

MORE SPOHR MYSTERIES

by Keith Warsop

Introduction

THIS article follows on from “Four Spohr Mysteries” in *Spohr Journal* 27 (Winter 2000) where the starting-point was found in Dr. Martin Wulfhorst’s statement that we should realise “how much nitty-gritty research Spohr scholars still need to do ... For many of Spohr’s compositions, chronology, motivation and genesis are still unclear”.

Spohr’s slow movements

In his *Autobiography* Spohr criticised the tempos taken in Andreas Romberg’s string quartets when he heard the composer himself perform them. He said the effect of the music was spoiled because he “invariably found the allegros too slow and the adagios too fast”. Elsewhere there is evidence that in his own music Spohr was also critical when players took his allegros too slowly, though it is mentioned that he was never upset by anyone taking them too quickly¹. Spohr’s opinion on the tempo of his slow movements is not mentioned but no doubt it reflected what he wrote about Romberg; i.e., that players should not take them too quickly and therefore spoil the effect of the music.

Spohr’s most frequently applied tempo mark for slow movements is *Adagio* with 43 occasions and another four with the associated marking of *Poco Adagio* plus one each for *Adagio molto* and *Adagio, ma non troppo*. Next in popularity comes *Larghetto* which occurs 28 times plus another seven marked *Larghetto con moto*. Our present investigation will be confined to these tempos.

With the expansion of the Spohr recorded repertoire over the past 10-15 years, we are lucky to have many CDs now available for study in evaluating the modern approach to tempo in his slow movements and, in a number of works, several rival versions for comparison.

The result of studying these recordings produces an intriguing mystery; in the works with piano tempos are, in general, slower than in the works without piano.

Of course, in settling on a tempo, performers take into account a number of differing factors such as the acoustic properties and size of the hall or recording studio, physical distances between the players, temperature and related matters as well as a received performance tradition, if there is one, perhaps the relationship between the movements, rubato and other expressive devices and so on. Furthermore there will also be the performers’ instinctive artistic feeling as to how the music “should go”, based maybe on many years playing experience.

For our first example of this mysterious discrepancy between the works with and without piano, we turn to the slow movement of the First Piano Trio in E minor, Op.119, composed in 1841. Here Spohr marked the tempo *Larghetto*, there are 103 bars in common time (4/4 hereafter) and there is a metronome marking of crotchet=54. We have the timings available for four recordings of this movement and they are:

New Munich Trio	8.15
Hartley Trio	8.10
Beethoven Broadwood Trio	7.43
Beethoven Trio Ravensburg	7.17

If we compare this with the 54-bar *Larghetto* from the First Double Quartet in D minor, Op.65, composed in 1823, which has the same tempo marking and time signature with a metronome marking of crotchet=66, our recordings produce the following:

L’Archibudelli	3.24
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Heifetz and partners	2.59
Academy of St Martin	2.44

By making adjustments to allow for the differing number of bars in the two movements and the different metronome markings, we can see that not one of the Double Quartet groups with the possible exception of the period instrument ensemble L'Archibudelli, come anywhere near the timings of the piano trios.

Similarly, we next examine the Second Piano Trio in F major, Op.123 of 1842, also marked *Larghetto*, lasting 98 bars but in 3/4 time with a metronome marking of quaver=88. Here we can list the times from five recordings:

New Munich Trio	9.17
Hartley Trio	9.02
Pallas Trio	7.47
Beethoven Trio Ravensburg	7.26
Beethoven Broadwood Trio	7.15

This time our comparison is with single performances of three different *Larghettos* in 3/4 time, as follows: Fifth String Quintet in G minor, Op.106, composed 1838 (92 bars, M.M. quaver=88); Fourth Double Quartet in G minor, composed 1847 (93 bars, M.M. quaver=92); Seventh String Quintet in G minor, Op.144, composed 1850 (88 bars, no metronome marking)

Haydn Quartet (Op.106)	6.34
Academy of St Martin (Op.136) ...	5.30
New Haydn Quartet (Op.144)	5.28

Again, it will be seen that the piano trios are much broader than the strings-only ensembles.

We turn to the Fourth Piano Trio in B \flat major, Op.133, composed 1846, which is marked *Poco Adagio*, has 71 bars and is in 4/4 time with a marking of M:M. crotchet=60. There are four recordings available:

Borodin Trio	6.24
Hartley Trio	6.18
New Munich Trio	6.10
Beethoven Trio Ravensburg	5.55

Here, there was only one recording for comparison, the Eighth Symphony in G major, Op.137, composed 1847 and so in close proximity to the composition of the Trio. It has the same tempo, time signature and a metronome marking of crotchet=58 but with 90 bars is 19 longer than the Trio. In the recording by the Slovak State Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Alfred Walter, the playing time is 5.31; distinctly less broad than the piano trio recordings.

Finally, we look at the Septet in A minor, Op.147, composed 1853. Allowing for an internal repeat being taken, there are 104 bars with a time signature of 6/8 and a tempo of *Pastorale. Larghetto*. The four recorded versions available for comparison shows these timings:

Midsummer's Music*	8.55
London Winds	8.29
Ensemble Villa Musica	8.03
Nash Ensemble	7.39

(*This version omitted the repeat; we have timed it and added it to the total but must point out that the omission of the repeat might have influenced the group's choice of a slower basic tempo than their rivals.)

There are many Spohr *Larghettos* in 6/8 so we give a selection (metronome markings shown if published). First String Quintet in E \flat major, Op.33/1, composed 1814, has 97 bars; First Concertante in A major for Two Violins and Orchestra, Op.48, composed 1808, has 56 bars;

Violin Duo in D major, Op.67/2, composed 1824, has 49 bars; 21st String Quartet in B♭ major, Op.74/2, composed 1826, has 62 bars; 27th String Quartet in D minor, Op.84/1, composed 1831, has 85 bars (quaver=84); Fourth String Quintet in A minor, Op.91, composed 1833-34, has 67 bars (quaver=72); Sixth *brilliant* Quartet in A major, composed 1835, has 86 bars; Sixth Symphony in G major, Op.116 *Historical*, composed 1839, has 110 bars (quaver=84); Fifteenth Violin Concerto in E minor, Op.128, composed 1844, has 50 bars (quaver=76). Timings are:

Slovak State PO (Op.116)	9.17
New Budapest Quartet (Op.93)	7.20
Bavarian Radio SO (Op.116)	6.53
New Budapest Quartet (Op.84/1)	6.04
Perlman/Zukerman (Op.67/2)	5.30
New Budapest Quartet (Op.74/2)	5.25
Danubius Quartet (Op.33/1)	5.12
Academy of St Martin (Op.91)	5.08
New Haydn Quartet (Op.91)	5.00
Ulf Hoelscher (Op.128)	4.50
Weihs/Georgieva (Op.48)	4.48
Schunk/Petersen (Op.67/2)	3.38

Note that, in general, timings here decrease in proportion to the number of bars in the particular movement involved. But Alfred Walter, who conducts the Slovak State Philharmonic Orchestra in Op.116, is much closer to the Septet ensembles in his view of *Larghetto* as are the New Budapest Quartet and Itzhak Perlman and Pinchas Zukerman in their 1978 recording of Op.67/2.

One solution to this mystery might be the purely practical one that, in the slow movements with piano, Spohr writes a fair amount of small-note figuration for the instrument and in order to accommodate this factor, the string players have to take heed of the views of their keyboard colleague. On the other hand, freed from the demands of the pianist, the performers might feel ill-at-ease in drawing out some of the hymn-like themes Spohr employs in his slow movements, perhaps fearing that to do so would induce monotony. The mystery which still remains is over which approach is nearest to Spohr's own preferences, the keyboard-influenced ensembles or the non-keyboard groups.

Spohr and Bach

In the closing pages of Spohr's *Autobiography* – the section added by his family after his death – we read that “his pleasure at hearing good music remained with him to the last”. In his final weeks he frequently requested his wife to play something to him and showed a preference for the piano music of Bach and Mendelssohn².

Bach's music threads through various stages of Spohr's life³; for instance the most publicised case being the Bach-Handel movement in the *Historical* Symphony, while earlier he had been involved in the Bach revival often attributed to Mendelssohn's Berlin performance of the St. Matthew Passion in 1829. According to evidence gathered by Herfried Homburg⁴, in 1827 Spohr had already been considering how he could perform the Passion. In 1829 Spohr became a member of the newly-formed Bach Gesellschaft and began to prepare a performance of the Passion in 1830. However, because of opposition from Spohr's employer, the Prince-Elector, he was unable to give the work until 1832 and then only in a version with keyboard as the Prince still refused permission for the use of the orchestra. Not until Good Friday 1833 was he allowed to perform the Passion with full orchestra but this turned out to be a great success and Spohr conducted it a number of times afterwards, the final one being in 1851.

Spohr had, however, performed smaller pieces by Bach in earlier years. Soon after arriving in Kassel he founded a St. Cecilia Choral Society and already by 1824 one of Bach's motets was given with others following in subsequent years.

Earlier, when Spohr was in Hamburg in 1809 he became friendly with a Bach enthusiast, Gottlieb Schwenke (1767-1822) who owned manuscripts obtained from the estate of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach and from this collection Spohr was eventually able to acquire the autographs of Bach's 15 Inventions and 15 Sinfonias BWV772-801, part of the *Clavier-Büchlein* for W. F. Bach.

This 1809 meeting provides the first documented contact between Spohr and Bach's music but Hartmut Becker⁵ has pointed to an earlier involvement which offers circumstantial evidence for Spohr's knowledge of Bach as a young man. On Spohr's 20th birthday, April 5, 1804, the death occurred of Johann Gottfried Schwanberger (b. 1740), the Brunswick court music director. Schwanberger's father, Georg Heinrich Ludwig, had studied in Leipzig with J. S. Bach himself and Schwanberger junior was a personal friend of Emanuel Bach. Furthermore, Schwanberger had personal links with Spohr's family, having given music lessons to Spohr's mother. During the later 1790s, as Spohr was taking part in or attending Brunswick concerts, he too would have come into contact with Schwanberger whose loyalty to the musical style of his youth meant that works by Telemann, Handel, J. G. Graun and C. P. E. Bach were still being performed in Brunswick at about the period of Beethoven's first symphonies and this at a time when present-day music historians generally state that only the latest contemporary, fashionable works appeared in concerts!

Spohr composed his D minor Violin Concerto, Op.2 (published as No.2) in the summer of 1804 and Becker points out that in 1926 the German musical scholar Hans Joachim Moser noticed two quotations from the St. Matthew Passion in the slow movement of Spohr's concerto. Becker notes that in the central section of the *Adagio* the "unrelenting forward progress and sorrowful character of the suspensions reflect the expression of funeral and passion music and are linked to arias No.35 "Geduld, Geduld, wenn mich falsche Zungen stehen" and No.57 "Komm, süßes Kreuz" from the Passion. He adds that Spohr also has the violin cite the closing chorus "Ruhe sanfte, sanfte ruh". Becker's hypothesis is that Spohr is here honouring the memory of Schwanberger and his Bach connections.

The mystery posed is how Spohr, who acquired the score and performing materials for the St. Matthew Passion during the 1820s, could have known the work well enough by 1804 to be able to insert quotations from it in his concerto. There are two possible solutions. One is that Schwanberger's father, during his studies with Bach, copied out extracts from the Passion as an exercise and that these copies were passed on to the son who let Spohr see them during his own youthful compositional studies. The other possibility is that Schwanberger acquired extracts from C. P. E. Bach who inherited the Passion material. Furthermore, during Emanuel Bach's years in Hamburg, 1768-88, it was part of his duties to compose and mount an annual Passion performance; Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, in turn each year. For these performances Emanuel Bach did not compose completely new works but rather compiled them by putting together old and newly composed music by himself and extracts from his father's works as well as Telemann's. Thus, the music for J. S. Bach's St. Matthew Passion was not mouldering away in an attic or a trunk but was being referred to and, in part, utilised so that Schwanberger would have had ample opportunity to examine it.

Whatever the answer, there is still the mystery as to how a teenage student was able to study valuable material owned by a senior composer of high court status. Spohr's self-confidence, bearing and the family links with Schwanberger may provide the solution to that.

Spohr's Russian tune

Spohr composed his Potpourri, Op.22 for solo violin and string quartet (plus optional double-bass for larger halls) in Gotha in 1807 some time before setting out on a concert tour that autumn. The release of recordings of the Potpourri in 1996 and 1998⁶ will have made this attractive work familiar to a number of Spohr enthusiasts who will, of course, have recognised the source of its second tune, the duet "Là ci darem la mano" from Mozart's *Don Giovanni*.

On the other hand, the source of the first tune remains something of a mystery though Spohr, in programmes, specified it as a Russian air. One could speculate that Spohr chose it as a tribute to the work's dedicatee, August Gerke, who had known Spohr in Brunswick before becoming music director in Kiev or it may even be that Gerke himself had found the tune and presented it to Spohr.

Another hypothesis would point to the fact that such Russian tunes were in fashion. After all, Beethoven followed the same procedure in his Op.59 string quartets which were dedicated to Count Rasumovsky, the Russian ambassador to Vienna. Beethoven's quartets date from 1805-6 but we can rule out a direct influence on Spohr as he apparently did not get to know them until 1810 though he might, of course, have seen references to their Russian elements in articles in the musical journals of 1807.

However, though we have not yet discovered the source of Spohr's Russian tune (it was not one of those used by Beethoven) we can now fill in another piece of the jigsaw. A Supraphon recording of the Symphony in D major, Op.36 by the Viennese-based composer Paul Wranitzky (Czech: Pavel Vranický, 1756-1808) reveals that Spohr was not alone in using this particular tune. Wranitzky features it as his symphony's second movement which replaces the usual slow movement and bears the title *Russe. Allegretto*, thus confirming its Russian provenance.

According to the CD booklet note, the symphony would have been composed around 1800 when the Austrian alliance with Russia in the Napoleonic wars would have made such a subject popular. Stylistically, the symphony certainly fits in with this period or the late 1790s as it is resplendently orchestrated and its proportions are equal to those of Haydn's last London symphonies or Beethoven's first. The *Russe* movement itself in this recording takes 8.06 minutes so it is a substantial piece. As a companion Supraphon recording⁷ includes another later Wranitzky D major symphony, Op.52 of even broader dimensions and with a slow movement lasting almost 15 minutes, we can take it that Op.36 cannot date from much later than 1800.

The question arises as to whether Spohr found the source of the Russian tune in Wranitzky's symphony. From the chronological point of view, he certainly had the opportunity to do so and Wranitzky's music was very popular at the time. So far, though, scholars have not shown any connection between Spohr and Wranitzky and it is equally possible that they both alighted on the tune in a common but as yet undiscovered source.

Spohr's Harp Trio

The Trio for violin, harp and cello WoO 28 was first published in 1984 edited by Folker Göthel⁸. Since then it has already achieved two recordings, one in the published key of F minor and the other in the authentic original sounding one of E minor⁹.

In the preface to his edition, Göthel explains why a composition dating from 1806 was not published by Spohr himself and then why it took until the composer's bicentenary year of 1984 for it to be "made available to the general public". In the first case, Göthel points out that Spohr's method of dual tuning for violin and harp was to some extent a "trade secret" which he did not wish to reveal in publications. In the second case Göthel puts the delay down to the problematical circumstances of the Trio's textural history.

The original version of the Trio was a Sonata for Violin and Harp WoO 27 and Spohr's

autograph of that has survived¹⁰ but, unfortunately, not the Trio. Göthel speculates that Spohr may not have written out a full score of the Trio but merely prepared a new cello part and, most likely, a revision of the original violin part. Göthel's edition is based on a score of the Trio prepared by Spohr's pupil Carl Rundnagel and the mystery which we face here is the question of how much of the Trio is down to Rundnagel and how much Spohr's original. According to Göthel, Rundnagel planned to publish the Trio around 1890 but we have no information on Rundnagel's source for his copy of the score. It is unlikely that Rundnagel devised a complete cello part to add to the existing duet sonata; as Göthel points out, additions to the violin part in the Trio version point to Spohr's own arrangement of this. But in Rundnagel's score, the string instruments are transposed to F minor and Göthel discerns his hand in some octave shifts in the cello part, purely for practical purposes.

The bigger mystery concerns the way in which the Trio ends. The duet sonata version closes in bar 257 in the quiet manner we know from a number of other Spohr works, for instance the Sonata Concertante for Violin and Harp, Op.115. In the Trio, however, *fortissimo* material from earlier in the finale is brought back to round things off with what Göthel describes as "a stormy unison". Did Rundnagel add this "stormy unison" to bring about what he may have considered a more effective concert ending or did Spohr's own Trio version already include this revised conclusion? We know that when Spohr adapted a work from one medium to another, he invariably made significant changes¹¹ and that could have been the case here. We do not know.

By the way, though Rundnagel did not manage to publish the Trio as planned, he did put manuscript copies into circulation which led to a number of performances. We have a copy of the programme for a concert in Berlin on January 8, 1902 at the Grand-Hotel de Rome in the Unter den Linden, in which the Trio is performed by Alfred Holý (harp), H. Nieselt (violin) and Albrecht Löffler (cello). There, the finale is shown as *Rondo: Allegro risoluto*, though in Spohr's autograph of the duet version it is marked merely *Rondo*.

In conclusion, we would point out that Göthel's edition shows the variants between the Trio and the Sonata so that it is perfectly possible for violin and harp duos to perform the original version from this source. We hope that such a performance will perhaps soon be attempted.

Notes

1. *Louis Spohr's Autobiography*, translated from the German, 2 vols. (London, 1865); for Romberg criticism, see Vol.1, page 211; for comments on Spohr's tempos, see Vol.2, page 335.
2. *Ibid.* Vol.2, page 340.
3. Not to mention the well-known linking of Spohr, Bach and Beethoven in Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*.
4. As summarised in Appendix 1 of *The Forgotten Master* by Dorothy Moulton Mayer (London, 1959)
5. Booklet notes with CPO 999067-2, CD of Spohr's Second and Fifth Violin concertos.
6. Chandos CHAN9424 (solo violin Kenneth Sillito:1996) and Marco Polo 8.223600 (solo violin Attila Falvay: 1998), both with the Sextet, Op.140, the earlier disc also including the Fourth String Quintet, Op.91 and the latter the Seventh String Quintet, Op.144.
7. Supraphon CD 111332-2 contains Op.36 plus Symphony in C major, Op.11; 110956-2 contains Op.52 plus Symphony in C minor without opus.
8. Edition Merseburger No.2081, published by Verlag Merseburger Berlin GmbH, Kassel.
9. F minor version on Calig CAL50887 (1989); E minor version on Naxos 8.555364 (2001).
10. Autograph in the archives of the Mitteldeutschen Sängerbund, Kassel.
11. In revising the Violin and Harp Potpourri on Themes of Vogler and Danzi, Op.118 as the Fantasia and Variations for Clarinet and String Quartet, Op.81, Spohr removed the Vogler material entirely, bringing back the stormy opening section in its place. Also, in his revision of the Solo Violin and String Trio Potpourri, Op.24 as a work for Violin and Piano, Op.42, Spohr replaced the variations on "Batti, batti" from *Don Giovanni* with ones on "Voi, che sapete" from *Figaro*.