

LOUIS SPOHR AND HIS PUBLISHERS

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LOUIS Spohr was just 16 years old when a new music publisher set up business in Leipzig on December 1, 1800. A mutual rapport and collaboration began from their first contact in 1805. A fascinating correspondence of some 158 letters from Spohr (including eight from his brother, Ferdinand), written over the course of some 50 years, between 1805 and 1856, shows the deep friendship, respect and trust which existed between publisher and composer. During this prolific partnership with three proprietors of the company, many of the main works of Spohr were published by what was originally called the Bureau de Musique.

The composer, conductor, lawyer and publisher Franz Anton Hoffmeister, born in 1754 and currently working in Vienna, established a business in Leipzig together with the younger art dealer and organist Ambrosius Kühnel, born in 1770. The fledgling business was called Hoffmeister & Kühnel, Leipzig, Bureau de Musique. Founded 'through a genuine love of the arts and pure patriotism for the arts', the undertaking comprised a music engraving studio, a printing works, the music publishing business itself and also a shop selling sheet music and musical instruments.

It was one of the earliest music publishing firms and developed into the most respected of all music publishers. Leipzig became the world centre of book and music publishing and production; at one time 10 per cent of the working population were employed in some aspect of the printing and publishing trade and 90 per cent of all music was published in Leipzig. One of the first composers whose music Hoffmeister and Kühnel published was Beethoven. They also aimed to publish all the music of the lamentably neglected Johann Sebastian Bach who had been dead for some 50 years. So young Louis Spohr was connected with the right place and the right publisher at the right time.

To give you a flavour of the relationship between publisher and composer, I will quote from a few of Spohr's letters which I have translated. I must confess that I have not seen the originals which are in the Bestand C. F. Peters in the Sächsisches Staatsarchiv, Leipzig. While I read German well, I am not much good at deciphering old German script. However, I have found some transcripts of the originals which will suffice. Among my late father's papers I found several extracts from the letters which my father made in 1932. Going even further back, I have located some of the letters which were printed in various issues of the *Leipziger Allgemeinen Musikalischen Zeitschrift* (the Leipzig General Music Journal) in 1867 – unfortunately I acquired only appalling photocopies of very small print on very old browned newsprint, making them very difficult to decipher. The complete collection has never been published – I leave that labour of love for some future musicologist!

The association between Spohr and the publisher started at the time when the talented Hoffmeister had decided to return to Vienna in 1805, so the early correspondence is with Kühnel who, in 1806, renamed the business *Neuer Verlag des Bureau de Musique von A. Kühnel in Leipzig*. Young Spohr had great aspirations, not much money, but an enormous faith in his future potential, as we can see from an early letter, written from Gotha where he was employed as Konzertmeister, on January 24, 1807:

Dearest Friend,

A few days ago fat Himmel [he means the composer Hummel] arrived and brought

greetings from you, for which we send our heartiest thanks. He set my piano muse in motion again and my wife is studying busily in order to play him his sonatas soon. She is only disappointed that she has to alter so much because her pianoforte, which actually isn't bad, only goes up to *F*; and this brought me to the thought that I would like to present her, on a celebratory occasion, with a Viennese Pianoforte. To whom could I rather turn in order to realise this wish, than to you? Please hear my proposal. I would like to obtain an instrument of unadorned appearance (something like the one which Schlicks and Schade got from you). It should have a strong tone, but with a light touch and with a range from *contra F* to four octaves *c*. You may well understand, I cannot pay you in cash. I therefore propose to you that instead (when we have agreed on the price of the instrument), that you accept in addition to the credit which I already have with you, as many of my manuscripts as you feel would cover the cost of the instrument. By the way, my idea is not that you should immediately take all the manuscripts I offer, but you should only take, if you accept my proposal, a selection of the following works, some of which are completed but some of which still have to be composed:

2 new Violin Quartets: a continuation of my first ones.

4 Quartets for 1st violin in the style of the Rode [Spohr admired the violinist Pierre Rode] ones, recently completed.

4 Overtures for full orchestra, but not those which I promised you.

3 Violin Duets, but which are not even half-completed.

Several concertos for violin from which you may make a choice, and finally several scenes from my opera among which there is one for descant with obbligato violin. I have noticed that you publish single scenes for your concerts and therefore thought that you would be well served with these scenes.

Please consider my proposal and let me know as soon as possible. If you agree, then please describe to me suitable instruments and let me know the price and also please mention which of my things you would prefer to have, then I hope we will be able to come to an agreement.

Be well and greet all acquaintances and friends.

Your
L. Spohr.

Spohr added a PS asking Kühnel to hurry with his reply, as he wanted to present the piano to his wife on a special day in six-eight weeks. Spohr had married Dorette Scheidler, a virtuoso harpist, just the year before and he composed numerous works for violin and harp for their joint concert tours. He may well have intended the gift as an anniversary present, or possibly to celebrate the imminent birth of their first child. The Spohrs formed a fine performing partnership and over the next 14 years, until 1821, travelled extensively, giving concerts in Vienna, Rome, London and Paris.

Spohr's success, however, was all in the future. Kühnel had to pay for the pianos when he purchased them; he could not afford to let a relatively new and little-known composer and performer have so much credit on a doubtful commercial success (or failure) at some distant point in time. He replied quickly, rejecting Spohr's businesslike proposal as such, wanting a certain down payment in cash but leaving the way open for further negotiations. Spohr wrote back, expressing his disappointment and disbelief on February 2, 1807, and adding:

... My salary here is at present very unimportant, until I am able to improve my situation

on the death of an older colleague. It is just enough to cover our basic requirements, and in the current economic situation I cannot even think of committing myself to an extra expense [for the piano].

He made further proposals, suggesting other compositions, but could offer no cash down payment at the time. The correspondence went back and forth – proposal against counter proposal. Spohr was particularly incensed that the publisher had come to a similar understanding with ‘Himmel’ [Hummel]. Writing from Gotha on June 26, 1807:

... How was it that you accepted a similar proposal from Kapellmeister Himmel, letting him have a considerably more expensive piano in exchange for manuscripts and not a penny in cash? His compositions obviously have a greater value for the publisher than mine do; because of his higher reputation they are sold more easily. Could you instead judge our things not from the viewpoint of the publisher, but as artist and arts lover? You will see that in due course especially my newest manuscripts will not be lagging behind in popularity. You could also have taken into consideration the different purposes which Himmel and I have set. Himmel got his instrument from you on speculation and will not doubt, before he leaves here, sell it at a profit. I wanted the piano as a present for my wife ...

I don't know whether Spohr ever got his piano from Kühnel because the next letter published is dated from Gotha on August 18, 1808, and concerns various compositions. He also writes about wanting to buy a harp for his wife. He apologises for having been unable to complete the two Quartets which he had promised, because he is involved with an important new work, which takes all his energy. He also offers several new compositions and continues:

... The work, which is taking up all of my time, is a long opera in three acts [*Alruna*]. The first act is already completed and I am working on the second. My genius seems to be especially suited for vocal music, as a very developed Finale to the first act, which was performed here, was received with huge applause. I hope therefore that through this work I will be able to improve my reputation as a composer more quickly. Next winter I will have it performed in Weimar and also probably in Frankfurt. If it is at all possible for me then, I will also visit Leipzig to look at your Erhard harps and possibly select one for my wife. This has long been my greatest wish ...

He writes again on November 24, that he has completed his ‘great work’, the opera in three acts and discusses other compositions and a price for his newest concerto which he will perform for the Prince's birthday on November 28. He feels that it will not be possible to publish his clarinet concerto because it is too difficult. ‘I don't think that anybody but Hermstedt will ever be able to play it correctly.’

In the same letter, the 24-year-old Spohr was not afraid to pen his views about Beethoven's music:

... I do not yet know Beethoven's newest Quartet. His last three Quartets as well as the newest Symphonies (which do in fact have some lighter points) and especially his Overture to *Leonora* are for me totally unbearable. They seem to me to be like the Rhapsodies of a madman.

Kühnel eventually managed to persuade Spohr to let him publish the clarinet concerto and the composer sent it with a covering letter on January 1, 1812:

Enclosed please find, my dear friend, the clarinet concerto. Please be kind enough to publish it as soon as possible. In order to make it more user-friendly I have added smaller notes over the principal line so that students will not be put off by its difficulty and by the poorer quality of their own instruments. I have written a short preface, which will teach them how to modify their instruments like Hermstedt and other clarinetists have done. Please have this printed on the reverse of the title page. I would like the following included on the title:

‘First concerto for clarinet with orchestral accompaniment; composed and dedicated for his friend, the Music Director Hermstedt in Sondershausen by Louis Spohr. Opus 26.’

He added that he was pleased with the reception of his opera [*Der Zweikampf mit der Geliebten*] in Hamburg.

Ambrosius Kühnel died on August 18, 1813, just two months before the Battle of the Nations. Johann Georg Mittler sold the business on behalf of the heirs on April 1, 1814, to the book dealer Carl Friedrich Peters who bestowed on it **THE** name by which it is known to this day. It became *C. F. Peters, Leipzig, Bureau de Musique*.

Spohr wrote to Carl Friedrich Peters about his collaboration with Kühnel on September 13, 1815:

... The fact that I far preferred to give my manuscripts to Mr Kühnel than to all other publishers, was through gratitude, because he received me on my debut as an artist in such a friendly manner. He accepted my first compositions in his publishing house, without obliging me to buy 100 copies of my own work instead of paying me a fee, as was the condition made upon me with my first concerto for Mr Härtel. In spite of the fact that Mr Härtel was very rich and Mr Kühnel was at that time very poor ...

Generosity to its composers became the ongoing tradition of this respected firm of music publishers.

The politically traumatic years after the Battle of the Nations were economically catastrophic and people did not have much money to spend on the purchase of sheet music. In spite of the fact that Peters suffered severe financial problems he nonetheless continued in business. He continued to publish works of the best known masters of the day, including Carl Maria von Weber, Johann Nepomuk Hummel, Ferdinand Ries and others, as well as Theodor Körner's *War Songs* and John Field's *Nocturnes*.

The collaboration with Spohr, publication of his works and the personal friendship continued, as we see from a few more extracts from some of Spohr's letters:

Bern, June 16, 1816, discussing the price for five works which he wished to send for publication, he expressed his concern regarding reviews when he added:

... As I believe I can be justifiably proud of these five works, so I would like you to be the one to write about them in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* when they appear. As neither Mr Kühnel nor I had a good relationship with Mr Härtel none of my works published by the Bureau de Musique has ever been reviewed in the *Musikalische Zeitung*. The same goes for my works published by other publishers ...

Spohr writes interestingly on the subject of gut strings from Naples on March 25, 1817, in reply to Peters' request for the name of the manufacturer of the best violin strings:

... As I have tried out all the violin strings produced in Italy, I can tell you from my own personal experience which are the best. Those made in Naples are definitely the best, even preferable to those from Rome. In the months of June, July and August in which the best ones are made, there is no fresh gut to be obtained in Rome, because they cease the slaughter of lambs there at Easter; whereas here, lamb is consumed throughout the whole of the summer. Therefore it is necessary there, during the best months for making strings, to make them from preserved gut, from animals which are really too young; whereas here they always have the freshest and best material. Having said that, alongside the good strings made here, they also produce bad ones ... I would therefore recommend you to make your purchases here through one of my friends, who will select the best for you ...

Peters also asked him about the possibilities of trade, to which Spohr replied that the Italian trade was totally unreliable and he would not recommend such an attempt. At a later date, Peters made some comments about the technical difficulties of some of Spohr's works, to which the composer replied from Wiesbaden on July 28, 1817:

... Your complaints about the technical difficulties of my works are not without justification, I admit. With regard to the duets, I disappointed myself. I realised it when I played them for the first time in Milan with Rolla, after I had had no opportunity earlier in Switzerland ... I can hardly believe that anybody will allow themselves to be put off by the difficulty, as dilettantes accustom themselves to the challenge of tackling more difficult works ... However, I have learnt a little how to write in a lighter vein during my time in Italy.

Spohr decided that he wanted a more personal presence to introduce his music and made Peters a proposal in his letter from Frankfurt dated July 30, 1818:

I have completed the three large Quartets and am now pleased to offer them to you for publication. I believe them to be among my best instrumental compositions published to date. I lay considerable value on having my portrait printed on the music, which I believe would not be taken as vanity and self-promotion, by collectors of musicians' portraits, of which there are many. I came upon this idea because I have recently been sketched and I would be happy to send you the drawing if you are in agreement with my ideas.

Peters was in agreement and the correspondence and Spohr's exacting requirements continued:

Frankfurt, 19.8.1818 ... For the engraving of my portrait I would ask you to choose a *talented* artist, so that the many bad portraits of musicians are not augmented by one more. I don't know whether it would be better to print it on a separate page, or whether it should go on the title page.

More extracts:

Gandersheim, 16.7.1820 ... I have just been told by a traveller that Carl Maria von Weber has taken a journey to Copenhagen in order to apply for the vacant position of Director of

Music. Is that true? Please be kind enough to write to me what you know about it.

Strasburg, 8.2.1821 ... Dearest Friend! Please don't be angry that I didn't write to you from Paris; I wanted to do it every day, but it wasn't possible to extract oneself, even for one hour, from the chaos of business and diversions in which we spent the past two months in a complete frenzy. I am very happy with my stay there even though it cost me more than I earned, as all the main goals of the trip have been achieved. I made the personal acquaintance of all the excellent artists, became friends with many of them, let most of them hear my latest compositions, had the pleasure of seeing these received with enthusiasm by them; I then appeared publicly and was received by the public with huge acclaim and, last but not least, I saw and heard everything noteworthy and excellent about Paris.

Carl Friedrich Peters by now was in poor health, both physically and psychologically and Louis Spohr was concerned about his friend's illness. A typical letter was the one he wrote from Kassel on December 24, 1824:

Dear Friend,

It is with sadness that we learned from your letter that you have been unwell for such a long time and we are worried about the melancholy tone in which you write. Rouse yourself and don't dwell on such bleak thoughts.

Peters' mental condition did not improve and we can see how badly this upset his friend when we read Spohr's letter of May 1, 1826:

Dearest Friend,

I deliberately left your letter for eight days before answering it; because if I had sat down to write about the contents in my first anger, I might well have expressed myself in a similar tone as that used by you. What sort of an ill mood could possibly have allowed you to dictate such a letter to me?

Earlier, on June 30, 1825, Carl Friedrich Peters made his Last Will and Testament, naming his young daughter, Anna, as the heir to his business. Throughout the period of his illness, Peters continued to publish Spohr's works and to help him in every way he could. When Spohr's talented young student, Ferdinand David, and his equally talented sister, the pianist Louise David, wanted to give a concert in Leipzig, Spohr wrote on December 16, 1825, asking Peters to 'be kind and helpful to the children.'

Suffering from a deep depression, the roots of which remain unknown, Carl Friedrich Peters died at the age of 48 on September 20, 1827, in the Home for the Mentally Disturbed on the Sonnenstein. He had headed the company, which continues to bear his name, for just thirteen years. On his death, Spohr wrote to the Commissioner, C. F. Leede, on December 13, 1827: 'With deepest sadness I have learnt of the early death of Mr Peters. The world loses with him an active and honorable man.'

Commissioner Leede ran the business until its sale on October 29, 1828. Peters had left it to his daughter, Anna Peters, who was only eleven years old at the time. The banker, Georg Wolfgang Schrepffer, and the book dealer, Johann Georg Mittler (who was the guardian of Kühnel's children), were her representatives. The new owner was the tobacco manufacturer, art

and music patron Carl Gotthelf Siegmund Böhme (1785-1855), who was a new citizen of Leipzig. Böhme bought it 'with all publishing rights, complete stock of copper and tin plates, sheet music here and elsewhere, utensils, printing works and equipment.' Böhme continued to publish the classical composers and added music by Franz Hüntten, Johannes Wenzeslaus Kalliwoda and the *Bolero*, Op.19, by Frédéric Chopin, among others.

The collaboration with Louis Spohr carried over to the new owner, the first letter from Spohr to Böhme being dated January 23, 1829, when he discussed his manuscripts. The publishing business continued to expand and later brought out the scores to Spohr's operas *Faust* and *Jessonda*, Schumann's opera *Genoveva* and Gasparo Spontini's *Vestalin*.

There were, at that time, no legally binding copyright laws; publishers would regularly reprint each other's works. As a result of political events, infringement of publishing right became rampant. Several unscrupulous publishers reproduced works of their competitors without permission. This caused Böhme to issue a statement at the end of his New Issues list published for the Jubilate Trade Fair: 'I neither accept, nor will I publish, arrangements of original works which do not belong to me. I can therefore rightfully expect that other decent publishers will observe similar considerations with regard to myself.'

In order to clarify the uncertainties concerning publishing rights, a group of music publishers, under the chairmanship of Friedrich Hofmeister, signed a declaration – the *Conventional-Akte* dated May 23, 1829. Signatories included Johann André, Breitkopf und Härtel, C. F. Peters, B. Schott's Söhne and Nikolaus Simrock. Louis Spohr became very involved in this and the correspondence between himself and his main publishers, C. F. Peters, can be seen as a documentation of publishing history which has yet to be evaluated.

In his will, Böhme had decreed that the firm should carry the name of C. F. Peters in perpetuity. On his death in 1855, Theodore Whistling managed the business, working with the same composers, including Spohr, until it was sold on January 1, 1860, two months after Spohr's death, to a book and music dealer, Julius Friedländer of Berlin. My family took over the music publishing company of C. F. Peters, Leipzig, just four years after Spohr's death, when my great-uncle, Dr Max Abraham, went into partnership with Friedländer in 1863. In due course he became the sole proprietor. It was Max Abraham who founded the now famous 'Edition Peters' with the distinctive green or pink covers in 1867. In 1887 Abraham's nephew from Hamburg, Henri Hinrischen, joined him in Leipzig. On Max Abraham's death in December 1900, Henri Hinrischen – who in due course was to become my grandfather – became the new owner.

There is a corollary to the Spohr association which concerns my grandfather. Spohr, while being critical of much of Beethoven's music in his youth, grew to appreciate it and to revere Beethoven. Carl Stieler had painted what was to become the best-known portrait of Beethoven in 1819-1820. Painted on commission for the Brentano family, with two of whose daughters Beethoven was said to have been in love, it was offered as a raffle prize run by the Art Association of Brunswick, when it was won by Louis Spohr's brother. On the brother's death the painting was inherited by his daughter Rosalie, the Countess of Sauerma, a well-known harpist. In 1909 Henri Hinrischen was able to buy it from the Countess. Beethoven's portrait, with its Spohr association, had pride of place as a symbol of the C. F. Peters tradition in his private music room in 10, Tal Straße, Leipzig.

Note

Irene Lawford is the author of *Music Publishing and Patronage – C. F. Peters: 1800 to the Holocaust*. Published by Edition Press 2000 at £25.00. Available from the author at 20 per cent discount plus p&p. Please send cheque for £23.50 (Euro41.00; US\$50.00 bill not cheque) in favour of Irene Lawford to her at 22, Bouverie Gardens, Kenton, Middlesex HA3 ORQ, UK.