHEFFIELD, FREEMANTLE & SON, 21, HIGH STREET.

The edition has the plate number 5057 and from this it is possible to establish that its date of publication was 1874 or 1875. One other pointer to these dates is the fact that Samuel Sebastian Wesley, who undertook the revision of Freemantle's adaptation, died in 1878, and it is unlikely that Novello held on to the material for very long before publishing it, especially at a time when Spohr was still hugely popular in England.

But the question has to be answered: how did an unpublished work of Spohr reach England to appear in print some 15 years after his death? The answer can be found on a copy now in the Kassel Murhardt Bibliothek on which Spohr has written the title and the dedication to "*Dem Herrn Organist Charles D. Hackett in Liverpool zur Herausgabe in seiner Sammlung von Psalmen von Komponisten. Cassel, den 12<sup>ten</sup> Juni 1853*". It would appear from this dedication that Hackett planned to publish a collection of Psalm settings by prominent composers. Charles Danvers Hackett<sup>4</sup> gained his Bachelor of Music degree at Oxford University and after holding posts in Bradford and Rotherham, was appointed organist of St Peter's Church, Falkner Street, Liverpool, on August 4th, 1846. He composed an oratorio, *The Passage of the Red Sea*, and a sacred cantata, *Zion*, among other works. We must assume that he met Spohr during the composer's visit to England in 1852 and asked for a contribution to his planned collection which, however, was never published. Quite how the work reached William Thomas Freemantle is not known but Hackett, Freemantle and Wesley were all church organists and no doubt their world was a small one with everyone knowing everyone else. Freemantle<sup>5</sup> was born in Chichester on November 24th, 1849 but in 1855 his parents moved to Sheffield where his father had acquired a music shop in the High street, in fact the shop mentioned at the foot of the Spohr title page in the Novello edition. From 1866 Freemantle was an articulated pupil of the Lincoln Cathedral organist, a Mr Young, before being appointed organist at St Andrew's Church, Sharrow, Sheffield, a fact also noted on the title page. He served there for more than 20 years and also helped his father in running the music shop. Later, he became interested in antiquities and local history, forming an immense collection of books and manuscripts. His Mendelssohn autographs and manuscripts were purchased by Lord Brotherton who presented them to Leeds University where they can still be found. As late as 1919 Freemantle published a book on the Bennett family and Sterndale Bennett in Sheffield. He died on December 19th, 1931.

### **Trio for Violin, Viola and Guitar, WoO.138**

IN CONTRAST to the Rondo for violin and harp investigated above, we do have a printed edition of the parts for the Trio in F major for violin, viola and harp, given the "work without opus" number of 138 by Göthel but assigned in his thematic catalogue to "attributed and doubtful works". However, the edition was not published until 1961 when it appeared under the imprint of Musikverlag Vamö of Vienna (Electio Edition No.010) edited by Otto Schindler and this was the first that Spohr scholars knew of the work though guitarists soon took it up with LP records appearing in the late 1960s (Pirouette 10-31, also issued on Baroque Records BC-2827/1827) and in the bicentenary year of 1984 (Schwann-Musica Mundi VMS1035).

According to the introduction to the edition, it was based on a lost manuscript formerly in the possession of the Hamburg guitarist Georg Meier (1865-?). As only a copy of this manuscript had survived for the editor, it is not known whether Meier possessed a Spohr autograph or merely a further copy. Furthermore, there is no reference to the work in the Spohr literature, especially the

composer's own memoirs or his handwritten catalogue of his compositions which is still in existence. In other words, as Göthel says in his notes to his Spohr thematic catalogue entry, we lack all external clues pointing to Spohr's authorship of the piece. Neither are there any stylistic fingerprints which would provide strong evidence that the Trio was indeed by Spohr. There are three movements, a 35-bar *Adagio* followed by a Minuet and Trio (32 bars) and a 48-bar *Allegretto* finale in 6/8 time.

Spohr was certainly no stranger to the guitar, having pupils who played the instrument and mentioning in his memoirs a hiking trip to a music festival in Mannheim undertaken with several old friends who included the ballad composer and singer Albert Gottlieb Methfessel (1785-1869). Spohr relates that "Methfessel, who accompanied our four-part songs with the guitar, carried his instrument slung by a band over his shoulders"<sup>6</sup>. There were also contemporary versions of Spohr's songs in Opp.37, 41 and 72 published with guitar accompaniment but how much the composer had to do with this and how much the publisher's house arrangers we do not know. Also, during the Congress of Vienna towards the close of 1814 Spohr gave a joint concert with the guitar virtuoso Mauro Giuliani but one cannot imagine the Spohr of *Faust*, the Seventh Violin Concerto and the Octet and Nonet composing anything so simple. Even the lighter pieces Spohr did write then such as the Fantasie and Variations on a Theme of Danzi are too well wrought to lead us to suppose that he composed the Guitar Trio for Giuliani's concert.

Before Spohr's emergence as a published composer following his study trip with Franz Eck to St Petersburg in 1802-03, he mentions that as a youth he wrote among other things trios for strings. There is an outside chance that this Guitar Trio was arranged from one of these lost works but Dr Martin Wulfhorst, author of the definitive study of Spohr's early chamber music, has expressed the opinion in private correspondence that the Guitar Trio was not a work of Spohr. As he put it: "In my dissertation I support Göthel's view that it is not authentic. First, the only surviving source is too unreliable; second, it most likely does not represent a transcription by one of Spohr's guitar-playing students (such as Wassermann), because none of Spohr's instrumental *compositions* (as opposed to Album Pieces) belong to the category of easy *Hausmusik* represented by the Guitar Trio. Even the juvenile Duets, his earliest compositions (according to *Lebenserinnerung*), have difficulties far exceeding the Trio." As Dr Wulfhorst says, Göthel felt unhappy over the attribution of the work to Spohr and so assigned it to the "doubtful" category of his thematic catalogue. As the work is pleasant enough though nothing more than that, if guitarists like to play it, we should not deter them though it ought to appear only as "attrib. Spohr".

#### **Konzertstück for Clarinet and Orchestra**

DID Spohr compose a work for clarinet in 1804 or 1805? Confusing statements and evidence exists about this work which, in its clarinet form, no longer survives.

Göthel, in his edition of Spohr's memoirs, appends a note to the details of the first performance at Sondershausen late in January, 1809, of the recently composed Sixth Violin Concerto. Göthel says that in the introduction to the first publication of Spohr's Fourth Clarinet Concerto in 1884 edited by Carl Rundnagel, Spohr's pupil Hans Michael Schletterer states that the Recitative and Adagio of the Sixth Violin Concerto originated in a Konzertstück written for the Brunswick clarinetist Tretbach in 1804 or 1805. In contradiction of this, Göthel, in his comments under the entry for the violin concerto in his later Spohr thematic catalogue, asks that his earlier note be deleted, explaining that Rundnagel, in his personal copy of his 1884 edition of Spohr's Third Clarinet Concerto in the Kassel Murhardt Bibliothek (in the previous note, Göthel had stated it was the Fourth Concerto), had written against Schletterer's comment on the Konzertstück that it was incorrect and that there was no such work.

However, Pamela Weston has noted that the clarinet version was performed at Hildburghausen in 1821 by C. Mahr, a pupil of Hermstedt<sup>7</sup>. It is uncertain, though, whether or not this was an arrangement made from the violin concerto version, of which there were many. For instance, in later years the violin virtuoso H. W. Ernst used the recitative alone as the introduction to his Elegy for violin and piano and this also survives in a version by Busoni for clarinet and piano.

There is a plausible sequence of events in 1805, as set out by Miss Weston, which could have resulted in Spohr composing a clarinet piece for Tretbach. Early that year he was in Dresden where he became friendly with the brothers Traugott and Gottlieb Roth, both long-serving clarinetists at the Dresden court. During the summer of that year, Spohr was in the retinue of Prince Louis Ferdinand of Prussia during army manoeuvres at Magdeburg and frequently took part in music parties alongside the prince's clarinetist, the great Baermann. Certainly, one prominent trait of Spohr's was to take on new compositional challenges as we well know from his memoirs so contact with such important clarinetists could well have been a spur to him.

However, by October, 1805, Spohr was installed as music director at the court of Gotha where he was busy writing works for himself, his fiancée Dorette Scheidler and her mother Susanne Scheidler. So, the most likely time in 1805 for composing something for Tretbach would have been after Spohr's return from Dresden but before his joining Prince Louis Ferdinand. Unfortunately there is nothing in Spohr's memoirs about such a clarinet work nor in his own catalogue of his compositions though he did not begin to keep that until after his move from Brunswick to Gotha and the earlier works were entered retrospectively, quite a number of which were overlooked or omitted by choice. In addition, there is the fact that when Spohr writes of Hermstedt commissioning the First Clarinet Concerto in 1808, he states that his knowledge of the instrument at that time was minimal

Our final verdict must be an open one; in any case we are not so well blessed with Spohr performances that we wish to discourage clarinetists from playing the Recitative and Adagio as a *Konzertstück*, especially as it has been newly published as such, edited by Pamela Weston<sup>8</sup>.

#### Notes

1. "Identifying Five Spohr Items" by Martin Wulfhorst, *Spohr Journal* 16, 1989, pp.2-6.
2. *Louis Spohr's Autobiography* (English translation; London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green, 1865), vol. 1, p. 182
3. The page of Spohr's catalogue which includes the entry for the Rondo is reproduced in Spohr's *Lebenserinnerungen* edited by Folker Göthel, (Tutzing, 1968)
4. Information on Charles Danvers Hackett kindly provided by Liverpool Central Library and Liverpool Record Office.
5. Information on William Thomas Freemantle kindly researched by Chris Tutt
6. *Louis Spohr's Autobiography* (see Note 2), vol. 2, p. 59
7. Pamela Weston: "The Many Clarinetists whom Spohr knew" in *Spohr Journal* 24, 1997, p. 2
8. Available from Fentone Music Ltd, Fleming Road, Earlstrees, Corby, Northants. NN17 4SN (tel. 0153 626 0981)