

# SPOHR'S LONDON STUDENTS IN 1820

by Karl Traugott Goldbach

IN THE 2013 issue of this Journal, I suggested writing an essay about some violinists who studied with Spohr and had an influence on British musical life<sup>1</sup>. There seems to be three groups of students connected with Britain; the first consisting of those who took lessons from Spohr when he paid his first visit to London in 1820. Then some English musicians who travelled to Kassel to study with the composer there form the second group while finally there are German students based in Britain. Here, I intend to introduce the London group of 1820.

Spohr himself reported of his London stay: 'Favourable notices of my play upon every occasion of my appearance soon spread my fame throughout the town, and pupils readily presented themselves to receive instruction from me on the violin, as well as ladies who were desirous of being accompanied on the piano. As all expressed their willingness to pay a guinea for each hour's instruction, I readily accepted their offers, as I considered that I owed it to my family to turn the good fortune I had met with in London as a musician to my pecuniary advantage.'<sup>2</sup>

Spohr was obviously not very proud of these London pupils for he says: 'The greater part of my pupils had neither talent nor application, and took lessons of me merely to be enabled to say that they were pupils of Spohr.'<sup>3</sup>

A list of his students, published half a year before Spohr's death in 1859, mentions the following names from this period: 'In London: General Cappel from London, 1820/ Corssen from Bremen, 1820/ Küper from London, 1820'<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, in the appendix to Ronald Dürre's PhD thesis there is a facsimile of Spohr's appointment diary from his 1820 stay in London<sup>5</sup>. The problem with this source is that it includes the names of Cappel and Küper as well as Miss Drury (probably one of the above mentioned 'ladies who were desirous of being accompanied on the piano') but not the name of Corssen. Instead, an unknown pupil 'N' is recorded five times.

Probably Ronald Dürre is right, and Spohr described General Cappel in his *Autobiography*<sup>6</sup> as follows: 'One was an old general on half-pay, but who always made his appearance in full uniform, decorated with all his orders, and with the extreme of high military bearing. He, as an exception, came always to my house, but, nevertheless, required to play for three quarters of an hour only, as according to the custom there deduction was made of the quarter of an hour for the drive.

'He came every morning, Sundays excepted, in his old state carriage, precisely at 12 o'clock, ordered one of his belaced and powdered footmen to bring up his violin-case, and after a dumb greeting sat himself down immediately to his music desk. But previous to that he took out his watch to see at what o'clock the lesson would commence, and then set it down close to him.

'He would bring easy duets with him, chiefly of Pleyel, in which I played second violin. Although there were many things in his play that indicated the unpractised pupil, I soon saw that it would not be wise to point them out to him; I contented myself therefore with accommodating my tones as much as possible to those of the old gentleman, and so we played one duet after the other in the best concord. As soon, however, as we had played the three quarters of an hour, the general would stop, though in the middle of the piece, take from his waistcoat pocket a one-pound note in which a shilling was wrapped up, and put it upon the table. He would then take up his watch, and take leave in the same taciturn manner as he had entered.'<sup>7</sup>

The name 'General Cappel' is also included in the facsimile of Spohr's appointments diary

given in the appendix of Dürre's thesis. Different from Spohr's account in the *Autobiography*, the diary shows that he did not come every morning but only once a week, mostly on a Tuesday<sup>8</sup>.

A 'Capel, General, 14, Charles Street, Berkely (*sic*) Square' is mentioned in the subscriber's list of John Bishop's 1843 edition of Spohr's *Violin School*<sup>9</sup>. Therefore it seems to be likely that this student is identical to the person mentioned in the following obituary: 'General the Hon. T. E. Capel. Feb.3. In Charles-street, Berkeley-square, in his 85th year, General the Hon. Thomas Edward Capel; uncle to the Earl of Essex. He was born on the 24th March 1770, the third son of Colonel Thomas Bladen, and was brother to the late Hon. and Rev. William Robert Capel, Vicar of Waterford, who died just two month before him; and to the late Admiral Sir Thomas Bladen Capel, G.C.B., who died in March 1853. General Capel was appointed Lieutenant and Captain in the 1st Foot Guards Oct.4, 1795; Captain and Lieut.-Colonel June 22, 1803. He served in the campaign in Flanders under H.R.H. the Duke of York, and in 1811 he was Assistant Adjutant general at Cadiz. He was made Colonel in the Army 1812, Major-General 1814, Lieut.-General 1830, and General 1846. He was unmarried.'<sup>10</sup>

Dürre is puzzled by the name Corssen and wonders if this is perhaps an Englishman named Lawson, not from Bremen but from Brandon in Cambridgeshire or Branston in Lincolnshire<sup>11</sup>. Actually, Corssen is a frequent name in Bremen. Four years after Spohr's first stay in London an important German music journal gave an account of the *Unionskonzerte* in Bremen in 1824, where a violinist named Corssen played the instrument and 'accomplished something commendable'<sup>12</sup>. The orchestra of the *Unionskonzerte* consisted mainly of merchants<sup>13</sup>.

It is not unlikely that a merchant named Corssen, who worked for some time in London, took a few lessons from Spohr. In fact, on June 10, 1845, J. M. Corssen from Bremen wrote a letter to Spohr in which he described himself as a former student of the composer. Because he heard that Spohr would spend a night in Bremen on his journey to Oldenburg, he invited him either to play the first violin in a quartet with his previous students Georg Schmidt and August Ochernal as well as an able cellist or to play a game of whist<sup>14</sup>.

According to Marianne Spohr's diary, she and Louis visited Corssen on July 1. Marianne reported on Corssen's garden, his stock of linen, his art collection and a splendid supper but no music<sup>15</sup>. Probably this J.M. Corssen is identical with the Bremen merchant Johann Matthias Corssen (1795-1877)<sup>16</sup> who was a member of the Bremen city-state parliament<sup>17</sup>, collector of indirect taxation<sup>18</sup> as well as captain and regimental quartermaster of the vigilantes<sup>19</sup>.

Dürre records that Küper must be a German name because of the umlaut 'ü'. For that reason he speculates that he may not have been 'Küper' but was really 'Cooper'<sup>20</sup>. However, we have an account from the memoirs of the German doctor Georg Friedrich Stromeier: 'In Frankfurt I had to visit two university friends, namely Henry Küper from London and Wilhelm Eisendecker from Hanover. Küper made his first attempts in diplomacy at the *Bundestag*, he gave me a letter of recommendation for his father. Eisendecker visited his uncle. Both of them were musically gifted. Küper was a student of Spohr on the violin'<sup>21</sup>. Later on Stromeier tells us that Küper's father was court preacher ('Hofprediger') in London<sup>22</sup>.

This information is consistent with additional sources about the British diplomat Henry George Küper: In 1836 he was an 'Attache to His Majesty's Legation' in Frankfurt, where he married his wife Mary<sup>23</sup>. Some official letters he wrote from Frankfurt to London from 1838 to 1843 were recently published in a volume containing letters from British diplomats residing in Germany<sup>24</sup>. In 1844 he became British Consul for Denmark and the Oresund in Elsinore<sup>25</sup>.

He died in 1856: 'At Baltimore, U. S., suddenly, aged 52, Henry George Küper, esq., British Consul at that city, eldest son of the Rev. William Küper, D.D., K.H., Chaplain to the Royal German Chapel; after upwards of 30 years passed in Her Majesty's service'<sup>26</sup>. In actual fact, he

was lynched during a riot!<sup>27</sup> This background is consistent with the letters Küper wrote to Spohr. On March 8, 1833 he sent from Frankfurt a letter of recommendation for the 13-year-old Belgian violinist Henri Vieuxtemps<sup>28</sup>. On May 16, 1841 he sent an arrangement for Septet of Spohr's Second and Third symphonies. He regretted that he was unable to accompany the ambassador to Kassel which is a hint that Küper made trips from Frankfurt to Kassel from time to time. Moreover, he also reports that he has just purchased a Stradivarius<sup>29</sup>.

In his next preserved letter from April 29, 1842 Küper asks Spohr for a score of the Fourth Symphony *Die Weihe der Töne* ('The Consecration of Sounds' or 'The Power of Sound' as it was often known in the nineteenth century) to arrange it as an octet or nonet. Of more importance is the letter's relation to Spohr's attempt to be given leave to come to England to direct the première of his oratorio *The Fall of Babylon*. Küper informed Spohr that the British government had authorised the application to the Hessian prince through the medium of the British Embassy<sup>30</sup>.

A last letter by Küper to Spohr is written on June 6, 1853 from Baltimore. Küper told Spohr that he lived from 1844 to 1852 in Elsinore so that we can conclude that he did not write any letters to Spohr during this period. Küper complained that there was no good music in Denmark, therefore he arranged some string quartets by Spohr for violin and piano and performed them with his wife as well as Spohr's newest duos for violin and piano. For the last four months he has been in the United States, the 'most unmusical country of the civilised world'. Luckily, he says, there are many Germans in Baltimore, including Spohr's former pupil Carl Mahr with whom Küper played not only some of Spohr's quartets but also double-quartets<sup>31</sup>.

Obviously, Spohr's London students from 1820 played no great role in the musical life of their time. But it seems that at least Corssen and Küper took part in the culture of chamber music which made Spohr's music known to musically interested members of the bourgeoisie.

## Notes

1. Karl Traugott Goldbach, 'Spohr, Kuhlau, Farrenc and "Jessonda"', *Spohr Journal* 40 (2013), p.4.
2. Louis Spohr. *Louis Spohr's Autobiography* (London: Longman, Roberts, & Green, 1865), v.2, p.84.
3. Ibid.
4. C.B., 'Verzeichnis der Schüler von Louis Spohr', *Niederrheinische Musik-Zeitung* 7 (1859), p.150.
5. Ronald Dürre, *Louis Spohr und die 'Kasseler Schule'. Das pädagogische Wirken des Komponisten, Geigenvirtuosen und Dirigenten in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (PhD thesis, University of Magdeburg 2004), pp.376-378.
6. Dürre, p.185.
7. Spohr, *Autobiography*, pp.84-85.
8. Cf. Dürre, pp.376-378.
9. Louis Spohr, *Louis Spohr's Celebrated Violin School*, transl. and ed. by John Bishop (London: Cocks [1843]), not paginated; page before the 'table of contents'.
10. General the Hon. T. E. Capel' in: *Gentlemen's Magazine* 43 (1855), p.305; cf. 'General Capel', in: Edward Walford, *Hardwicke's Annual Biography for 1856* (London: Hardwicke 1856), p.138.
11. Dürre, p.186; cf. *ibid.*, p.318.
12. 'Auf der Violine leisteten die Hrn. Eggers, Münter, Corssen und Heineken lobenwerthes' ('Bremen. Ende Decembers 1822', *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* 26 (1824), p.146).

13. Cf. Klaus Blum, *Musikfreunde und Musici. Musikleben in Bremen seit der Aufklärung* (Tutzing: Schneider, 1975), pp.63-65.
14. Letter from J. M. Corsssen to Louis Spohr, Bremen June 10, 1845 (ms., University library Kassel (D Kl), shelf mark 4° ms. hass. 287).
15. Marianne Spohr, *Reise nach Oldenburg, Carlsbad, Berlin, Bonn im Sommer 1845* (ms., Spohr Museum Kassel (D Ksp), shelf mark Sp. ep. 2.2.03), f. 4v.
16. 'Johann Matthias Corßen', in *Ortsfamilienbuch Bremen und Vegesack. Familienbericht*, URL: <http://www.ortsfamilienbuecher.de/famreport.php?ofb=vegesack&ID=154019>.
17. Cf. *Verhandlungen der Bürgerschaft über den Entwurf der Bremischen Verfassung* (Bremen: Schünemann, 1849), p.119.
18. *Staats-Calender der freien Hansestadt Bremen auf das Jahr 1857* (Bremen: Strack 1857), p.37; *Staats-Calender der freien Hansestadt Bremen auf das Jahr 1865* (Bremen: Strack 1865), p.44.
19. *Staats-Calender der freien Hansestadt Bremen auf das Jahr 1839* (Bremen: Heyse 1839), p.35.
20. Dürre, p.186;.cf. *ibid.*, p.318.
21. 'Ich hatte in Frankfurt zwei Universitätsfreunde zu besuchen, Henry Küper aus London und Wilhelm Eisendechser aus Hannover. Küper machte am Bundestage seine ersten Studien in der Diplomatic; er gab mir Empfehlungen an seinen Vater, Eisendechser war zu Besuch bei einem Onkel. Beide waren sehr musikalisch. Küper war ein Schüler von Spohr auf der Violine [...]' (Georg Friedrich Louis Stromeyer, *Erinnerungen eines deutschen Arztes* (Hannover: Rümpler, 1875), v.1, p.313).
22. *Ibid.*, p.376.
23. *New Monthly Magazine* (1836), v.2, p.271.
24. *British Envoys to Germany, 1816-1866, v.2 1830-1847*, ed. Markus Mösslang, Sabine Freitag and Peter Wende (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.88-92 and 98-101.
25. *Gentlemen's Magazine* (1844), p.415; *Annual Register* 86 (1844), p.294.
26. *Annual Register* 98 (1856), p.286.
27. Tracey Matthew Melton, *Hanging Henry Gambrill. The Violent Career of Baltimore's Plug Uglies, 1854-1860* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 2005), p.180.
28. Letter from Henry George Küper to Louis Spohr, Frankfurt (Main) March 8, 1833 (ms., University library Kassel (D Kl), shelf mark 4° ms. hass. 287).
29. Letter from Henry George Küper to Louis Spohr, Frankfurt (Main) May 16, 1841 (ms., University library Kassel (D Kl), shelf mark 4° ms. hass. 287).
30. Letter from Henry George Küper to Louis Spohr, Frankfurt (Main) April 29, 1842 (ms., University library Kassel (D Kl), shelf mark 4° ms. hass. 287); cf. Spohr, *Autobiography*, v.2, p.247.
31. Letter from Henry George Küper to Louis Spohr, Frankfurt (Main) June 6, 1853 (ms., University library Kassel (D Kl), shelf mark 4° ms. hass. 287).

#### **Footnote by Keith Warsop**

English readers might be interested to know that the General Capel investigated above by Dr Goldbach had another string to his bow, for in his younger days he played in a few first-class cricket matches! The most important one was in 1790 when he represented England against Hampshire and the MCC combined at Lord's, scoring 19 in his first innings.