

AN ENGLISH CONTEMPORARY OF SPOHR: HENRY SMART

by Philip L.Scowcroft

HENRY SMART'S music is not much heard these days, even compared with eminent musical Victorians like Sterndale Bennett, Macfarren, Balfe, W. V. Wallace, Sullivan, S. S. Wesley, Parry, Stanford, Cowen and Mackenzie. This may be because, like Wesley, admittedly a superior musician, he is perceived to be a composer of service and organ music, though not confined to that.

Henry Thomas Smart, born in London on October 26, 1813, and died there on July 6, 1879, came from an important musical family, as the son of Henry Smart, director of early nineteenth century theatre orchestras, and nephew of Sir George Smart (1776-1867), conductor, composer, violinist and a founder of the Philharmonic Society.

H. T. Smart's first important post was organist of Blackburn Parish Church (Lancashire), now a cathedral. From there he moved back to London as organist of St Philip's, Regent Street (1838), St Luke's, Old Street (1844-64) and St Pancras, Euston. He taught and wrote music criticism and continued to compose despite being handicapped by blindness after 1864.

His church music included 23 anthems, hymn tunes and a few service settings. His organ portfolio included four sets of short easy pieces, suitable for teaching, and at least 50 preludes and postludes. More substantial works were doubtless heard in Smart's recitals: two sets, each of three, Andantes and two independent Andantes.

These were some six minutes long; *Air with Variations and Finale Fugato*; *Con Moto Moderato en Forme d'Ouverture*; *Chorale with Variations*; *Fantasia with Chorale*; *Allegro in D*; and various trios inspired by J. S. Bach's trio sonatas. He composed marches; his *Solemn Grand March* reminds me of Meyerbeer.

Smart's secular music ranged widely. His opera *Berta* (1855) achieved production but never challenged Balfe and Wallace. Other operas included *Undine*, *The Siege of Calais* and (though probably not produced) *Orpheus and Euridice*.

More successful were the cantatas *Jacob*, *The Fishermaidens* and *King Rene's Daughter* (all 1871) and, most popular, *The Bride of Dunkerron*, premièred at the 1864 Birmingham Festival. Individual songs from *Dunkerron* and *King Rene* were separately published. Smart composed 167 solo songs and 143 partsongs. Some were popular in their day and could be ripe for modest revival in our own day.

In his youth Smart considered going in for the law and the Indian army before turning to music. Something of a landmark in his musical development was his entree to rehearsals at Covent Garden where Spohr's *Zemire und Azor* was being prepared for its English première. Spohr's music made a considerable impression on the young Smart. Both composers favoured chromaticism, as did S. S. Wesley (1810-76), though for all three this feature can be exaggerated. However that may be, many Smart songs, particularly those from the early 1830s, may well have owed their existence to Spohr's example.

A musical link between Spohr and Henry Smart seems tenuous to us, primarily as it is the latter's organ music that has survived. Not until we heard again Smart's songs, theatre music and cantatas (any chance of a revival of, if only on CD, of *The Bride of Dunkerron*?) can such a link be tested.