

SPOHR AT THE LONDON PROMENADE CONCERTS 1895-2013

by Mike Jarman

IN 2009, the 150th anniversary of Spohr's death, the BBC Promenade Concerts featured one work by the composer, the Nonet in F major, Op.31. It was in a programme put on at the Cadogan Hall and not at the main venue for the Proms, the Royal Albert Hall, London. In fact none of the concerts now known as the BBC Proms and formerly as the Henry Wood Promenade Concerts has featured a work by Spohr at this venue following their move there after the bombing of the former Queen's Hall in 1941.

It is, of course, well known that interest in Spohr's work suffered a marked decline at the end of the 19th century that continued into the 20th, with only recent signs of a real revival. It is of interest therefore to examine the list of Proms performances now available on the BBC Proms website (see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/proms/archive>) to see to what extent works of Spohr featured since Henry Wood started the Proms in 1895.

Appendix 1 shows a full list of the compositions of Spohr that have appeared in the Proms from 1895 to date, together with relevant details of the performances. The works are presented in the order of their first performance, i.e. a duet for violins from Op.67, is listed first as its inclusion, on August 28, 1895, preceded that of the first of many appearances of the next work on the list, the aria from the opera *Zemire und Azor*, in September 1895, and so on.

The survey showed that works by Spohr were programmed quite frequently up to the First World War, then much less so thereafter. Indeed, the 1930s included not one work and the last scheduled appearance of a composition by Spohr at the Queen's Hall, the famous 'Rose Softly Blooming' aria (Rose, wie bist du so reizend und mild) from *Zemire und Azor*, due to have been performed during September 1940, was cancelled because of the risk of air raids.

Despite works by Spohr having featured quite frequently early on in the history of the Proms, the range of compositions covered is small. None of the symphonies appear and only three concertos. Violin Concerto No.8, his most often played today, is given full performances but Concerto No.9 is represented only by its *Adagio*. The second of his concertos for two violins, Op.88 in B minor, however, was performed in full.

Other small-scale works, a duet for violins from Op.67, and No.2 from the Six deutsche Lieder, Op.103, as well as the overture to the opera *Jessonda* appear only once. In contrast, the aforementioned aria from *Zemire und Azor*, popularised in modern times by a notable recording of it by the famous opera singer Joan Sutherland, appears no less than 16 times, six of them arranged for voice and piano and the other ten with orchestral accompaniment.

It could be suggested that the paucity of larger scale works by Spohr reflects the different composition of the early Proms which typically contained many more works and hence many on a smaller scale than is customary these days. However, even the most superficial analysis shows this is not the case. Unsurprisingly, most of Beethoven's symphonies appear almost annually from the outset but symphonies by Spohr's near-contemporaries, Mendelssohn and Schumann for instance, are also in the early programmes.

As a postscript to the above brief survey, I also discovered that an orchestration by Spohr of Beethoven's song Adelaïde, Op.46, was played regularly at the Proms, 45 times in all between 1895 and 1960. The same song was also performed in seven other concerts in an unattributed

arrangement which may or may not have been Spohr's. Details of these performances are listed in Appendix 2. As Beethoven's *Adelaide* has been arranged by other composers, including Liszt, it is interesting that it was Spohr's version that was the one so frequently favoured.

Appendix 1: List of works by Spohr scheduled at the Proms, 1895-2013

A duet (for violins) from Op.67 featured in one concert, 1895

Wednesday August 28, 1895

Proms premiere

Elsie Crompton, violin

Gertrude Crompton, violin

***Zemire und Azor*, WoO 52** (aria: 'Rose, wie bist du so reizend und mild', Act 1), featured in 16 concerts, 1895-1940

(i): arr. for voice and piano featured in six concerts, 1895 (twice), 1900, 1907, 1908, 1911

(1) Saturday September 21, 1895

Clara Samuëll, soprano

Henry Lane-Wilson, piano

(2) Friday October 4, 1895

Charlotte Thudichum, soprano

Henry Lane-Wilson, piano

(3) Friday September 7, 1900

Elsie Mackenzie, mezzo-soprano

Percy Pitt, piano

(4) Monday September 30, 1907

Ethel Wood, soprano

Webster Millar, tenor

[Note: This is the entry in the Proms website; it is possibly a duet from the opera]

(5) Thursday September 1, 1908

Miss Barwell-Holbrook [first name not known], soprano

Frederick Kiddle, piano

(6) Friday September 8, 1911

Alice Motterway, soprano

Frederick Kiddle, piano

(ii): for voice and orchestra featured in 10 concerts, 1904 (1st night), 1910, 1917, 1923, 1924, 1925, 1940 (scheduled but cancelled due to the danger of air raids; this would have been by the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Henry Wood)

(1) Saturday August 6, 1904 (First Night of the Proms)

Lillie Wormald, soprano

(2) Saturday September 30, 1905

(3) Thursday October 5, 1905

Both by Nora Meredith, soprano

(4) Wednesday October 24, 1906

Zara Minadieu, soprano

Charlesworth Fawcett, clarinet

[Note: This is the entry in the Proms website; it is possibly a song from the Op.103 set]

(5) Wednesday September 28, 1910

Alice Motterway, soprano

(6) Thursday August 30, 1917

Dora Labbette, soprano

(7) Saturday September 29, 1923

Dora Labbette, soprano

(8) Wednesday August 27, 1924

Dora Labbette, soprano

(9) Saturday September 5, 1925

Dora Labbette, soprano

(10) Saturday September 21, 1940 (cancelled because of air raid risk)

Olive Groves, soprano

Violin Concerto No.8 in A minor, Op.47 'in modo di scena cantante' featured in three concerts, 1897, 1901, 1924

(1) Thursday September 9, 1897

Proms premiere

K.Roth-Ronay, violin

(2) Saturday October 12, 1901

Arthur W.Payne, violin

(3) Saturday October 4, 1924

Anna Hegner, violin

Violin Concerto No.9 in D minor, Op.55 (second movement only; *Adagio*) featured in two concerts, 1900, 1906

(1) Wednesday October 3, 1900

A.V.Belinski, violin

Percy Pitt, piano

(2) Friday August 31, 1906

S.Abas, violin

(It is unclear whether there was piano or orchestral accompaniment)

Concertante No.2 in B minor, Op.88 for two violins featured in one concert, 1902

Thursday October 9, 1902

Proms premiere

Winifred Carnegie-Prior, violin

Muriel Carnegie-Prior, violin

Sechs deutsche Lieder, Op.103; No.2 'Zweigesang' featured in one concert, 1904

Thursday October 20, 1904

Maria Philippi, contralto

Charlesworth Fawcett, clarinet

Percy Pitt, piano

Jessonda Overture, Op.63, featured in one concert, 1909

Wednesday October 6, 1909

Nonet in F major, Op.31, featured in one concert, 2009

Saturday August 29, 2009 (at Cadogan Hall)

Proms premiere

Aronowitz Ensemble; Luis Cabrera, double-bass; Galliard Ensemble

Appendix 2: details of performances of Beethoven's song Adelaïde, Op.46, as orchestrated by Spohr

First performed: Prom 48 Friday October 4, 1895. Last performed: Prom 33 Tuesday August 30, 1960

This work featured in 45 concerts, 1895-1939 at the Queen's Hall, and 1943-60 at the Royal Albert Hall

- (1895) Prom 48; Friday October 4
- (1896) Prom 18; Friday September 18
- (1896) Prom 30; Friday October 2
- (1897) Prom 6; Friday September 3
- (1899) Prom 33; Tuesday October 3
- (1901) Prom 42; Friday October 11
- (1902) Prom 48; Friday October 17
- (1903) Prom 16; Wednesday September 9
- (1903) Prom 24; Friday September 18
- (1905) Prom 6; Friday August 25
- (1906) Prom 12; Friday August 31
- (1907) Prom 42; Friday October 4
- (1908) Prom 30; Friday September 18
- (1911) Prom 48; Friday October 6
- (1912) Prom 30; Friday September 20
- (1913) Prom 24; Friday September 12
- (1915) Prom 15; Tuesday August 31
- (1916) Prom 18; Friday September 15
- (1919) Prom 54; Friday October 17
- (1920) Prom 24; Friday September 10
- (1921) Prom 52; Wednesday October 12
- (1924) Prom 24; Friday September 5
- (1925) Prom 42; Friday September 25
- (1926) Prom 12; Friday August 27
- (1929) Prom 48; Friday October 4
- (1933) Prom 48; Friday October 6
- (1936) Prom 18; Friday August 28
- (1937) Prom 24; Friday September 3
- (1938) Prom 42; Friday September 23
- (1939) Prom 30; Friday September 15
- (1943) Prom 42; Friday August 6
- (1944) Prom 12; Friday June 23
- (1945) Prom 42; Friday September 7
- (1946) Prom 12; Friday August 9
- (1950; Winter) Prom 5; Friday January 13
- (1950) Prom 3; Tuesday July 25
- (1951, Winter) Prom 11; Friday January 19
- (1952) Prom 6; Friday August 1
- (1953) Prom 30; Friday August 28
- (1954) Prom 18; Friday August 13
- (1955) Prom 18; Friday August 12
- (1956) Prom 30; Friday August 24
- (1959) Prom 6; Friday July 31
- (1960) Prom 33; Tuesday August 30

Note: The song also appeared in another seven Proms in unspecified arrangements.