

# SPOHR AND HAYDN

by Keith Warsop

IN HIS memoirs Spohr makes clear his great admiration for Mozart whom he considered the most perfect of composers while his opinions of Beethoven, both positive and negative, are also given at some length. However, in the case of Haydn, the third in the great trinity of Viennese classics, Spohr expresses no particular views; instead he links Haydn with Mozart in a more conventional way. For instance, writing to former colleague Moritz Hauptmann in 1852 he said: "What would Haydn and Mozart have said if they had been forced to listen to the hellish noise which is now considered to be music?"

Yet it is quite clear that the music of Haydn played an important role in Spohr's life as any composer with the exception of Mozart. As a young violinist he played Haydn's string quartets with friends and colleagues and, according to Martin Wulfhorst, it was Spohr who established the standard quartet programme of works by Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. When he began the first public chamber music concerts in Frankfurt in 1818, it was these three composers who made up the bulk of the programmes alongside his own quartets and a few by Onslow and Fesca.

Although Spohr's own music was influenced considerably both harmonically and melodically by Mozart as well as taking on board Beethoven's innovation of the scherzo, when it came to formal matters, as will be examined later, he adopted or adapted many ideas from Haydn.

It was also Haydn who played a major part in Spohr's rise to prominence as a conductor with his direction of *The Creation* at the 1810 Frankenhausen Music Festival. The composer was so proud of this achievement that he inserted in his memoirs the lengthy complimentary review of the event in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*.

Among other things, the reviewer said: "Herr Spohr's leading with a roll of paper, without the least noise, and without the slightest contortion of countenance, might be called a graceful leading if that word were sufficient to express the precision and influence impressed by his movements upon the whole mass, strange both to him and to itself. To this happy talent in Herr Spohr I ascribe in great part the excellence and precision — the imposing power, as well as the soft blending of this numerous orchestra with the voices of the singers in the execution of *The Creation*."

After dealing with the vocal soloists, he concluded: "This execution of *The Creation* was the most powerful, most expressive and, in a word, the most successful that I have ever heard."

The festival's second day included the final chorus from Haydn's *The Seasons* where the organist, Herr Fischer, improvised a prelude to it: "He dwelt upon the dominant and to keep the expectation yet more alive for the entry of the chorus, by means of a sort of organ-point, formed a close at this interval. This was no sooner observed by Herr Spohr than he lifted his roll of paper and scarcely had the last organ tone ceased when the whole orchestra fell in with the first single chord C of the chorus; which C the trumpets had then to sustain alone to the end of the bar. This was executed with the greatest punctuality. One of the trumpeters, only, preoccupied with the organ playing, had forgotten to change his mouthpiece and so blew E minor. In an instant Herr Spohr made a motion and nothing more of the second bar was heard from the orchestra. Upon this, Herr Fischer instantly fell in with his organ, continued his prelude and this time closed in the tonic C major — just as if the occurrence had been intentionally introduced."

During the two days of the concerts, the director of the festival, George Friedrich Bischoff,

erected a marquee in his garden and laid on dinner for the performers and guests. Here, the reviewer expressly linked Haydn and Spohr in his report of the festivities: "It was a pleasure to behold so many worthy artists and lovers of art assembled here for one and the same purpose, proceeding thence to their labour of love and returning therefrom to meet here anew for cheerful enjoyment and to pay unanimous and hearty tribute to the great father Haydn, the excellent Spohr and many other first-rate artists with brimming glasses."

We now turn to some general influences from Haydn in Spohr's works. First is the frequent use of the slow introduction — less common in Mozart where symphonies 36, 38 and 39 have one but 35, 40 and 41 do not. Some of these Haydn introductions also figure in a speeded-up form as the start of the succeeding *Allegro*, as in symphonies 91 and 98, a procedure Spohr frequently follows, e.g. Violin Concerto No.3, Clarinet Concerto No.1 and Symphony No.6.

There is also Haydn's practice in many sonata form movements of abolishing the contrasting second subject and instead re-using the first motif at this point, sometimes altered slightly but at others hardly changed at all apart from the key. Five of Spohr's seven string quintets adopt this model with only No.4 and No.7 featuring distinctly independent second subjects.

The Ninth Violin Concerto allows Spohr to use both methods; the opening tutti for the orchestra alone has only one theme after the Haydn model but following the entry of the solo violin there is a contrasting second subject which remains the exclusive property of the soloist, as we find is often the case in Mozart's piano concertos.

The use of one basic theme for both subjects also turns up in the first movement of the Third Symphony where Spohr goes one better by introducing the same motif as the opening theme of the slow movement too.

Spohr admitted using Mozart as his model in a number of his early compositions, saying that his *Alruna* overture was a 'direct copy' of that to *The Magic Flute*. In the same year of 1808 we can see Spohr doing this with Haydn in the opening movement of his Clarinet Concerto No.1 where the fugato in bars 61-66 and later appearances is openly based on the one in Haydn's Symphony No.95 which, like Spohr's concerto, is also in C minor.

The finale of Spohr's cantata *Das befreite Deutschland* reminds us instantly of the close of Haydn's *Creation* as the chorus sings 'Nun ist das grosse Werk vollbracht'; no doubt that 1810 Frankenhausen performance made an unforgettable impression on the young composer.

Haydn's C major string quartet, Op.54, No.2, is another work Spohr clearly knew and drew on for his own G major quartet, Op.58, No.3. In Haydn's case, after the standard first three movements, he has a slow finale with a short *Presto* section at its centre before the *Adagio* tempo returns. In Spohr's case, he opts for a standard first movement followed by a minuet and trio, and then a finale which opens *Adagio molto* before being interrupted by a jaunty *Allegro*. The slow and quick music alternate before the *Adagio molto* wins out at the end.

In Spohr's Symphony No.6 *The Historical*, Haydn naturally features in the 'Age of Haydn and Mozart' *Larghetto* but although this opening motif slightly resembles the main theme of the slow movement in Haydn's Symphony No.87, the overall impression is that Mozart dominates with clear hints of his symphonies 38 and 39.

A last link between Haydn and Spohr comes at the close of their careers with the former able to complete only two movements of his final string quartet, Op.103, while Spohr became so dissatisfied with his last two quartets (Opp.155 and 157) that, despite having earlier stated that they were good enough to stand with the others, he eventually banned their performance or publication.