

# SPOHR AND THE HARP

by Maurice F. Powell

*This is a revised and updated version of an article which first appeared in Spohr Journal Four, 1975. In view of the quarter-century which has passed since then, and the forthcoming appearance on Compact Disc of Spohr's surviving chamber music with harp, it is felt that it has a renewed interest to justify its being re-published*

AMONG Louis Spohr's large and varied output, the compositions featuring the harp were, until quite recent years, probably the least known and seldom performed. I offer the following reasons for this long neglect. Firstly, the harp works grew out of special circumstances which will be made clear in due course. Secondly, the earliest editions of the duo compositions for harp and violin have certain peculiarities in the manner in which they are notated which rendered them unplayable until transcribed in modern performing editions. Thirdly and most significantly is the fact that all the works involving the harp were written during the first half of Spohr's career. The finest of them are among his earliest mature compositions.

Spohr's reputation, in England at any rate, rested firmly on the tremendous prestige attached to his visits to London (from 1820) and Norwich where he conducted his popular oratorios. In the minds of most music lovers and musicians, Spohr was for many years associated with the Victorian era, even though a considerable amount of his music was written before the Queen herself was born. Musically, he was, and to some degree still is, associated with Mendelssohn, Schumann, Liszt and Brahms, whereas his most significant compositions are contemporaneous with Beethoven. Only a handful of these works, considered avant garde at the time, are performed today. Apart from the first two clarinet concertos, the earliest concerto to enjoy a measure of popularity is the famous *Gesangszene* violin concerto of 1816. There would be an immediate re-valuation of Spohr's music if such works as the Concertante Op.48 for two violins and orchestra, the Fifth and Seventh violin concertos, the First Symphony, the string quartets Op.29 and the opera *Faust* were performed regularly today. The works involving the harp are buried in this little-known but immensely fertile and rewarding period.

Spohr's association with the harp, however, began much earlier. He tells us in his *Autobiography*<sup>1</sup> that he attempted to learn to play the instrument as a boy in Brunswick, under the tuition of a Herr Hasenbalg<sup>2</sup>. The lessons probably took place during the years 1797-99 while he was a pupil at the Brunswick Katherinen-Schule. Perhaps he was joined at these lessons by his younger brother Wilhelm<sup>3</sup> whose daughter became the famous harpist Rosalie Spohr<sup>4</sup>. "I reached a standard sufficient enough to accompany my own singing", he wrote; but he neglected practise when his voice broke and eventually ceased playing the harp altogether. His affection for the instrument remained though, and he fully appreciated how difficult an instrument it was "if one wished to play more than mere accompaniments".

In December 1804 brilliant concert reviews from Rochlitz<sup>5</sup> in Leipzig earned for Spohr the reputation of Germany's leading virtuoso violinist. In 1805, his fame throughout Northern Germany helped him to secure the post of music director at Gotha, a town whose eccentric duke<sup>6</sup> and "enlightened" population thrived on their great musical tradition and the ideas of the new humanism<sup>7</sup>. During his seven years based at Gotha Spohr matured both as a man and an artist. Many of his most significant compositions date from these years and the concert tours he undertook from there.

Spohr had a fine orchestra to direct at Gotha, one which contained many eminent musicians. Perhaps only the violinist Regina Schlick<sup>8</sup> and the clarinetist, bassethornist and harpist Backofen<sup>9</sup> are remembered today. Spohr's talents (and youthful good looks, no doubt) soon found favour with the court, especially with the Duchess, Caroline Amalie, and won him many friends and supporters. Among these was the court singer Susanne Scheidler<sup>10</sup> whose beautiful 18-year-old daughter, Dorette, was Backofen's star harp pupil. Spohr was soon in love with Dorette Scheidler whom he had heard play "a difficult fantasia", composed by her teacher, soon after his arrival in Gotha. Dorette was a most accomplished young woman and Spohr was amazed not only by her "brilliant execution" on the harp but also by her talent as a pianist and violinist. She also spoke French and Italian fluently. He displayed both considerable latent talent as a diplomat and great ingenuity when he first wrote a grand concert aria<sup>11</sup> for his future mother-in-law, quickly followed by a duo sonata for violin and harp for himself and Dorette to play. As this second composition would need frequent rehearsal he ensured that he would need no excuse to see her whenever he wished. The Sonata in C minor is Spohr's first known composition for the harp.

Dorette's instrument at this time – and the one for which Spohr specifically wrote these first compositions – was a Strasbourg-made single action pedal harp; a small instrument by modern standards, limited in range and tone<sup>12</sup>. As the harp works have become better known, the two-movement duo sonata in C minor is one which has become a favourite with recitalists, quite often with a flautist performing the violin part. Stylistically it hovers between the familiar classicism of Haydn and Mozart, and Spohr's own rapidly developing "spicier" musical language. As he was feeling his way with the harp writing, the sonata is of only moderate difficulty compared with the later works. From the purely musical point of view the main interest in the work is centred on the juxtaposition of the key of C minor and its relative major E♭. The *Adagio* introduction is the most Spohrian part of the sonata. Three minor chords from which grow sombre harp arpeggios are each answered by a yearning phrase from the violin, harmonically characterised by consecutive diminished sevenths. E♭ major is established in the eighth bar and the violin then leads us to a general pause on the dominant (G major) in Spohr's loveliest "singing" vein. A stark and vigorous arpeggio theme in the violin opens the *Allegro vivace*. This is a more emphatic and purposeful relative of the introductory material and is strongly reminiscent of Mozart's C minor piano sonata, K457. The harp answers with brief, sparkling runs over a conventional Alberti bass. As the violin repeats the theme, the harp settles down to a rippling semi-quaver accompaniment while imitating the violin in the left hand. The music moves towards the warmer regions of E♭ major and the harp gradually eases into a flowing backcloth of triplets.

A second descending crotchet theme now appears in the harp but the violin answers with its flattened sixth (C♭), introducing an unexpected pang of melancholy. Spohr seems unable to shrug off this mood until another general pause on the dominant is reached. The entire scheme is now recapitulated with a turn towards the tonic major key after 30 bars. Like many of Spohr's "minor" movements, it ends optimistically in the major key. The second movement introduces two themes in its opening *Andante* (E♭ major); the first, a descending dotted-note scale of six notes, is clearly related to the second theme of the first movement; the second is in the style of a siciliano by some 18th century Italian violin master. Both themes are transformed in the ensuing *Allegro* (C major); one becomes the principal dance-like tune of the movement and the other a chirpy harp phrase of some importance. A C minor episode appears twice and the *Andante* returns just before the end of the work. I have devoted more space to this first of Spohr's harp works than I intend to give to subsequent examples in which we find that the harp writing

is more idiomatic and adventurous and has freer use of his rich harmonic language and violin style.

Spohr and Dorette were married in February 1806 and there began the second phase of Spohr's preoccupation with the harp as he grasped the opportunity for a more intensive study of the instrument and its capabilities. He wished primarily to write more effectively and brilliantly for the harp, particularly in concerted works in partnership with the violin. This would mean greater demands on both the player and the instrument and could aggravate one of the harpist's main problems – that of strings breaking under concert conditions. He also recognised another hurdle to be overcome when relating his individual style of composition to the limitations of the harp; "As I was fond of rich modulations ... I paid special attention to the pedals of the harp, so as to write nothing impractical"<sup>13</sup>. Spohr goes on to explain how he (and presumably Dorette) devised an ingenious method of reducing the threat of a string breaking and yet obtain the best results tonally from the harp. The instrument would be tuned a semi-tone lower than concert pitch and the part written in a flat key. The lower tuning would result in less tension on the strings and in flat keys fewer pedals would be brought into play. The violin part (in the duo compositions) would be written a semi-tone lower than the harp part, in a sharp key. Thus a harp part in E $\flat$  would match a violin part in D. Spohr further gained here for "the violin sounds most brilliant in sharp keys". Henceforth Spohr wrote most of his duo harp works in the keys of E $\flat$  (or D) and A $\flat$  (or G). With the major problems largely solved, and because of Dorette's great skill as a performer, Spohr was able to "give free rein" to his inspiration in the new harp and violin works of that year; the Grand Sonata in B $\flat$ , Op.16 and the Sonata Concertante in E $\flat$ , Op.113.

The B $\flat$  sonata is a transitory work composed before the discovery of the solution outlined above and therefore having a violin part in the same flat key as the harp. But it is larger in scale than the C minor work, having three movements instead of two. In addition, the first movement is in a fully developed sonata form and so this work establishes the proportions of the two following sonatas. Despite its first movement proportions the violin part is almost discreet, allowing the harp to indulge in a wealth of virtuoso display. Spohr fully explores the potentialities of the harp; glittering runs and broken chord accompaniments, breaking away from the "piano style" of the earlier sonata, characterise the first movement. The slow movement is notable for the considerable ornamentation and filigree decoration of the harp part and the wholly Spohrian use of harmony; the rondo finale opens with a toccata-like "moto perpetuo" for the harp with two episodes which favour the violin.

With the Sonata concertante, Op.113, Spohr achieved the "ideal" form for his violin and harp compositions. The harp writing is fully developed, idiomatic and perfectly integrated with the brilliant violin part.

Spohr planned to undertake a concert tour during 1806, the first with Dorette; but events prevented their leaving Gotha for a lengthy period. Throughout the summer the whole area was filled with Prussian troops awaiting the battle of Jena and Spohr was anxious that his new home might be broken into or occupied. He passed the time by writing a set of violin variations (D minor, Op.6) and some numbers for his first opera, *Die Prüfung*. During the September, Dorette became pregnant and their first daughter Emilie<sup>14</sup> was born in May the following year.

1807 was a more productive year for Spohr. In addition to the impressive Fifth Violin Concerto (E $\flat$ , Op.17) he wrote the popular Potpourri for violin (B $\flat$ , Op.22) which includes variations on "La ci darem", the duo for violin and viola (E minor, Op.13), completed the two violin duos, Op.9 and continued work on two string quartets, eventually published as Op.15. It was also a year of further experimentation with the harp, no doubt initiated by Dorette acquiring

a new instrument. The little Strasbourg harp was inadequate for the many subtleties in Spohr's recent compositions so a superior instrument by Nadermann<sup>15</sup> was purchased from Backofen. Now that Dorette possessed a larger instrument, stronger strung and capable of a more powerful tone, Spohr began to plan larger scale works for violin and harp as well as more advanced virtuoso works for solo harp.

For once, however, Spohr's experiments did not meet his expectations. He wrote two concertantes (three-movement works of concerto proportions) for violin, harp and orchestra. The first of these, according to the autograph score, had already been completed in August 1806 (G major and A $\flat$  major) while the second (E minor and F minor) dates from 1807. On finishing the pieces and probably after rehearsals with the Gotha orchestra as well as one or two public performances on tour he began to doubt the success of the medium. "I found that any accompaniment only disturbed our deeply felt mutual ensemble", he wrote. A further experiment, a trio for violin, harp and cello (an arrangement of a duo sonata composed in 1806), was also abandoned. The work has survived in an edition prepared by Spohr's pupil, Carl Rundnagel in the 1880s though not published until 1984. Comparison with the autograph duo sonata version shows that Rundnagel's edition was generally a faithful one though he does seem to have brought back as a *forte* coda a passage from earlier in the finale whereas in the sonata version Spohr typically brings things to a quiet conclusion. For some years only the first of the two concertantes was known until, late in the 1970s, the second was discovered in a private collection.

The first concertante is cast in three movements and an optional link between slow movement and finale is shown in the score I examined in the BBC Music Library, compiled from a set of orchestral parts at the Royal College of Music. Spohr calls for a classical orchestra consisting of two each of flutes, horns and timpani, and strings. The orchestral writing throughout is full and interesting, particularly the woodwind parts. The second concertante is in similar style, perhaps slightly more romantic than its classical partner and featuring a slow introduction before the solo instruments launch the *Allegro vivace*. On the evidence of modern recordings of the two concertantes and the trio, I cannot help feeling that Spohr was over-critical in rejecting them. Perhaps he revised his opinion and took the orchestral material of the first concertante to London in 1820, hoping to revive the work at one of his Philharmonic Society concerts. This would go a long way towards explaining how a set of parts for a forgotten work written in 1806 could turn up in London in 1975!

More successful in Spohr's view and firmly in the harpist's repertoire today are the two remaining harp works of 1807; the Variations in F major, Op.36 and the Fantasie in C minor, Op.35, both written for solo harp and dedicated to Dorette.

In October 1807 the Spohrs were at last able to depart on their first concert tour together. They journeyed to Weimar<sup>16</sup>, then on to Leipzig where they gave a brilliantly successful concert<sup>17</sup>. Their programme consisted of: The latest violin concerto (No.5); the "La ci darem" potpourri; Dorette played a Fantasie for solo harp (almost certainly Op.35); and together they played a concertante (either the latest duo, Op.113 or one of the works with orchestra). Since the acquisition of the Nadermann harp, the Spohrs do not appear to have performed the earliest harp works. The above programme, always with the newest concerto and concertante substituted, became the favourite concert format of the Spohrs during their years of touring together.

They continued their tour to Dresden<sup>18</sup> and Prague – the latter city was to become particularly associated with Spohr's music – and on to Munich via Regensburg<sup>19</sup>. They gave two concerts in Munich; the first at the court of the King, Maximilian Joseph; and the second a public "grosses vokal-und instrumentalkonzert" in the Redoutensaal<sup>20</sup>. The director of the orchestra for the

second concert was Spohr's eminent contemporary Peter von Winter<sup>21</sup>, famed throughout Germany for his opera *Das unterbrochene Opferfest*. It was at the court in Munich that the following well-known incident occurred: as the couple were about to play it was discovered that no stool had been provided for Dorette. The King noticed this and insisted that she have his own gilded chair. Only after Spohr had tactfully demonstrated that the arms of the magnificent chair would impede Dorette's playing did the good-hearted monarch consent to her using a seat procured by one of the servants.

Now on to Stuttgart via Augsburg<sup>22</sup>. As usual, the Spohrs presented their letters of introduction to the Hofmarschal and learned of disturbing conditions prevailing during Stuttgart court concerts, for it seemed that music was tolerated only as a background to the endless card games. They were granted a recital and thereupon insisted on a condition of their own. They would perform only if the King and assembled company gave their fullest attention to the music during the duration of the performance. To their surprise, and to the great joy of the Stuttgart musicians who were used to the despotic whims of their King, the condition was accepted. In this way considerable attention was drawn to the artist pair and they won the goodwill of the orchestra and its director, Franz Danzi<sup>23</sup>. Their public concert was unusually well-attended. The Spohrs now returned to Gotha after giving concerts in Karlsruhe, Heidelberg and Frankfurt on the way; flushed with success and with a considerable profit.

The years 1806 and 1807 were in many ways Spohr's "harp years". Henceforth there were to be fewer harp compositions; one a year for the next two years and only a further four works written during the next nine years. Spohr was to be in increasing demand as a conductor and frequently his thoughts were to turn to opera, particularly since his meeting with Danzi who shared his deep love of Mozart.

The years 1808 and 1809 were also productive ones for Spohr and resulted in some of his finest works: the Concertante for two violins and orchestra, Op.48, which grew out of his admiration for his pupil Hildebrandt<sup>24</sup>; the Clarinet Concerto No.1, Op.26, composed for the great Sondershausen virtuoso Johann Simon Hermstedt; the dynamic Violin Concerto No.6, Op.28; and the second opera, *Alruna*. In the November of 1808, Dorette gave birth to a second daughter, Ida<sup>25</sup>. The two harp works of this period are the unpublished and lost solo Variations in E $\flat$  and a second Sonata Concertante in D/E $\flat$ , Op.115, composed in preparation for a second concert tour during the autumn of 1809. The concertante, Op.115, is the longest of the three duo concertantes and is arguably the finest. In 1817 Spohr arranged the slow movement for bassoon and piano as a birthday offering for his friend, the bassoonist Friedrich Thoma.

Spohr had long wished to return to Russia<sup>26</sup> and the news that his rise to prominence had attracted the attention of the court at St Petersburg suggested that the time was right. The Spohrs set out in the October, first to Weimar to obtain vital introductions from the Grand Duchess to her brother, Tsar Alexander and other "Russische Grosse". Spohr was armed with his new violin concerto, the sixth, and Dorette with the concertante, Op.115 and the new variations. After a successful concert in Weimar they continued to Leipzig and there gave two concerts. On November 1st they played in Dresden and on the 7th in Bautzen<sup>27</sup>, then on to Breslau "one of the most musical towns in Germany". After three concerts in Breslau, Spohr decided it was time to travel on to Russia and he duly applied for an extension of leave from Gotha. It was a great disappointment to him when the Duchess replied that she could not be without his services at court for a longer period than originally stated and requested that they return promptly. The pill was sweetened somewhat with the news that Dorette had been appointed "solo performer" at the court concerts and music teacher to the Princess Louise<sup>28</sup> along with, of course, the extra income which went with the posts.

The return to Gotha was made via Berlin (January, 1810), Hamburg and brief excursions to Lübeck and Altona. The programme for the Hamburg concerts included the *Alruna* overture, Sonata Concertante, Op.115, Harp Fantasie, Op.35 and one of the sets of variations for solo harp<sup>29</sup>.

The years 1810-1812 were dominated by the music festivals at Frankenhausen and Erfurt<sup>30</sup>, and the production in Hamburg of Spohr's third opera *Der Zweikampf mit der Geliebten*. No extensive tours were undertaken during these years but a number of important works were written: the Clarinet Concerto No.2, Op.57, the Symphony No.1, Op.20 and the oratorio *Das jüngste Gericht*. The harp and violin work of this period is the third Sonata Concertante, Op.114, composed during the winter of 1810-11.

For the Concertante, Op.114, Spohr reverted to a two-movement plan. In the second movement he chose to write a potpourri on themes from Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*. It is perhaps because potpourris are considered in poor light today that this work has not been taken so seriously as its companions. This is a pity for Spohr's potpourris are rarely mere medleys of popular tunes but invariably well-organised mixtures of variation and fantasie forms. Spohr drew his themes from Act Two of Mozart's opera; thereby (somewhat surprisingly, perhaps) shunning the very popular duet "Bei Männern" and Papageno's "Der Vogelfänger". The movement opens with Pamina's sorrowful "Ach, ich fühl's" (number 17) and proceeds to the terzet of the three genii "Seid uns zum zweiten Mal willkommen" (number 16). This is varied and extended considerably with the violin making much of the demi-semi-quaver figure which characterises the piece. The central section is based on Papageno's "Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen" (number 20), with the harp taking its cue from Mozart's bells and with witty decoration of each reprise of the theme. Then comes an unusual choice for what is ostensibly a light-hearted movement; the duet of the two men in armour from the finale. Perhaps this austere music had a deeper significance for Spohr who became a Freemason during this period in Gotha. The final section is fast and furious; Monostatos's "Alles fühlt der liebe Freuden" (number 13). This movement was very popular during Spohr's lifetime and he often detached it from the concertante and performed it as a separate item as well as preparing an arrangement for violin and piano in 1820 (Op.50).

In the autumn of 1812 the Spohrs were once again ready for a concert tour. Their destination was Vienna, via Leipzig and Prague. In Leipzig they shared a concert with Hermstedt<sup>31</sup> and played the new concertante. The work was given again in Prague<sup>32</sup> where the critics were particularly enthusiastic about the second movement. "The movement consists of a potpourri of well-loved melodies from *Die Zauberflöte*, each varied in the most pleasing manner. The most perfect harmonic marriage of the two artists was recognised". The Spohrs arrived in Vienna in December, 1812, and their first concert took place on the 17th. Spohr played his Sixth Violin Concerto and together they performed the concertante, Op.114. Their second concert, nearly a month later on January 14th, included the A major violin concerto, Op.62 and the "La ci darem" potpourri; Dorette played the solo harp Fantasie, Op.35 and a rondo.

While in Vienna, Spohr was offered a three-year engagement as leader of the orchestra at the Theater an der Wien by its director, Count Palffy<sup>33</sup>. Vienna was the capital of the musical world for Spohr, the home of his beloved Mozart and of Beethoven whose works he admired and often played<sup>34</sup>. In addition, Vienna provided a real chance of operatic success. Spohr accepted the offer, resigned his post at Gotha and moved to Vienna. During the next two years he wrote some of his most endearing works: the Nonet, Op.31, the Octet, Op.32, the string quartets, Op.29, the Seventh Violin Concerto, Op.38 and the opera *Faust*<sup>35</sup>. He and Dorette frequently met Beethoven, Hummel and Moscheles, besides many other eminent composers and musicians

living and working in Vienna. Spohr was at the peak of his career as a violinist and composer; it was a time of great fulfilment, both artistic and personal. There were some dark clouds though. Dorette bore a son, Friedrich, in July, 1814, but the boy died barely two months later. Spohr tried musical therapy to help Dorette to get over her loss; he composed an Introduction and Rondo for harp and violin and to some degree it helped her recovery. Unfortunately, I cannot discuss the piece as it is one of those which today are lost or at least not yet rediscovered in some musty archive. Spohr also quarrelled with Palffy<sup>36</sup> and eventually resigned his post at the theatre. Before leaving Vienna, he wrote a further composition for the harp and violin; the Potpourri on Themes of Vogler and Danzi, Op.118.

Spohr's intention after leaving Vienna was to travel to Prague where his *Faust* was being rehearsed under Weber's direction. However, a timely invitation from Silesia, issued through his old Gotha friend von Reibnitz<sup>37</sup>, prompted him to spend the summer there. Spohr was probably concerned for Dorette's health and wished her to spend a comparatively relaxed summer giving music lessons to the two daughters of the Prince, Heinrich Karl Erdmann zu Carolath-Beuthen; one of whom played the harp and the other the piano.

Throughout the remainder of 1815 the Spohrs journeyed through Germany with only a brief stop at Gotha to visit Dorette's relations. Then on to Frankenhausen for another music festival; Meiningen, Würzburg, Nuremberg, Munich, back to Würzburg and then on to Frankfurt. The strain on Dorette was beginning to manifest itself in illness – "nervösen erschöpfungs Zustand" – and they were delayed for a month in Darmstadt at the beginning of 1816. She was well enough to take part in a concert with Spohr on February 6th<sup>38</sup> but early signs of the final crisis that lurked only four years away were there; even if they refused to acknowledge them. Dorette managed to play only one harp work – the Fantasie in C minor, Op.35 – and for the remainder of the concert she accompanied Spohr on the piano.

The tour re-commenced; but the gruelling pace hardly slackened. By the end of February they were in Heidelberg and Karlsruhe during a spell of extremely cold weather. March saw them in Strasbourg and Munster; April in Basel, Zurich and Berne. Dorette was now in desperate need of a long rest to regain her strength fully. Towards the end of April they arrived at the beautiful village of Thierachern and here stayed until August. The clear mountain air and attractive scenery gradually aided Dorette back to health while she coached her children in the "three Rs". Spohr busied himself walking in the mountains, writing new violin works<sup>39</sup> and by thinking seriously about a trip to Italy.

But he was also concerned for Dorette's health. He had been uneasy since her collapse in Darmstadt and for the first time expressed anxiety at the prospect of her joining him on another prolonged tour and resuming practise on the harp; "the instrument which so affects the nerves". He also realised that Dorette, as an artiste, could not remain inactive for long and, after "mature consultation", the Spohrs managed to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable when, in September, 1816, they set out for Milan. Dorette's harp remained in Switzerland, but in order for her to be able to join him in his concerts, Spohr rearranged some earlier violin-harp works for violin and piano, besides composing some new pieces for this combination<sup>40</sup>.

The Spohrs returned to Switzerland in the spring of 1817 and rested for two weeks in Thierachern. Dorette began to practise her harp again and they rehearsed one of the sonatas concertantes in preparation for forthcoming concerts. Spohr was eager to continue touring throughout the summer but Dorette needed not only a lengthy period of rest, she was also anxious to resume her domestic duties. After a brief visit to Holland, Spohr accepted the position of Kapellmeister in Frankfurt; consoling himself, no doubt, with the knowledge that his new post would give him further opportunity to realise his operatic ambitions. It was in Frankfurt in 1819

that Spohr wrote his final composition featuring the harp as a solo instrument; the sonata in G/A $\flat$  for violin and harp. The work probably received its first public performance in Berlin on November 12th, 1819; unfortunately, it is another piece which has disappeared so that I can say little about it except that we know it follows the form of the sonata concertante, Op.114 with a sonata form first movement succeeded by a potpourri on themes from Spohr's recently completed opera, *Zemire und Azor*. Meanwhile, on July 29th, 1818, Dorette gave birth to their third daughter, Therese<sup>41</sup>.

Spohr resigned his post at Frankfurt in 1819 after an argument with the opera management. Dorette was disappointed at having to move again as the two elder children were of school age and could no longer be taken on tour. Spohr was concerned that constant worry over her children, plus the hardships of touring and playing the harp would result in further nervous illness. He was able to ease Dorette's mind considerably by assuring her that in future they would spend the summer with their children and tour only four or five months during the winter. With the Spohrs' departure from Frankfurt our story begins its final, sad phase. For although no further harp compositions were to be written, the last scenes were to be played out across the English Channel. As he was leaving Frankfurt, Spohr received an invitation from the Philharmonic Society in London to give a series of concerts during the 1820 season<sup>42</sup>. Dorette left the Nadermann harp with a friend in Lille as Spohr wished to purchase one of the renowned Erard double action instruments for her while they were in London<sup>43</sup>. The choice of a new instrument turned out to be a difficult one, for even the smallest model was larger, more strongly strung than any harp Dorette was used to and she became obsessed by the belief that she would never manage the new mechanisms. Clearly, several months hard practise would be required before she could play with confidence and with her usual accomplishment. The firm of Erard generously loaned an instrument to Dorette, "on approval", as it were, for the duration of her stay in London.

Spohr's fear that Dorette would over-exert herself with practise proved justified and she was soon suffering from exhaustion. Spohr determined that she should appear only once with the new instrument, at the fourth Philharmonic concert on April 24th, 1820. They performed the latest sonata but, as Spohr wrote in his *Autobiography*<sup>44</sup>: "Neither of us thought that it was to be the last time that Dorette would play the harp". As with a number of other recollections in this work, Spohr's memory was confused about the sequence of events as, on the return journey to Germany, Dorette played the same sonata again in a concert in Aachen. Soon after the concert, Dorette succumbed to further symptoms of a nervous fever and Spohr resolved to persuade her to give up the harp forever. This extreme measure had been in his mind from the time of Dorette's illness in Darmstadt but "she was too much heart and soul an artiste and had so great a love for the instrument that had brought her many triumphs to give it up easily". By now though, Dorette herself realised that she lacked the physical strength to master the new Erard instrument and, as she had no desire to return to her previous model, she agreed to her husband's urgent request.

Dorette, though never physically strong, had travelled many hundreds of miles with Spohr, often in appalling conditions; supporting him in all his endeavours; looking after her children; and fighting her illness. Yet she had maintained her artistic standards so that at the time she relinquished the harp forever, she had no equal in Germany. Spohr was able to console her to some extent by reminding her of her second talent as a pianist and, as he had foreseen the way events were unfolding while still in London, he began there to work on a quintet for piano and wind instruments. Op.52, which was completed after the return to Germany. Although she gained considerable success with the quintet in Germany and France, Dorette never achieved fame as a pianist. Spohr arranged the Potpourri on Themes from *Die Zauberflöte* from the Sonata



Concertante, Op.114, for piano and violin (published as Op.50) and the finale of the Sonata, Op.115, as a Grand Rondo for the same two instruments, (as Op.51) for her during 1820. The following year he arranged the clarinet Potpourri on Themes of Winter, Op.80, for piano and violin (as Op.56). In 1822, Spohr secured the post of Kapellmeister in Kassel which he retained until two years before his death in 1859. He wrote no more works involving the piano for Dorette so it seems that once settled into her new life in Kassel, she finally curbed any artistic aspirations that may have lingered.

Dorette died on November 20th, 1834 and the shattering loss of his companion of almost 30 years rekindled in Spohr one final return to the harp in two remarkable and touching tributes to her. During Dorette's final illness he was composing his oratorio *Des Heilands letzte Stunden*, playing parts to her as he completed them and taking his turn to sit through the night by the patient's sickbed. When Dorette died he was working on the chorus "Arzt, der Allen half" (Part Two: No.24) and the grieving husband marked the date and time of the tragic event on his autograph score. By a strange coincidence, the recitative preceding the next aria, sung by Mary while Christ is on the Cross, includes the words "Kein Tod kein Grab kann unsre Liebe trennen" ("Our love o'er death itself shall triumph" in the Novello English version). Spohr must have sensed the hand of fate in such a juxtaposition and when he felt able to return to work in January, 1835, his setting of the soprano aria features solo violin and harp, symbol of his happy years with Dorette.

A further tribute came in October, 1835, in the first of the Six Deutsche Lieder, Op.94. As Peter Skrine has shown in his translation below<sup>45</sup>, the words of the "Lied der Harfnerin" express Spohr's loss while the piano part provides musical symbolism by imitating the harp. The link with Dorette and the grief over its severance could not be more clear:

*Be silent, heart! Why this anxious longing for sweet but long lost happiness?  
 Alas! Your burning tears will not be able to call back what has vanished.  
 It's gone for good. The lovely dream of life, that paradise of the imagination  
 Is one you keep on searching for in vain; you search and search, yet cannot ever find it!  
 Of all the garlands which I wove myself in times of optimism  
 And of the blissful hours of love, nothing is left me but the memory.  
 My dream's glowingly lovely colours have long since been erased, they have faded and  
 are dead.  
 Memory lets longing starve where love once fed it on nectar.*

#### **List of compositions featuring the harp**

*WoO = Works without opus number from Thematisch-Bibliographisches Verzeichnis der Werke von Louis Spohr by Folker Göthel (Tutzing, 1981)*

- 1805: Sonata in C minor for violin and harp, WoO23  
 Sonata movement in G major for violin and harp, WoO24 (unfinished, 76 bars)  
 Introduzione in G major/A ♭ major for violin and harp, WoO25 (28 bars only)
- 1806: Grand Sonata in B ♭ major for violin and harp, Op.16  
 Sonata Concertante in D major/E ♭ major for violin and harp, Op.113  
 Sonata in E minor/F minor for violin and harp, WoO27 (revised as Trio WoO28)  
 Trio in E minor/F minor for violin, harp and cello, WoO28  
 Concertante in G major/A ♭ major for violin, harp and orchestra, WoO13
- 1807: Concertante in E minor/F minor for violin, harp and orchestra, WoO14  
 Variations on a theme by Mehul in F major for harp, Op.36  
 Fantasie in C minor for harp, Op.35
- 1808: Variations in E ♭ major for harp, WoO29 (lost)
- 1809: Sonata Concertante in G major/A ♭ major for violin and harp, Op.115

- 1811: Sonata Concertante in D major/E $\flat$  major for violin and harp, Op.114  
 1813: Rondo in D major/E $\flat$  major for violin and harp, WoO33 (lost)  
 1814: Potpourri on Themes of Vogler and Danzi in B minor-A major/C minor-B $\flat$  major for violin and harp, Op.118<sup>46</sup>  
 1819: Sonata in G major/A $\flat$  major for violin and harp, WoO36 (lost)  
 1825: "Was treibt den Waidmann in den Wald": Arie der Emma for soprano, harp and horn, WoO92  
 1835: "Rufe aus der Welt voll Mangel": Maria's aria (No.27) for soprano, violin, harp, horn, cello and orchestra from *Des Heilands letzte Stunden*, WoO64

#### Notes

1. *Louis Spohr's Autobiography* (English edition, 1865), p.90; *Lebenserinnerungen* edited by Folker Göthel, (Tutzing, 1968), p.93 (henceforth *Auto* and *Ler*)
2. Johann Heinrich Friedrich Hasenbalg (1776-1859); music teacher, composer and local personality in Brunswick
3. Wilhelm Spohr (1788-1860); kammerbaumeister in Brunswick
4. Rosalie Spohr (1829-1918); later Countess Sauerma
5. Johann Friedrich Rochlitz (1769-1842); Germany's leading music journalist. Founded the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung (AmZ)*, 1798
6. Duke Emil Leopold August (1747-1806)
7. Pachelbel, Stölzel, Telemann and Georg Benda lived and worked in Gotha; also the great theatre reformer Conrad Ekhof.
8. Regina Schlick (1761-1839), born Strinasacchi; for whom Mozart wrote his violin sonata in B $\flat$  major, K454. Spohr acquired her Stradivari violin in 1822.
9. Georg Heinrich Backofen (1768-1839). Very little concerning this musician has come down to us; he apparently travelled extensively and was at the court of Darmstadt in 1811 and 1816. He wrote some delightful chamber music including a clarinet quintet and a concertante for basshorn and harp.
10. Susanne Scheidler, born Preysing. From 1776 Kammersängerin at the ducal court of Gotha. Widow of cellist Johann David Scheidler, she died in 1821.
11. *Oskar, umsonst!* Unpublished; autograph in the Landesbibliothek, Kassel.
12. For reasonably non-technical information concerning harps and harpists, readers should consult *The Harp, its History, Technique and Repertoire* by Roslyn Rensch (Duckworth, 1969)
13. *Auto* pp. 95-96; *Ler*. p. 98
14. Emilie Spohr (1807-95) married Johann Wilhelm Zahn in 1828. Their daughter, Natalie, married the publisher Georg Heinrich Wigand (1823-93) who issued the first edition of Spohr's *Autobiography* in 1861
15. Henri Nadermann, harp maker of Paris. Maker of some of the first single action pedal harps. Later he also became associated with the invention of the double action during the first decade of the 19th century
16. The Spohrs were warmly received by the Grand Duchess, Maria Paulowna, and were introduced to Wieland and Goethe after their concert. Goethe wrote in his diary for that day: "Abends bei der Hoheit, wo Spohr und seiner Frau von Gotha, er auf der violine, sie auf der harfe sich hören leissen"
17. October 27th. Rochlitz, *AmZ*, reaffirmed Spohr's role in German music
18. Concert, Hotel de Pologne, November 6th
19. Two concerts in Regensburg, December 14th and 15th
20. January 4th
21. Winter (1754-1825) was an important representative of early German romantic opera. An interesting sidelight here; Weber also came into contact with Winter but the older composer was extremely unfriendly towards him. Weber made no secret of the fact that his interests lay in the field of opera and Winter probably saw him as a possible rival. Spohr, however, appeared in Munich as a violinist and therefore did not arouse Winter's concern
22. Concert January 30th, Hotel "Drei Mohren"
23. Franz Danzi (1763-1826). Another exponent of German opera in the early 19th century. A good friend and an influence on Weber. Today he is remembered mainly for his wind quintets

24. Friedrich Wilhelm Hildebrandt (1785-1830), a pupil of Spohr from 1807 to 1809. Kammermusiker in Berlin 1815; appeared in Stockholm in 1816
25. Johanna Sophia Louise Spohr (1808-1881), always known as Ida. She married the Kassel architect Johann Heinrich Wolff (1792-1869)
26. Spohr's first visit to Russia was with his teacher Franz Eck in 1802-03
27. Spohr's "tagebucher" provide a wealth of information concerning the dates of concerts and the amounts of the receipts. *Ler* p. 348
28. Princess Louise of Sachsen-Gotha and Altenburg (1800-1851)
29. *Ler* p. 349
30. Germany's first music festival was held in Frankenhausen during June, 1810. Spohr was invited to conduct by the organiser, Georg Friedrich Bischoff (1780-1841), Kantor of Frankenhausen and later music director at the Evangelischen church in Hildesheim. A second festival took place in 1811 and one in Erfurt in 1812
31. Hermstedt played the First Clarinet concerto and the Potpourri on Themes of Winter, Op.80
32. November 12th, 1812
33. Ferdinand Graf Palffy von Erdöd (1774-1840). Owner of the Theater an der Wien
34. Particularly the string quartets, Op.18. In Gotha he also performed Beethoven's piano concertos with Dorette as soloist, as well as some of the symphonies
35. Despite his hopes, Spohr's *Faust* was not first produced in Vienna. The first performance was in Prague in 1816 under Weber's baton. The Vienna premiere was not until 1999!
36. See *Auto* pp. 194-195
37. Ludwig Georg Christoph Freiherr von Reibnitz (1775-1845). Fifteen years a soldier, in 1804 Kammerjunker at the court of Gotha, 1805 court intendant, 1806 ducal reisemarschal with the title of Kammerherrn. Spohr dedicated his Potpourri in G, Op.5, to him
38. Dorette's teacher, Backofen, was in Darmstadt at the time but was unable to attend the concert because of his court duties
39. The most important composition of the period is the Eighth Violin Concerto in A minor, Op.47 *Gesangszene*
40. New works: Introduction and Rondo for violin and piano; arrangement for violin and piano of the Potpourri, Op.24 (the new version as Op.42)
41. Therese Spohr (1818-1838). Her early death four years after that of Dorette was a severe blow to Spohr
42. According to the Philharmonic Society records, Spohr received 250 guineas (£262.50p) for his engagement while Dorette's sole appearance at a Philharmonic concert earned 15 guineas (£15.75p)
43. Sebastian Erard (1752-1831) and his nephew Pierre (1796-1855). The double action pedal harp was patented in Paris in June, 1810. Pierre Erard took charge of the London branch of the firm in 1815
44. *Auto* p. 97. The correct information is in *Ler* p. 241
45. See "The Poets of Spohr's Sechs Deutsche Lieder, Op.94", *Spohr Journal* 26 (Winter 1999), pp. 2-8
46. When published by Schuberth in 1844, the title was *Fantasie and Variations on Themes of Handel and Vogler*, though no theme by Handel appears in the work!