

THE SUPPLEMENT TO: A CONSPECTUS OF THE RECORDINGS OF SPOHR'S SYMPHONIES

by Martin Pulbrook

Introduction

WHEN my *Conspectus of the Recordings of Spohr's Symphonies* was published in 2009 in *Spohr Journal* 36 (pp.3-31), the CD cycles by Howard Griffiths and Howard Shelley were ongoing and not yet complete. This *Supplement* now offers additional remarks on the remaining recordings of both cycles. And to these comments I have added three other things: (a) an analysis of the Schlemm/Urania recording of the Third Symphony — which is in fact, I believe, a most valuable and important performance of the work; (b) rather fuller coverage (than what appeared on pp.26-27 of the *Conspectus*) of such overtures and other minor works as appear as fillers for the symphony cycles; and (c) mention at the very end of Raimund Hug's outstanding performances of the Mass (in comparison with other available recordings of the work) and *Jubilate Deo*.

I owe readers something of an apology for the long delay in the appearance of this *Supplement*. Personal pressures — my mother died aged 89 in March 2013, and I have been her sole Executor — have prevented completion before now. Keith Warsop, despairing (reasonably enough) that I would ever complete the *Supplement*, offered a completion of his own in the 2015 *Journal*. And very kindly — since his approach does not in fact wholly overlap with mine — he has agreed to publish my *Supplement* too in this 2016 *Journal*.

For ease of reference I have subdivided this *Supplement* into distinct numbered sections, one for each work covered.

1. Symphony No.1 in E flat major, Op.20

CD recording conducted by Howard Griffiths with the NDR Radiophilharmonie, Hannover [with Symphony No.6 and the Concert Overture, Op.12] (recorded in November 2007 and issued in 2011, cpo 777 179-2)

IN THE *CONSPECTUS* — only two commercial recordings, those of Walter and Shelley, being then available — I favoured Shelley in the first three movements, for his “fine, crisp performance” of the first movement, the “graceful and pointed playing” of the second, and his “nuanced spacing and phrasing” in the third. But in the last movement I much preferred Walter, for what I called “a truly inspired” performance.

But two qualifications to the above recommendations must also be made. On p.27 of the *Conspectus* (in the section ‘Some Non-Commercial Performances’) I mentioned the impressive rendering by Vaclav Neumann of the first movement of this symphony, at a *tempo* slower than that of Shelley, and of the Scherzo of the third movement, again slower than Shelley; and I commented “What Neumann does here vindicates the case for a slower, grander conception of these parts than what Walter and Shelley have given us in their commercial recordings”.

One might thus sum up the position obtaining by postulating a ‘best performance’ made up of Neumann in the first movement (with repeat included which Neumann in fact omits), Shelley in the second, Neumann and Shelley in the third (Neumann, Scherzo, with no cuts second time round; and Shelley, Trio), and Walter in the last.

How does Howard Griffiths compare in his recording with the above recommendations, or what does he add to this position outlined? Sad to say, Griffiths does not add anything substantial, such as would lead me to modify the ‘best performance’ model postulated above. His first movement, at an indicated 12m.1s., is more than half a minute faster than Walter and Shelley (and Neumann, as we have seen, is even slower), and in the end, for that reason, less successful.

After a finely spaced *Adagio* introduction, the rest of the movement simply proceeds too fast. In spite of the often fine playing of the Hannover orchestra, too much that is clearer and balanced in Neumann and Walter and Shelley becomes, under Griffiths, something of a breathless scramble which it is hard, ultimately, to recommend.

And the same is true, even more dramatically, in the slow movement (*Larghetto con moto*). At an indicated timing of 4m.46s., Griffiths is nearly a minute faster than Walter, and a minute and a half faster than Shelley. One might argue about the precise implications, for Spohr, of '*con moto*'. Does it indicate physical movement, i.e. speed, which might possibly justify Griffiths' approach? Or does it refer to what is inward, i.e. feeling and emotion, which would support Shelley's slower speed?

While *Collins' Dictionary of Music* goes firmly for the former, *Cassell's Italian Dictionary* defines *moto* as both 'movement/motion' and as 'emotion'. And in the end one factor seems to me decisive in favour of the second definition, and Shelley's interpretation: the movement simply makes much better sense, in its particular context, taken this way.

Again Griffiths is disappointing in the third and fourth movements. In the third his overall time of 7m.33s., though slower than Walter's 7m.2s., is faster than Shelley's excellent 8m.41s. (itself faster, as we have seen, than Neumann in the Scherzo part of it). And in the last movement Griffiths' 8m.7s. seems impossibly rushed compared with Shelley's still-too-fast 8m.31s. and Walter's magnificent 9m.21s.

The brilliance of Spohr's achievement in this movement is lost and blurred at Griffiths' and Shelley's breakneck speeds. Walter's majestic spacing of sound and musical argument here grows on one with every hearing: it is so absolutely 'right' and therefore convincing. And the movement, thus played, emerges as a veritable *tour de force*. In summary, no part of Griffiths' performance of this symphony can displace the recommendations made in the first and second paragraphs above: Neumann/Shelley in the first movement, Shelley in the second, Neumann/Shelley again in the third, and Walter in the fourth.

2. Symphony No.3 in C minor, Op.78

10-inch LP recording conducted by Gustav Schlemm with the Frankfurt Radio Orchestra (issued 1952, Urania URLP 5008)

CD recording conducted by Howard Shelley with the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana [with Symphony No.6 and *The Fall of Babylon* overture] (recorded in March 2009 and issued in 2010, Hyperion CDA 67788)

A MISUNDERSTANDING about the Schlemm recording needs to be cleared up as a first step. In the original *Conspectus* I referred to the conductor as being Georg Schlemm (pp.7 and 8). Such has, for example, also been the view of Keith Warsop (to whom I am grateful for supplying me, courtesy of Eugene Minor, with a CD transfer of the recording — I have not seen the original record or sleeve) and of several cataloguers. Might it be the case, I wonder, that Urania, by accident or design, issued copies of URLP 5008 with the conductor's first name incorrectly given?

In fact no such conductor as Georg Schlemm ever existed, which has led to supposition — which I myself shared for a long time — that the name "Georg Schlemm" was entirely fictitious, and thus a 'cover' for another (perhaps famous?) conductor who could not be named for legal or copyright reasons. The original RCA 'Camden' series is a good example of this practice of concealment; and, in England, William Barrington Coupe, with his Fidelio and Summit and ARC (and other) labels, made hay out of the concept.

The conductor of the Urania recording of the Third Symphony was actually Gustav Schlemm, a perfectly well-known and well-documented musician, although he made few records. John L. Holmes, in his 1982 book *Conductors on Record* (published by Victor Gollancz Ltd., London), gives Gustav Schlemm the following entry (p.586):

Schlemm, Gustav Adolf (b.1902). Born at Giessen, Schlemm studied at the Hoch Conservatory at Frankfurt am Main (1918-23), and was a répétiteur at Königsberg (1923-4). He has been a conductor at Münster (1924-9), music director at Herford (1929-31) and Meiningen (1931-3), was a free-lance composer and guest conductor in Berlin (1933-5), conductor with the Hamburg Radio (1935-7), in Berlin (1937-45), directed the Singing Academy he founded at Wetzlar (1945-53), was music director at Hildesheim (1956) and then settled in Bavaria as a freelance composer. His compositions include two symphonies, orchestral, choral, instrumental and chamber music, and he recorded Spohr's Symphony No.3 with the Frankfurt Radio Orchestra for Urania.

I see no reason, therefore, to doubt the attribution of this record to the Frankfurt Radio Orchestra and Gustav Schlemm. And, appearing as it did in 1952, almost certainly — in common with many other Urania issues of the period — the record is of a performance given some time in the late 1930s or 1940s. It cannot, for obvious reasons, have been post-1950, when the Frankfurter Rundfunk-Symphonie-Orchester was renamed Sinfonie-Orchester des Hessischen Rundfunks. This recording is thus of considerable value in illustrating inherited practice and tradition in the performance of Spohr in Germany before that tradition was almost entirely swept away from public consciousness and memory.

In the *Conspectus* I articulated the often-true principle that slower performance speeds, where appropriate, enabled clearer articulation of notation and phrasing, and were in such circumstances preferable. And thus, in the first movement of the Third Symphony, I preferred Walter and Sulyok (both 8m.51s.) to Griffiths (8m.11s.), Hager (7m.55s.) and Albrecht (7m.34s.), whose faster speeds turn the movement into something of a headlong scramble.

The recordings of the first movement by Schlemm and Shelley fall also, as it happens, into these two distinct categories, Schlemm being even marginally slower than Walter and Sulyok, at 8m.54s., and Shelley, at 8m.8s., being very close to Griffiths' 8m.11s. But further details are also important. Schlemm's *Andante grave* introduction, at 1m.58s., while slower than Griffiths, Hager and Albrecht, is actually slightly faster than Sulyok's 2m., and considerably faster than Walter's 2m.18s. Thus, for the rest of the movement, Schlemm's tempo is in fact the slowest of all (Schlemm, 6m.56s.; Sulyok, 6m.51s.; Walter, 6m.33s.). This — as we shall see — has significant implications. In Shelley's case the introduction is on the fast side (1m.43s., faster than everyone except Hager's unsatisfactory 1m.32s.), which means that the rest of his movement is slower (6m.25s.) than might otherwise appear to be the case; but it is, nonetheless, still too fast, when compared with Schlemm and Sulyok in particular.

Two somewhat different approaches to Spohr are thus in evidence. Shelley's is a brisk, no-nonsense treatment, beautifully played, but ultimately somewhat superficial. It leaves no time to pause and draw breath, no time for wonderment and imaginative reflection along the way. And this is precisely the area where Schlemm is at his strongest. Schlemm's recording is unfortunately cramped and primitive, but his spacing of progressive clusters of sound is majestic in its cumulative effect, a sort of outline prefiguration of the tonal world of Bruckner. Ultimately, for me, Schlemm's approach in this movement is much to be preferred; and I would see an ideal performance of the movement as comprising Walter's introduction (2m.18s.) and Schlemm in the main body of the movement (6m.56s.), a total of 9m.14s. in all.

Both Shelley and (strangely, after his marvellous first movement) Schlemm in different ways misjudge the slow movement, the *Larghetto*. Shelley's reading is exceptionally disappointing. At 5m.33s., he is faster than Albrecht (9m.58s.), Walter (7m.36s.), Hager (6m.11s.) and Griffiths (5m.46s.), and when we bear in mind that even Albrecht's magnificent and spacious performance is actually faster than the composer's indicated metronome marking, it should be clear that Shelley does not even begin to enter the serious reckoning here.

Somewhat paradoxically, Schlemm is both slightly faster (5m.21s.) than Shelley, but also rather more convincing. Under Schlemm the *Larghetto* becomes a passionate outpouring of great intensity, one controlled sweep of emotion, superbly executed by the Frankfurt players. One is bound to pose the question: might this actually be what Spohr himself intended? For, in its way, it is certainly most effective. In the end I can see no alternative but to acknowledge that the composer's metronome marking tells against Schlemm's interpretation. Albrecht's slower reading (or, as I suggested in the *Conspectus*, something even marginally slower than that) must be correct here.

In the Scherzo and Trio, I preferred Walter and Sulyok in the *Conspectus* (6m.45s. and 6.48s. respectively), feeling that Griffiths (6m.19s.) and Albrecht (4m.23s.) were too fast to be properly effective, and Hager (7m.48s.), for all his qualities, probably too slow. In purely objective terms, the position therefore appears good for Shelley, with his timing of 6m.49s., but less good for Schlemm, whose time of 8m.11s. for the movement is the longest of any of the seven conductors. But how do Shelley and Schlemm measure up subjectively?

Shelley's is an exceptionally good performance of the third movement, "very cleanly played" ("sehr sauber gespielt", as Otto Klemperer remarked of another performance in another context, Heyworth Vol.2, p.349). Sulyok, Walter and Shelley are indeed much of a muchness in this movement. Sulyok has perhaps

the least good orchestra of the three, with rough edges audible here and there; this leaves the effective choice one between Walter and Shelley. Walter's orchestra is magnificent, deep-toned and full-throated, which in the end swings things in his favour. Shelley's Swiss Italian orchestra put no foot wrong, and play spectacularly well, but ultimately lack the depth and richness of Walter's Slovak forces. But between these two it is indeed a close-run thing!

Schlemm, by contrast, again turns in a very good, but misjudged, performance of the third movement. It is more like early Bruckner than Spohr, more like a movement composed in 1858 rather than 1828. That is not to say that it is not very good; in some ways, like his reading of the *Larghetto*, it is (from one angle) overwhelming. But the metronome evidence again points firmly to the conclusion that the composer himself intended otherwise than what Schlemm gives us. It is strange that Schlemm so ignores the metronome evidence in the second and third movements. Did he, I wonder, use a copy of the score or orchestral parts in which these metronome markings were omitted? It seems reasonable to conclude that, if Schlemm chose different tempi in spite of in fact knowing the composer's intentions, he deserves more criticism than if he chose tempi (which happened to be mistaken) in ignorance of those actual intentions.

At 9m.32s., Shelley's performance of the Finale is slower than Griffiths' (9m.12s.) but faster than Sulyok's (9m.41s.) and Walter's (9m.46s.). I said previously of Griffiths here that "the needs of architectural structure" — so prominent a feature with Sulyok and Walter — "are too often ignored"; and this is true also of Shelley in this movement. There is much deft, and even graceful and beautiful, playing from Shelley's orchestra. But, without the sense of "architectural structure" which is so exceptional in Walter's case in particular, the movement fails to make the total effect that it can and should.

In his own way Schlemm is again spectacular here. He is in fact slightly slower than Walter, and once more he conjures a sound and phrasing from his players which seems to anticipate early Bruckner or even Wagner of the 1840s and '50s. But there is also a serious miscalculation. Like Hager and Albrecht, Schlemm omits the repeat, which has the effect of destabilising the balancing proportions of the symphony's first and last movements. His time of 7m.22s., if adjusted to include the repeat, would result in a total playing time of about 10¼ minutes.

Walter's performance of the last movement, particularly as regards articulation and phrasing, and the depth of sound he secures from his players, is very hard to fault in any way, and leaves Albrecht and Griffiths and Shelley trailing far behind. The Urania sound for Schlemm is less good, on account of its age, appreciably congested and with a rough edge at climaxes. But some may justifiably prefer the greater spaciousness of conception that Schlemm brings to the movement, grand and noble and unhurried. Perhaps an ideal performance time lies somewhere within the range between Walter's 9m.46s. and Schlemm's (adjusted) time of 10¼ minutes.

One final comment. Since there exist more recordings, seven in all, of the Third Symphony than of any other Spohr symphony, the reaching in this case of just such a 'platform of consciousness' as I articulated as desirable in the *Conspectus* is not only here now achievable but also, I hope, in ample measure actually achieved.

3. Symphony No.4 in F major, *The Consecration of Sounds*, Op.86

CD recording conducted by Howard Griffiths with the NDR Radiophilharmonie, Hannover [with Symphony No.5 and the overture *Der Matrose*] (recorded in 2010 and issued in 2013, cpo 777 745-2) IN MY ANALYSIS of the Fourth Symphony in the original *Conspectus* (pp.10-11), I noted that Alfred Walter was in each of the four movements marginally slower than Howard Shelley, and added "Perhaps only time will tell — if or when a 'platform of consciousness' has been properly established for this work — which of the two approaches is ultimately more appropriate" (p.11). In the event Griffiths is everywhere somewhat faster than Walter and (in the case of the second movement) than Shelley too. And perhaps the best course of action, with this work which so lacks an established 'platform of consciousness', is to take each of the four movements in turn, and to try to achieve a comparative analysis of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the available performances.

Griffiths scores immediately (on a structural detail) in the first movement by making the repeat, omitted by Walter and Shelley; for (as I remarked in the *Conspectus*) "That omission ... is to be regretted: the time-balance of first and third movements is thereby impaired" (p.11). That exposition repeat excepted, Griffiths turns in a less visionary performance of the first movement than Walter. Griffiths takes 3m.8s. to perform

the material which is then repeated, which means that his advertised performing time for the movement of 13m.7s. is in reality 9m.59s. for that music for which Walter takes 10.27s. Walter's slower tempo pays rich dividends, both in terms of articulation and understanding.

Writing elsewhere of Sir Adrian Boult's recording of Havergal Brian's *Gothic Symphony* (Testament CDs SBT 1454) compared with that of Ondrej Lenárd (Naxos CDs 8.557418-19), I said of the middle part of the first movement:

"Boult's interpretation of the passage falls in the end a long way short. If we were here in the presence of a transient pastoral idyll, Boult might be held to cope very well, in a ... superficial way. But the intruding drum rhythms ... do not properly register, under Boult, against the prevailing pastoral mood, and thus an element of the developing conflict between the opposing forces is simply bypassed. This ... is very bad news, in that [this music] thereby tends to become an isolated self-standing interlude, rather than an integral stage in a progressive development."

This, exactly, is the relationship of Griffiths' realisation of the Fourth Symphony's first movement to that of Alfred Walter. Griffiths presents many beautiful and effective moments purely *in themselves*. But what is lacking is Walter's innate sense of the importance of each such 'moment' as part of an integrated whole.

In sum, while I would contend that Walter's visualisation of the first movement is at least a valid and worthy realisation of its implications, Griffiths' attempt, for the reason stated, in the event falls far short.

In the second movement ('Lullaby, Dance, Serenade') the situation seems to me somewhat different. Walter and Shelley take very similar times (6m.41s., Walter; 6m.39s., Shelley). Although in the *Conspectus* I described Shelley as generally "rather more dramatic" (p.11), there is in fact little difference of overall perspective between the two. Griffiths' indicated time of 6m.16s. leads to an appreciably tauter structure, which in this instance brings very considerable benefits. And as the Hannover orchestra plays for Griffiths with great immediacy and bloom, this is a rare case where (in my view) Griffiths emerges as clearly preferable to the others.

In the third movement — which takes the place of the usual scherzo — 'normal service' is resumed. Walter's rather slower total time, 13m.45s. in all (in spite of his omitting a short repeat at the start of the March), compared with Griffiths' indicated 12m.56s., means that he (Walter) is grander and simpler in all aspects of the movement, the military March to war, the central sections ("Emotions of those left behind"), the repeat of the March, and the final chorale of thanksgiving.

I am bound, in the circumstances, to ask a painful question about Griffiths in this movement. Does he, deep down, believe in this music one hundred per cent? For the March and the closing chorale, capable (respectively) of striking effect and profound nobility, make, thus tossed off somewhat superficially, a lesser impression than they should. And I find it impossible to square what Griffiths gives us with Spohr's complete seriousness and nobility of character, and consequent artistic intentions.

The final movement, of lament and then, ultimately, consolation, takes 7m.43s. in Walter's glorious realisation of it, marked by sombre gravity and a spirit of fervent outpouring. By contrast, Griffiths (7m.6s.) and Shelley (6m.33s.), with their faster speeds, simply fail to convey adequately the depth of expressiveness inherent in the music. In particular, Griffiths' treatment of the second subject (the *Allegretto* section) is very much on the fast side.

In conclusion I would like to make one plea to future performers of this work, in the attempt to reach a viable 'platform of consciousness' for it. When all is said and done, even Walter's performance, for all its splendour, is without much doubt in places too tentative and reined-in. Caution needs to be thrown to the winds and all inhibition and tentativeness cast aside. The work would then flower as the overwhelming physical experience that it should be — along the lines of the incredible 1956 performance of Schumann's Piano Concerto by Friedrich Wührer and Hermann Abendroth (Eterna) or Klemperer's extraordinary, surging recording of the first movement of Schumann's Third Symphony (Columbia).

4. Symphony No.5 in C minor, Op.102

CD recording conducted by Howard Griffiths with the NDR Radiophilharmonie, Hannover [with Symphony No.4 and the overture *Der Matrose*] (recorded in 2010 and issued in 2013, cpo 777 745-2) IN MY REVIEW of the two then-available recordings, by Walter and Shelley, in the original *Conspectus* (pp.11-15), I came to the general conclusion that Walter was to be preferred overall, for his tautness and overall vision in the first and last movements — although the repeat, which he omits, should be made in

the last movement — and for his marginally more expansive treatment of the second and third. Shelley, though generally very good throughout the symphony, is in the end and almost everywhere trumped by Walter's superior understanding and execution.

Griffiths' recording of the first movement of this symphony is one of the best things in his entire Spohr cycle, a fine and noble performance beautifully and forcefully executed by his Hannover players. The difficulty for him is that he is up against the phenomenal rendering of this movement by Alfred Walter; and, when all is said and done, Walter in the end has the edge — as he did earlier against Shelley.

Timewise there is nothing to differentiate Griffiths (who takes an indicated 11m.14s.) and Walter (11m.15s.). After repeated listening, for the sake of comparison, there seem to me three distinct areas and reasons why Walter emerges in front. Griffiths' orchestra is very, very good; but what Walter coaxes from his players is superlative, sometimes defying belief for its deep humanity and wisdom of conception and execution. Secondly, Walter integrates the different elements of the movement exceptionally well, in fact seamlessly and organically. Griffiths' transitions involve more pronounced 'changes of gear', and are thus, ultimately, less satisfying. Thirdly, when the opening 'world of warmth' theme reappears and is then gradually elaborated on in the second half of the movement, Griffiths treats it somewhat superficially, so that it appears almost as 'salon music' — which cannot be correct. Walter is here both more natural and more sincere, and the cumulative effect of his approach is overwhelming.

In the second movement, the *Larghetto*, Griffiths is marginally faster (at an indicated 6m.5s.) than both Walter (6m.24s.) and Shelley (6m.17s.). Again, Griffiths is unlucky here to be pitted against Walter at his very best. Griffiths' is by no means a bad performance, being in fact very well played. But whatever he does well Walter in the event does even better, so that in the end there is no real contest. In particular — as in the first movement — Walter integrates the different parts of the movement (the alternating 'A' and 'B' parts) with greater and more convincing cohesion, showing with supreme skill in execution how the two parts are to be blended together into a single whole.

The position in the third movement mirrors exactly that in the second: Walter (4m.15s. overall), Shelley (4m.2s.), Griffiths (3m.57s.). At his slightly slower speed Walter is able to articulate phrasing and rhythms to greater effect. Griffiths' performance is by no means bad, but it simply does not measure up to Walter's.

In the fourth movement — which I characterised in the *Conspectus* as covering the question of "the struggle of the artist for emergence in a hostile world" — I preferred the slightly tauter rendering of Walter (9m.59s. with the omitted repeat included) as against Shelley's 10m.30s., of which I said "there is something calculated, almost statuesque, about his performance" (p.15). Griffiths' time of 9m.51s. puts him — as in the first movement — very close to Walter, and the comparison between them is again instructive.

Unfortunately, this time, Griffiths is not as successful. There is much beautiful playing, certainly; but, somehow, Griffiths manages to be superficial; it is as though the 'battle' or 'struggle' is for outward show only, rather than being something of essence, a real 'life or death' encounter. And central to this failing on Griffiths' part is his continuing view of the 'world of warmth' theme, reappearing now in somewhat recast form from the first movement, as something worldly, in a sense 'heart on sleeve', rather than something deep-seated and fundamental. Walter's complete seriousness and absolute integrity in this regard is undeniable, and in the end makes his recording the only truly recommendable one — if only he had made the repeat in the last movement!

5. Symphony No.6 in G major, *Historical*, Op.116

CD recording conducted by Howard Shelley with the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana [with Symphony No.3 and *The Fall of Babylon* overture] (recorded in March 2009 and issued in 2010, Hyperion CDA 67788)

CD recording conducted by Howard Griffiths with the NDR Radiophilharmonie Hannover [with Symphony No.1 and the Concert Overture, Op.12] (recorded in December 2009 and issued in 2011, cpo 777 179-2)

THE OPENING MOVEMENT ("the Bach-Handel period, 1720") of the "Historical" Symphony is very disappointing under both Shelley and Griffiths. The power and contrasts of the movement are each in turn underplayed, so that it emerges as something weaker and slighter than it should. Shelley's time of 5m.34s., and Griffiths' time of 5m.12s., as against Rickenbacher's 5m.47s. and Walter's 7m.25s., tell — as looked

at in the main *Conspectus* — only part of the story. For the movement consists of a slow introduction, which must not be played too fast, and then an ‘ABA’ structure, the ‘A’ parts of which must not be played too slowly.

In the slow introduction, where I preferred Walter (52s.) to Rickenbacher (41s.), Shelley and Griffiths, both 38s., are even faster than Rickenbacher. In the ‘A’ sections, where Walter was absurdly slow (2m.25s. and 1m.52s.), turning the music into “heavy-handed affectation or parody”, I preferred Rickenbacher’s controlled crispness (1m.41s. and 1m.23s.).

Shelley (1m.39s. and 1m.18s.) and Griffiths (1m.36s. and 1m.18s.) are marginally faster than Rickenbacher, without anything like his incisiveness. And in the ‘B’ section of the movement, where I favoured Walter’s slower 2m.16s. as against Rickenbacher’s 2m.2s., Shelley, at 1m.55s., and Griffiths, at 1m.40s., are again faster than Rickenbacher, making less of this section in consequence.

In the case of performance of Mozart’s symphonies, one might debate whether ‘brisk Mozart’ (e.g. Klemperer’s recordings made between 1938 and 1951 in Los Angeles, Budapest, Paris, Berlin and Amsterdam) or ‘Romantic Mozart’ (e.g. Bruno Walter’s final Mozart set ‘The Last Six Mozart Symphonies’ made with the Columbia Symphony Orchestra for CBS towards the end of his life) is preferable, or more authentic.

But the slow movement of Spohr’s Sixth is (as I observed in the main *Conspectus*) “Mozart viewed through the optic and filter of Spohr’s perceptions; and it is ultimately, in consequence, a Spohr movement not a Mozart movement”. And I therefore favoured Alfred Walter’s rather heavier and more elaborate reading (9m.17s.) instead of Rickenbacher’s very brisk and classically ‘correct’ interpretation (6m.29s.). Which view is to be preferred is ultimately a matter of personal evaluation and choice.

Shelley, at 7m.34s., is also fast, though not as fast as Rickenbacher; and Griffiths is fastest of all, at 6m.20s. I have to admit that my vote goes to Alfred Walter here; compared with him, the trio of Rickenbacher and Shelley and Griffiths seem rushed and slight: the movement thus becomes a Mozart parody, not Spohr’s own considered summing-up of Mozart’s world.

In the third movement neither Rickenbacher (5m.50s.=2m.2s.+2m.6s.+1m.42s.) nor Walter (6m.25s.=2m.19s.+2m.9s.+1m.57s.) really gets to grips with what is needed. And Shelley, lying between the two (6m.2s.=2m.11s.+2m.3s.+1m.48s.), does not succeed either. Shelley’s orchestra play sharply and crisply, even daintily at times. But what is necessary to make a success of this movement is a large degree of swagger and angularity, of bumpiness and force — just those things that Spohr conceived Beethoven to be as a person and as a composer. Let us hope that some interpreter gives us this view of the movement one day.

Griffiths, with a total time of 5m.50s. (2m.7s.+2m.+1m.43s.), is like Rickenbacher, too fast to make a real success of the movement. But he does in fact succeed, spectacularly, in one important respect where all the others fail. His forceful treatment of the timpani, at the start and particularly end of the Scherzo, is outstanding, and just what is called for. If that could be allied to Walter’s slower speed, then performance of the Scherzo would indeed be along the right lines. In the Trio I think something even slower than Walter’s 2m.9s., and with more emphasis — almost punch-drunk in spirit — is ideally desirable.

In the main *Conspectus* I preferred Walter’s performance (6m.30s.) of the Sixth’s last movement to Rickenbacher’s (6m.22s.), in part because “Walter’s articulation of passage-work, particularly in the woodwinds, is preferable”. But room remained for something more impressive and convincing; and I added “a slightly slower performance than either Rickenbacher or Walter gives us would pay rich dividends. Something of the verve and acuteness in phrase-pointing of Sir Thomas Beecham [or, one might add, of Georg Solti in his extraordinary recording of Tchaikovsky’s Second Symphony] is needed to bring out the qualities of Spohr’s writing in this movement”. In view of what he achieved in the last movement of the First Symphony, it is both surprising and disappointing that Alfred Walter does not realise the true potential of the last movement of the Sixth.

What Shelley gives us does not end up by achieving the hoped-for outcome either. At 6m.30s. Shelley is occasionally faster than Walter (e.g. in the opening bars) and occasionally slower (e.g. his slight *rallentando* in the closing bars), But two things should be clear: overall Walter’s conception is more evenly judged, and we still wait for a wholly convincing performance of this movement in terms of zest and execution. Griffiths is once more the fastest of the four conductors in this movement, with a time of

5m.47s. This performance is a kaleidoscope of colour and excitement, but essentially empty and meaningless. It therefore does nothing, absolutely nothing, to substantiate the proposition I articulated in the main *Conspectus*: “The last movement of the Sixth is ... completely serious music by Spohr ... in which he sets himself the task of succeeding in a field where others deem, or have shown, success impossible”. One longs for a Beecham or a Solti — as I mentioned earlier — so as to bring out the sparkle and brilliance abundantly evident in the music but for the most part skated over, superficially, by Griffiths.

6, Symphony No.7 in C major, *The Earthly and Divine in Human Life*, Op.121

CD recording conducted by Howard Shelley with the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana [with Symphony No.9 and the *Introduzione* in D and *Festmarsch* in D] (recorded in August 2011 and issued in 2012, Hyperion CDA 67939)

CD recording conducted by Howard Griffiths with the NDR Radiophilharmonie, Hannover [with Symphony No.9 and *Erinnerung an Marienbad*] (recorded in 2010 and issued in 2015, cpo 777 746-2)

IN THE ORIGINAL *Conspectus* I was able to consider only two recordings of this work, the 1991 commercial one by Alfred Walter (pp.18-19) and the 1979 non-commercial one by Raymond Leppard (p.28), the only obvious failing of which was the non-observance of the first movement’s repeat. Of these Walter’s was on the whole a huge disappointment, giving the impression that Walter was for the most part “feeling his way” through strange and unfamiliar territory. Leppard’s performance was such that I commented “It would certainly be in the interests of wider recognition of Symphony No.7 if Leppard’s marvellous realisation of it ... could somehow be made commercially available”. Now there are the recordings of Griffiths and Shelley to add to the unequal ‘mix’: what — if anything — do they bring to the situation?

The question of performance speeds is not an entirely one-way matter. Sometimes a slow speed will bring benefits, as in the cases of Albrecht’s recording of the *Larghetto* of the Third Symphony and of del Mar’s and Rickenbacher’s respective realisations of the slow movements of the Eighth and Ninth. But sometimes a faster speed will succeed in holding the music together with greater coherence and logic, as in the cases of the first movement of the Fifth Symphony under Walter or the *Zweikampf* overture under Schönherr.

Thus speeds alone, whether slow or fast, are no absolute guide, particularly in a work such as the Seventh Symphony, where there is no performing tradition or ‘platform of consciousness’ at all in respect of what constitutes good performance.

I think this needs to be said, because the times alone of the four performances, while they *may* tell something useful, are in no circumstances an absolute indication one way or the other. As was seen in the main *Conspectus*, Leppard’s faster and tauter performing time in the first movement (estimated time with repeat included, approx. 11 minutes, as compared with Walter’s 12m.1s.) in this case pays rich dividends. Both Griffiths (indicated time of 11m.6s.) and Shelley (10m.43s.) are very close to Leppard in time, but neither offers anything like Leppard’s intense concentration and sense of forward movement; thus under them the music tends to drift along, amiably and pleasantly enough it must be said, but without Leppard’s ever-arching mastery of perspective. Leppard is so far ahead of the rest of the field in this first movement that there is in the event no real contest.

I do not wish to be repetitious, but essentially the same position obtains in both the second and third movements of this symphony. For reasons that I cannot entirely explain, the second movement of the Seventh seems to be the most difficult symphonic movement by Spohr to perform at all adequately. In the main *Conspectus* I described Walter here as “feeling his way, not very securely” (p.28), and the same could also be said of Griffiths, who is marginally faster than Walter (at an indicated 11m.37s. against Walter’s 12m.11s.), but in the end fares no better in his search for what is satisfying. Shelley is somewhat more convincing, not least because (at an indicated 10m.43s.) he is nearly a minute faster than Griffiths, but the end result is in truth not a huge improvement, and very far from entirely successful or an embodiment of conviction. For that we have to go to Leppard, whose performance of this movement I described in the *Conspectus* (p.28) as “assured and incisive, [with] first-rate playing from [the BBC Northern Orchestra]”.

With respect to the third movement, I wrote in the *Conspectus* that “Although Walter is himself marginally slower than Spohr’s metronome marking ..., at 9m.31s. ..., Leppard is slower still, at 11m.20s. ..., and manages to ‘bring off’ the movement at this speed by a superb tonal and virtuosic display from his

orchestra" (p.28). Griffiths and Shelley lie midway between Leppard and Walter time-wise (at indicated times of 10m.27s. and 10m.44s. respectively), but — apart from Griffiths' final *Adagio* passage, which is superb — neither substantially understands and makes sense of the movement as a whole in the way that Leppard does. Leppard, perforce, has to remain the unrivalled recommendation in the work as a whole: see my 'Concluding Remarks'.

7. **Symphony No.8 in G major, Op.137**

CD recording conducted by Howard Shelley with the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana [with Symphony No.10 and *Der Zweikampf mit der Geliebten* overture] (recorded in April 2010 and issued in 2011, Hyperion CDA 67802)

THE EIGHTH SYMPHONY is covered in two places in the original *Conspectus*, the commercial recordings of Walter and Griffiths (pp.19-21) and the non-commercial performance of Norman del Mar (pp.28-29). And I summed up the resulting situation as follows: "Walter's CD ... remains for the time being the recommended version of this symphony, except for del Mar's exceptional slow movement. But ... there is still room for a truly outstanding performance of the first movement". What then does Howard Shelley's subsequent CD add to this pre-existent picture?

Of Griffiths' recording of the first movement, which takes 10m.24s., I said in the *Conspectus* that "unequivocally ... Griffiths is too fast; too much of the music becomes a scramble, and architectural continuity is thereby repeatedly blurred and even lost" (p.19). Walter, at 12m.25s., was (because of his slower speed) considerably more convincing, with some reservations: "Walter, by default therefore, comes nearer to Spohr's intentions. But that is not to say that Walter is in every sense ideal; his reading lacks the momentum and depth that he brings to the first movement of the Second (for example); a more imaginative rhythmic sense and pointing would achieve more pronounced results. Too often Walter lets the music 'drift' and lose focus". Shelley, at an indicated 12m.40s., is marginally slower even than Walter; and in many ways his is a very well thought out and well executed performance.

And yet, in essence, I have the same reservations about Shelley here as about Walter. Why? In my piece about the Fourth Symphony earlier in this *Supplement* I suggested that "Caution needs to be thrown to the winds and all inhibitions and tentativeness cast aside". I think this is also true of the first movement of the Eighth: the movement would then emerge as one of surging, overwhelming power, such as is evident in Leopold Stokowski's recording of Tchaikovsky's *Francesca da Rimini* (Everest LP SDBR 3011) and Valéry Gergiev's 1990 Rotterdam CD of Borodin's Second Symphony (released by Philips in 1999 as CD 422 996-2). By underplaying the emotional scope and effect of Spohr's music — which is where, ultimately, I believe Walter's and Shelley's recordings of the first movement of the Eighth Symphony fall short —, conductors produce interpretations lacking in the conviction ultimately possible.

In the case of the slow movement (*Poco Adagio*) I came to the conclusion (in the *Conspectus*), in respect of the commercial recordings, that "Neither of the recordings does the movement real justice. The performing times of both Walter (5m.29s.) and Griffiths (5m.48s.) are too fast by a considerable margin" (p.20). Equally (as regards the 1984 BBC broadcast by Norman del Mar) I wrote that "There is one outstanding feature of Norman del Mar's performance, and that is the slow movement ... Del Mar, at 6m.40s., paces the movement perfectly, combining gravitas with pathos, which is surely what the composer intended" (p.28).

Shelley's indicated time of 6m.23s. for this movement puts him in the same bracket as Norman del Mar; and indeed he is only very slightly faster than del Mar. The comparison is an instructive one. While clearly the pick from among the three commercial recordings, Shelley's performance is (I feel) too calculatedly forced and bloated, and must yield place to del Mar's extraordinarily controlled and almost ascetic continuum of concentration. Del Mar's is a phenomenal realisation of the movement, and deserves to be better known.

In the third movement I preferred (in the *Conspectus*) Walter's "somewhat slower and more idiomatic performance" (7m.5s.) to Griffiths (6m.16s.). Shelley, at an indicated 6m.14s., is simply too fast here, and no match for Walter.

In the Eighth's last movement, I observed (*Conspectus*, p.21) that "there is no contest between Walter (9m.51s.) and Griffiths (8m.6s.) ... Walter puts in one of his very best performances ... and Griffiths is simply too rushed, missing the proper architectural perspective". Shelley, at an indicated 9m.50s., comes

close to Walter, and is clearly preferable to Griffiths; but in the end he cannot match Walter either in splendour of orchestral playing or sense of architecture.

In sum, the overall position in the Eighth Symphony, in terms of recommendations, remains much as it was at the time of the original *Conspectus*: del Mar in the second movement and Walter in the third and fourth, with a wholly convincing performance of the first movement (along the lines outlined here in the third paragraph) still to come.

8. Symphony No.9 in B minor, *The Seasons*, Op.143

CD recording conducted by Howard Shelley with the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana [with Symphony No.7 and the *Introduzione* and *Festmarsch*] (recorded in August 2011 and issued in 2012, Hyperion CDA 67939)

[Inexplicably, this CD places Symphony No.9 before No.7, as though the latter is the less important work. Better not to make that judgment, and to put the symphonies in numerical order — as does Griffiths' CD of these works, and as do Shelley's other CDs in his cycle.]

CD recording conducted by Howard Griffiths with the NDR Radiophilharmonie, Hannover [with Symphony No.7 and *Erinnerung an Marienbad*] (recorded in 2011 and issued in 2015, cpo 777 746-2) [The back cover gives Symphony No.9 as beginning at Band 5 — not 4 — and *Erinnerung an Marienbad* as being Band 9 — not 8 — as though Symphony No.7 has four movements. The CD's booklet does not make this error which suggests lack of co-ordination in production.]

IN THE MAIN *Conspectus* I considered the two recordings of the Ninth up to then available, those of Rickenbacher and Walter, concluding that Rickenbacher was to be preferred in the second and third movements, and Walter for the most part in the first and fourth — although the way remained open for more totally convincing performances in both these latter cases. How, in these circumstances, do Griffiths and Shelley measure up to this challenge? Do they succeed in giving us what has been lacking hitherto?

I explained my preference for Walter over Rickenbacher in the first movement in the following terms: "Time-wise, there is little to choose in this movement between Rickenbacher (9m.9s.) and Walter (8m.44s.). In some respects Rickenbacher's marginally broader tempi are preferable, but, as the movement progresses, Walter conjures from his Slovak players ... a depth and range of orchestral colour which eludes Rickenbacher and the Bavarian orchestra ... There is perhaps scope in the future for a recording which combines Walter's tonal achievement with a truly *maestoso* approach of slowness and grandeur" (p.22).

And, as if in answer to that wish, we now have Shelley's magnificent interpretation of the first movement, clearly one of the highlights, in terms of vision and achievement, of his entire Spohr cycle. At an indicated 9m.29s., he is even slower than Rickenbacher, but holds the movement together, as a developing unity, spectacularly well, coaxing glorious playing from his orchestra. Shelley is now very obviously 'no.1 choice' in this movement.

Griffiths, at an indicated 8m.50s., is marginally slower than Walter, but without Walter's logic. Griffiths has a cumulatively annoying tendency of emphasising short-term emotional effect at the expense of long-term perspective and goals. The result is many glorious brief moments which, added together, do not cohere and develop as they properly should.

In the second movement, 'Spring' (*Moderato-Presto-Moderato*), Shelley is once again the slowest of the four conductors:

Shelley	7m.7s.
Griffiths	7m.4s.
Rickenbacher	7m.1s.
Walter	6m.20s.

Again Shelley puts in an excellent performance, and the choice consequently (in my view) has to be between Shelley and Rickenbacher. In the *Conspectus* I observed that "At every stage of the movement Rickenbacher is marginally more relaxed and idiomatic than Walter" (p.22). In the end, I have to admit to still preferring Rickenbacher myself here, but it is a very close run thing, dependent very largely on personal preferences. Rickenbacher is classically pointed and nuanced, emphasising Spohr's continuing inheritance from Mozart. Shelley is fuller and more romantic, which may well be correct — this is after all late Spohr. Griffiths, by contrast, is again somewhat disappointing overall: plenty of wonderful moments, but no real continuity or logical development.

In the third movement we are once again in a position where Shelley and Rickenbacher are unquestionably the leaders in the narrow field. Timings alone tell an irrefutable story:

Shelley	6m.41s.
Rickenbacher	6m.24s.
Walter	4m.58s.
Griffiths	4m.53s.

In the *Conspectus* I commented: “Walter’s relative failure of perception is to a degree surprising ... Indeed, it seems doubtful whether Walter’s surprisingly fast and superficial speed and treatment at all adequately represent the marking *Largo*, which must involve a speed close or very close to Rickenbacher’s” (p.22). Griffiths, unbelievably, is even faster (marginally) than Walter here; and how such a speed can possibly be seen as an adequate expression of the music’s meaning is beyond comprehension. There is, above all, a structural reason which tells against Walter’s and Griffiths’ view. The movement is already a short one for the slow movement of a major symphony — such as I have suggested that this ‘Ninth’ is —, and if it is taken too quickly, it becomes simply a miniature, not in the abstract impossible for Spohr, but out of keeping with the scope of the rest of the symphony. There is no denying that both Walter’s and Griffiths’ renderings of the movement are most beautifully and effectively played, but their fast speeds narrow unnecessarily the horizons of Spohr’s vision.

As between Rickenbacher and Shelley much the same differences are in evidence as in their performances of the second movement: limpid clarity from Rickenbacher and a lusher, more romantic interpretation from Shelley. Both in their respective ways are superlative performances. Much will depend on individual personal preference, but my vote has to go in the end to Rickenbacher.

Yet again, in the final movement, Shelley takes an expansive view:

Shelley	6m.44s.
Walter	6m.43s.
Griffiths	6m.40s.
Rickenbacher	6m.39s.

But these time differences are, self-evidently, minimal, and thus everything comes to depend on the interpretative insights and abilities of each performer. In the *Conspectus* I came to the conclusion that “a more finely pointed and emphatic interpretation of the last movement of the Ninth (than either Rickenbacher or Walter gives here) would put a more definite seal on a work which, in many ways, ... is Spohr’s greatest symphonic achievement” (p.23).

Unfortunately Shelley does not repeat in this last movement his triumph with the first. Neither Shelley, Griffiths, nor indeed Rickenbacher, achieve the line and cumulative logic of Walter. Each of the three, in various ways, makes the error of highlighting what is immediate at the expense of longer-term development; thus the cumulative force of the composer’s musical argument — so strong a feature, for example, of Klemperer’s conducting — does not register as it should. So, for the time being, Walter’s performance of the last movement remains the best available. Perhaps one day someone will give us a recording of this movement along the lines of Klaus Arp’s extraordinary performance of the *Faust* overture; then this striking and spectacular symphony will end in the progressive and overwhelming burst of orchestral colour that its composer surely intended.

9. Symphony No.10 in E flat major, WoO.8

CD recording conducted by Howard Shelley with the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana [with Symphony No.8 and *Der Zweikampf mit der Geliebten* overture] (recorded in April 2010 and issued in 2011, Hyperion CDA 67802)

THE SINGLE RECORDING of the Tenth Symphony considered in the main *Conspectus* (pp.24-26), that of Howard Griffiths, was disappointing and not in any sense recommendable. And I suggested (p.29) that the two 1998 non-commercial recordings of the work by Eugene Minor formed a much better basis for understanding the symphony: “The moral perhaps is that future professional performers should try to listen to Minor’s performances, and absorb the implications, before embarking on their own performances and/or recordings”. How does Howard Shelley measure up in this context?

In the *Conspectus* I dismissed Griffiths’ first-movement time of 6m.53s. as “simply too fast ... time after time, felicities of phrasing and scoring are rushed or passed over”; and I preferred Eugene Minor’s 6th

June 1998 time of 8m.20s.: “This is a case where Minor’s conception is visibly growing and developing before our eyes, and his longer performing time the second time round carries even greater conviction”. Shelley’s indicated time of 7m.23s. means that his performance of the movement has slightly more spaciousness than that of Griffiths. But it is still nearly a whole minute faster than Minor, who therefore performs remains the model (among available performers) in this movement.

With one important qualification, exactly the same position applies in the second movement. The qualification involves the fact that Eugene Minor — mistakenly! — omits the exposition repeat. Even so he took 7m.18s. for the movement in his 6th June 1998 performance, whereas Griffiths takes 7m.3s. **with the repeat**. And Shelley is not much better, at an indicated 7m.10s. Griffiths and Shelley are simply much too fast for the *Larghetto* marking; and I can only re-echo my earlier recommendation, that future performers should base themselves on Minor’s most effective realisation of this movement’s mood and spirit, if they wish for anything approaching success.

I do not wish to labour the same point interminably, but Shelley — like Griffiths before him — again falls far short of what is required in the third and fourth movements. Shelley’s overall time of 5m.59s. in the third movement is in the event even faster than Griffiths’ 6m.2s., and results in a sort of parody of the composer’s real intentions, which I described thus in the *Conspectus*: “This movement is in some respects a Haydnesque creation — Haydn brought up to date! —, and Spohr’s use of tuba, valve horns and valve trumpets should emphasise the rhythmic ‘bounce’ of the opening bars, and coda, of the movement. In fact the movement should emerge as a *tour de force*, as for example does the corresponding movement in Furtwängler’s famous Berlin recording of Haydn’s 88th Symphony” (p.26).

And in the fourth movement we are once again up against the same problems, in Shelley as in Griffiths, as we encountered in the first movement. Shelley’s indicated time of 5m.54s. is (marginally!) less unsatisfactory than Griffiths’ rushed and transient 5m.11s., but both are eclipsed completely by Eugene Minor’s 6th June 1998 time of 6m.43s., which makes sense of the movement in a way that Griffiths and Shelley miss completely.

It is regrettable, in sum, that both commercially available recordings of the Tenth Symphony fail by such a distance to establish, or even hint at, a viable ‘platform of consciousness’ for what is, for reasons I tried to describe on pp.24-25 of the *Conspectus*, a most important Spohr symphony. This means, in effect, that the listening public are, in this instance, without any remotely viable version of this work; and I have suggested a possible way forward from this unsatisfactory state of affairs in my ‘Concluding Remarks’ at the end of this *Supplement*.

10. Concert Overture in C minor, Op.12

CD recording by Howard Griffiths with the NDR Radiophilharmonie, Hannover [with Symphonies Nos. 1 and 6] (recorded in December 2009 and issued in 2011, cpo 777 179-2)

CD recording by Sebastian Weigle with the Leipziger Kammerorchester [with Quartet-Concerto and Nonet] (recorded in March 1998 and issued in 2001, despite 1998 being shown on the disc, MDG 307 0849-2)

WHILE PREPARING this review, I have by chance been listening to the LP reissues of Sir Thomas Beecham’s Mozart recordings made with the London Philharmonic Orchestra between 1934 and 1940 (Symphonies Nos. 29, 31, 34, 35, 36, 38, 39, 40 and 41; Piano Concerto No.12, with Louis Kentner; and the overtures to *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*; World Records ‘Retrospect’ Series, SH 201-205, issued in 1973). What is immediately evident in this set — without any doubt one of the finest demonstrations available of how to conduct Mozart — is Beecham’s formidable grasp of phrasing, balance, and buoyancy of rhythm — a veritable masterclass of first perception and then execution.

Spohr’s Concert Overture in C minor of 1806, as the composer’s first purely orchestral work (he was then 22), is shot through and through with the spirit of Mozart; and calls for a Beecham — which assuredly Howard Griffiths is not — to make it sparkle and live. The three Beecham qualities mentioned above, “phrasing, balance and buoyancy of rhythm”, are a prerequisite for a successful performance of this work. Under Griffiths the orchestral textures tend to be muddy, not crystal clear; and Griffiths has an annoying habit of increasing speed slightly at climaxes, in the attempt to achieve emphasis. Better — on the model of Beecham — to maintain an absolutely steady speed and let the tunefulness of the music speak for itself, rather than being artificially forced along.

Sebastian Weigle's performance is in a different league. To continue the Beecham analogy from above, Weigle does not have Beecham's delicacy and breathtaking lightness of touch; there is a certain ponderousness about his overall conception. That said, we at least have in his performance a sensible appreciation and rendering of the overture as a musical structure. He is slower than Griffiths, which greatly helps, an indicated 6m.23s. as against Griffiths' 5m.49s. (within that total figure, his slow introduction takes 1m.25s. compared with Griffiths' 1m.12s., a much more fitting rendering of the composer's *Grave* marking). Weigle's pointing of woodwinds in particular is excellent. And, for the time being at least, this is clearly the recommended recording of the work.

11. Der Zweikampf mit der Geliebten Overture, WoO.50

CD recording conducted by Howard Shelley with the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana [with Symphonies Nos.8 and 10] (recorded in April 2010 and issued in 2011, Hyperion CDA 67802)

Broadcast performance conducted by Max Schönherr with the Grosse Orchester des Österreichisches Rundfunks (c.1982)

Recording conducted by Howard Shelley with the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana (recorded for Hyperion in 2006 but never issued)

THE ENTIRE OPERA *Der Zweikampf mit der Geliebten* was given a nine-day run at the Neuberger Kammeroper in 2012 (21st to 29th July); but I have not been able to obtain a transfer of the overture from these performances. We are thus reliant on the three performances listed above, the second two very kindly supplied by Keith Warsop from the archives of the Spohr Society. Howard Shelley's 2006 recording was originally designed, Keith Warsop has told me (personal communication), "to go with his CD of Symphonies 1 and 2 but left off because of playing time limits". In the event we have here three rather different conceptions of this overture; and what is somewhat surprising is the extent to which Shelley's conception of the work changed between December 2006 and April 2010.

Let me set the scene by drawing a parallel from Mozart. In the previous section, on the Overture in C minor, I mentioned the exceptional 1930s Mozart performances with the London Philharmonic Orchestra of Sir Thomas Beecham. If we compare Beecham's performance of the *Jupiter* in that set with a recording such as that allegedly made in 1988 by Alfredo Scholz with the Vienna State Orchestra (Everyman CD EVCD 32) — which may well be a recording pirated from elsewhere, since Scholz as a record-producer was a notorious purloiner of other conductors' performances —, we see the difference between brightness and clarity of the highest artistic and intellectual order (Beecham) and heavily romanticised and over-blown sentiment (Scholz).

Schönherr's performance is tight and controlled, a brilliantly executed realisation (opening *Adagio*, 1m.17s.; *Allegro vivace*, 4m.9s.; = 5m.26s. in all); his is nearest to the Beecham model. By contrast Shelley exemplifies "heavily romanticised and over-blown sentiment" as per Scholz. And his 2010 recording (1m.20s. + 4m.48s. = 6m.8s.), though falling far short of Schönherr's conception, is actually less extreme than that of 2006 (1m.34s. + 5m.03s. = 6m.37s.), where the opening *Adagio* in particular is absurdly bombastic and boastful. In circumstances where, for the reasons stated, Shelley is an unsure and unsatisfactory guide, we must hope that Schönherr's exhilarating performance of this overture may one day perhaps be released commercially — see my 'Concluding Remarks'.

12. Faust Overture, Op.60

LP recording conducted by Gustav Goerlich with the Symphony Orchestra of Radio Berlin [with the *Jessonda* overture and overtures by Gluck] (recorded in the 1940s?, released in 1951, Urania URL 7028)

Recording conducted by Hans Müller-Kray with the Radio-Sinfonieorchester Stuttgart [SWR Music Archives, pre-1970 as Müller-Kray died in 1969] (released on iTunes, 1st December 2014)

LP recording conducted by Victor Feldbrill with the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) Festival Orchestra [with Bruch's Violin Concerto No.3] (issued 1977, CBC SM 329)

LP recording conducted by Gennady (outside sleeve; 'Gennadi', inner booklet) Rozhdestvensky with the Moscow State Conservatory Student Symphony Orchestra [with works by other composers] (issued 1977, Melodiya C10-12547-50; reissued on CD in 2009 in the 10-CD set Brilliant Classics 9019/1-10, in which the *Faust* Overture is to be found as band 6 on CD 2)

CD recording conducted by Christian Fröhlich with the Rundfunk Sinfonieorchester Berlin [with seven other Spohr overtures, including *Jessonda*] (recorded in 1991 and issued in 1993, cpo 999 093-2)

CD recording conducted by Geoffrey Moull with the Bielefelder Philharmoniker [from a complete performance of the opera, June 1993] (issued in 1993, cpo 999 247-2)

CD recording conducted by Klaus Arp with the Rundfunkorchester des SWF Kaiserslautern [from a complete performance of the opera, 1993] (issued in 1994, Capriccio 60 049-2)

THE ABOVE SEVEN RECORDINGS of the *Faust* overture, added to the version by Alfred Walter appended as a filler to his CD of the Fourth Symphony (see *Conspectus*, p.26), give us a wide enough spread of material for a 'platform of consciousness' to be well within our grasp here. (Only of the overture to *Jessonda* are as many recordings available as this.) There does not appear to be any textual differences (according to Clive Brown, *Louis Spohr: A Critical Biography*, pp.323-324) between the overture to the original 1813 score and in the 1852 revision. Thus, for present purposes, all the recordings can be grouped and considered together. In the original *Conspectus* I noted that "In [the] *Faust* [overture] Spohr's marking for the initial *Allegro vivace* is crotchet = 132, and Walter's speed ... is initially exactly 132. Spohr gives no marking for the subsequent *Andante maestoso* at the entry of the trombones, but Walter's speed seems unquestionably right" (p.26). With the benefit of comparing other versions I am now not so sure. Time-wise Walter stands by himself, at an indicated 6m.37s., both more considered and even statuesque than the others, who — Rozhdestvensky excluded — are grouped close together round the six-minute mark:

Rozhdestvensky	3m.23s.
Fröhlich	5m.55s.
Arp	6m.4s.
Goerlich	6m.6s.
Moull	6m.11s.
Redlbrill	6m.12s.
Müller-Kray	6m.17s.

Of these seven recordings I would without hesitation dismiss Rozhdestvensky, Fröhlich and Moull from the reckoning. Fröhlich is wholly unimaginative, 'knitting-machine Spohr' in fact; time is beaten and time passes, and that is it, with the result that at the end we are no nearer realisation of what is involved than we were in starting out. And Moull is so lightweight that it is difficult to appreciate from his performance that serious matters, very serious matters, are being considered.

Rozhdestvensky, very clearly, stands in a category by himself, and what he does is not in any way to his credit. When Gustav Mahler conducted a performance of Bruckner's Sixth Symphony, he cut the work to the bone in the attempt to bring a clarity and logic which he did not find in the score as composed. Such 'second-guessing' of a composer's intentions is much to be deplored. In the case of the *Faust* Overture, Rozhdestvensky removes the whole of the *Andante maestoso* central section, tacking on the concluding coda as an ending to the first part which has shared this material. Rozhdestvensky is a fine conductor, and this 1977 performance is not bad, *as far as it goes*, though it is on the fast side and the acoustic is somewhat cramped. But this attempt — as with Mahler's in the Bruckner instance described — to modify the composer's layout and intentions has to be condemned unreservedly, and effectively rules Rozhdestvensky out here.

Hans Müller-Kray's Hessische Rundfunk performance is a good, clean realisation of the overture, which does all the right things and puts no foot seriously wrong. But it falls short of being either inspired or inspiring, and Müller-Kray, on this evidence and in this instance, is not in the same league as Victor Feldbrill and Klaus Arp.

In sum the real competition to Walter comes from Arp and Goerlich and Feldbrill. Goerlich conducts a passionate performance of great élan and force; but sadly the old recording is both screechy and boxy, with the result that too much detail is submerged and compressed. Nonetheless we should be grateful for this first-ever recording of the *Faust* overture, captured on disc perhaps seventy or so years ago.

Klaus Arp is simply sensational, by quite a long way the most dramatic and effective rendering of the overture available. One might argue whether Walter's theoretically more accurate performance of Spohr's metronome marking is to be preferred; but in the end such argument falls away in the face of what Arp achieves. He is brilliant, he is imaginative, he always points the right emphases; and one hears layers of orchestral detail ignored or blurred in all the other performances except Feldbrill's. This is great conducting at its best, and no recommendation can be too high.

Victor Feldbrill's recording is a marvellously thoughtful and *experienced* performance of the overture. I emphasise 'experienced' because — which is of the greatest importance in the context of the present evaluation — Feldbrill sounds as though he has been conducting this music for years and knows it inside out. At a bound, therefore, he transcends the question of attaining a 'platform of consciousness' which so bedevils many Spohr performances. For Feldbrill the 'platform of consciousness', by some miracle of insight and awareness, already exists; and we can thus approach his recording on the same terms as when listening to a new recording, say, of the overtures to *Egmont* or *Oberon*. Are there any other Spohr recordings or broadcasts by Victor Feldbrill, I wonder? If so, they should, on the evidence of this *Faust* Overture, be published and disseminated as widely as possible.

Walter Pitman's 2010 biography *Victor Feldbrill, Canadian Conductor Extraordinaire* (Dundurn Press, Toronto) does not as it happens include any reference to Spohr, but that omission (it seems to me) is not necessarily conclusive. Feldbrill had been a violin pupil at the London College of Music, Western Ontario, of Kathleen Parlow (see Pitman's book, pp.133-135), herself a pupil of Henry Holmes, who had so impressed Spohr with his playing of some of the composer's violin duets. Thus Feldbrill may have absorbed, during his musical education, a deeper attachment to and understanding of the values of Spohr and his music than would in other circumstances have been the case. And is this possibly a reason for Feldbrill's extraordinary sympathy, in his *Faust* Overture recording, with Spohr's musical language?

That Feldbrill's success with the *Faust* Overture is no 'one-off' fluke is emphasised by the work occupying the remainder of the record, Max Bruch's little-known Violin Concerto No.3 (with Albert Pratz as soloist) which, likewise, receives a spectacular and scintillating performance — claimed on the record-sleeve to be a first-ever recording. But while Feldbrill, for all the reasons discussed, is very, very good in the *Faust* Overture, Arp in the end goes one better, and can only be described as superlative; and it is in the last analysis Arp, therefore, rather than Feldbrill who has to have my final vote in this case.

13. *Jessonda* Overture, Op.63

LP recording conducted by Gustav Goerlich with the Symphony Orchestra of Radio Berlin [with the *Faust* overture and overtures by Gluck] (recorded in the 1940s?, issued in 1951, Urania URL 7028)

LP recording conducted by John Carewe with the Radio-Sinfonie-Orchester Frankfurt [with others works by Spohr, Rihm and Beethoven] (limited edition 2-LP album 'Louis Spohr' of a public concert on an unspecified date and issued by the Stadtparkasse Kassel in 1979 as records 66.28063-01-1/4, the *Jessonda* overture being the first item on Side 1 of the 4 sides)

LP recording conducted by Gerd Albrecht with the ORF Orchestra [from the complete bicentenary Austrian radio studio broadcast of the opera, 1984] (issued probably in 1985, Voce 106)

CD recording conducted by Gerd Albrecht with the Philharmonisches Staatsorchester Hamburg [from a complete live performance of the opera, July 1990, and issued in 1991, Orfeo CD1/CD2 C 240 912 H]

CD recording conducted by Christian Fröhlich with the Rundfunk Sinfonieorchester Berlin [with 7 other Spohr overtures, including *Faust*] (recorded in 1991 and issued in 1993, cpo 999 093-2)

CD recording conducted by Ola Rudner with the Württembergische Philharmonie Reutlingen [in a collection entitled 'Romantische Ouvertüren', which includes 7 other overtures by Weber, Meyerbeer, Mendelssohn and Wagner] (issued in 2011, Ars 38 083)

THE ABOVE SIX RECORDINGS of the *Jessonda* overture, if added to the two (by Albrecht and Walter) already considered briefly in the main *Conspectus* (p.26), mean that there are eight recordings in all of this overture — even if three of the eight are by Gerd Albrecht, on different occasions. At least, therefore, in this case, the achieving of a viable 'platform of consciousness' should be well possible.

Timings vary by nearly a minute and a half as between the eight recordings:

Goerlich	6m.41s.	(3m.28s. + 3m.13s.)
Albrecht (1983)	6m.47s.	(3m.15s. + 3m.32s.)
Albrecht (1984)	7m.9s.	(3m.39s. + 3m.30s.)
Rudner	7m.25s.	(3m.33s. + 3m.52s.)
Carewe	7m.29s.	(3m.44s. + 3m.45s.)
Fröhlich	7m.30s.	(3m.40s. + 3m.50s.)
Walter	7m.34s.	(3m.22s. + 4m.12s.)
Albrecht (1990)	8m.4s.	(4m.9s. + 3m.55s.)

Let us start — as seems only just in the circumstances — with Gerd Albrecht's evident fascination with and interest in this work. In the *Conspectus* I preferred Albrecht's 1983 recording to Walter's of 1987 on the grounds that Albrecht "offers a more cohesive and persuasive flow" and that "both sections of the overture rather fall apart under Walter". That remains an entirely true analysis and position.

But whatever Albrecht did well in 1983 he did spectacularly better in the bicentenary broadcast the following year. In part this is because of the gutsy and unbelievably alert playing of the ORF Orchestra. There is snap and crackle in the air from the very opening bars, and this continues all the way through — not just in the overture, but throughout the opera as a whole. Thus Albrecht manages to achieve, for *Jessonda*, in this 1984 performance, exactly what Klaus Arp brings to *Faust*. This sets the bar extraordinarily high and — importantly to our purposes here — creates without more ado an immediate 'platform of consciousness' for the work at an exalted level, in terms of both aspiration and achievement. It should go without saying that a performance like this is an invaluable and essential tool in propagating to the general musical world outside — who probably remain at best sceptics in this regard — the true genius of Spohr the composer.

After this remarkable 1984 success, the direction taken by Albrecht in Hamburg in 1990 defies belief. If under Walter, at 7m.34s., "both sections of the overture rather fall apart", Albrecht's 1990 time of 8m.4s. is characterised by the same tendency, but in more extreme form. Gone is all the electric tension of 1984. Instead, Albrecht now approaches the overture as some sort of infinitely slow epic induction to a drama on a cosmic scale. Thus Albrecht tries here to interpret *Jessonda* as something that assuredly it is not, instead of repeating from 1984 and building on (if that were possible!) the intensely dramatic and emotional emphasis of what *Jessonda* actually is. I hope it is not unfair and unkind to say that Albrecht's 1990 *Jessonda* thus represents a grotesque parody of Spohr the artist, in that Spohr's ideals are in it so severely distorted. And it is particularly tragic that someone who has understood and portrayed so successfully only six years earlier the real Spohr's achievement should come now to err so fundamentally and so comprehensively in his calculations.

But at least we should be grateful to have the miraculous 1984 performance as a yardstick and as a guide. And, against this background, the four remaining recordings (Goerlich, Rudner, Carewe, Fröhlich) can be 'placed' contextually without overmuch difficulty. Goerlich does not repeat here his success with the *Faust* overture: in *Jessonda* he is simply too fast, racing away inconsequentially. A great deal is lost, but in part (in Goerlich's defence) this may result from the deficiencies of the very old recording.

Ola Rudner's conception of the overture is spacious, but cold emotionally in a typically Scandinavian way (Rudner is Swedish), when what is needed above all is romantic warmth. And Christian Fröhlich is not dissimilar, though not in such clear-cut form as Rudner. Fröhlich too lacks all-enveloping warmth, conducting rather over-calculatingly, as though he is 'holding back' in order to get things 'right', rather than committing himself to the hilt and unreservedly, as Albrecht, pulled along by events and particular circumstances, somehow did in 1984.

By far the best of the middle 'bunch of four' (Rudner, Carewe, Fröhlich and Walter, whose timings are all so similar) is John Carewe. Because this is a public performance, one or two coughs intrude themselves here and there, but nothing that spoils the general sense of continuity. Carewe is more affectionate in phrasing and treatment than Rudner and Fröhlich, and holds the overture together as a whole better than Walter. It is a fine and impressive performance, combining both movement and power, but in the end — perhaps inevitably — has to yield place to Albrecht's exceptional and overwhelming 1984 version.

13 (a). Excerpt from finale of Act I of *Jessonda*, WoO.53 (No.9 'So wie das Rohr zerbrach' and 'Reiche, herrliche Natur!')

LP/78 recording in Volume 8 ('The Age of Beethoven, 1790-1830') of the HMV 'History of Music in Sound': Alexander Young (Nadori), Nancy Evans (Amazili) and April Cantelo (*Jessonda*) with Mosco Carner conducting the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (HMV HLP 20; HMS 83 [sides 3 and 4 from 11-disc set of 78s, HMS 82-92; issued in 1958)

LP recording [of the complete opera on two LPs] with Thomas Moser (Nadori), Doris Soffel (Amazili) and Cheryl Studer (*Jessonda*) with Gerd Albrecht conducting the ORF Orchestra (Voce 106, bicentenary Austrian Radio studio broadcast, 1984; undated but issued c.1985)

CD recording [of the complete opera on two CDs] with Thomas Moser (Nadori), Renate Behle (Amazili)

and Julia Varady (Jessonda) with Gerd Albrecht conducting the Philharmonisches Staatsorchester Hamburg (Orfeo C 240 912 H, live recording from the Hamburg performances of 4th-8th July 1990; issued in 1991)

THE EXISTENCE OF three versions — albeit that two of them are conducted by Gerd Albrecht — of part of the finale of Act I of *Jessonda* means that the achieving of a ‘platform of consciousness’ in respect of this short passage of the opera should not be beyond our grasp. To the best of my knowledge this is the only reasonably extended Spohr operatic passage of which as many as three separate recorded versions exist.

And — following his wide variation in respect of the overture — Albrecht continues his somewhat unpredictable showing in these two passages from the finale of Act I.

Mosco Carner’s 1950s’ recording is a competent, professional account of the two passages, but never takes real fire. Nonetheless, this is a valuable recording to have, because Carner’s timings of 3m.38s. for ‘So wie das Rohr zerbrach’ and 1m.43s. for ‘Reiche, herrliche Natur!’ form a sort of ‘bass-line’ against which Albrecht’s 1984 and 1990 recordings can then be put in context.

If Carner’s account “never takes real fire”, Albrecht’s 1984 bicentenary broadcast is a different matter entirely. This is a tense and dramatic rendering, of exceptional power and force, and the ORF Orchestra (presumably the Austrian Radio Orchestra) play like beings possessed — as they did too, incidentally, in Schönherr’s recording of the *Der Zweikampf* overture. Albrecht’s timing for ‘So wie das Rohr zerbrach’ is, as it happens, exactly the same as Carner’s, 3m.38s., but a huge gulf separates these two versions, the one somewhat cold and clinical, the other of searing intensity. Albrecht in 1984 was somewhat faster in ‘Reiche, herrliche Natur!’ than Carner had been (1m.27s. against 1m.43s.), and again there is no gainsaying the sheer dramatic intensity of what Albrecht achieves here: this is operatic Spohr as it must be meant to be.

It is against this background that the incomprehensibility of Albrecht’s 1991 Orfeo set has to be considered. Albrecht has the same Nadori still as in the 1984 performance, the excellent Thomas Moser, but otherwise everything is different. ‘So wie das Rohr zerbrach’ is now extended out somewhat in concept, taking 3m.55s., and much of the dramatic force of 1984 goes in the process. The passage now becomes a sort of out-of-body philosophising, beyond dramatic reality and immediacy, which is neither as effective nor can possibly be right. By contrast the following trio ‘Reiche, herrliche Natur!’ is now intolerably rushed, becoming a mere scramble (at 1m.8s. as against Albrecht’s own 1m.27s. in 1984 and Carner’s 1m.43s.).

How possibly could Gerd Albrecht, having got things so absolutely right in 1984, have come to such a series of misjudgments only six years later? It seems incomprehensible. The Voce recording is hard to source (mine came all the way from Jerusalem!), having presumably been produced in only small numbers. But my advice is “Snap it up if you get the chance”; for, on the evidence considered here, it leaves the Orfeo CD-set absolutely standing.

14. Der Matrose Overture, WoO.7

CD recording by Howard Griffiths with the NDR Radiophilharmonie, Hannover [with Symphonies Nos. 4 and 5] (recorded in 2010 and issued in 2013, cpo 777 745-2)

IT IS HARD to recommend Griffiths’ performance of this marvellous overture — as far as I know, this is the only available recording of it. Griffiths is at his best (together with his orchestra) at the beginning (in the *Allegro moderato* introduction) and at the very end, where the music ebbs away to its *pianissimo* conclusion. But, even here, Griffiths underplays his hand, so that what should be overwhelming in its breadth becomes merely potentially expansive. As in the *Fall of Babylon* overture, the listener should be swept away here by the flowing force of Spohr’s invention. And in the end Griffiths misses that intensity by some distance. In the main central *Presto* part of the movement Griffiths is simply too fast, so that much of the musical argument is left blurred and inconsequential.

15. Miscellaneous Small Orchestral Works

(a) Introduction in D major, WoO.4

(b) Festival March in D major, WoO.3

CD recording conducted by Howard Shelley with the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana [with Symphonies Nos.7 and 9] (recorded in August 2011 and issued in 2012, Hyperion CDA 67939)

I MUST ADMIT to considerable reservations as to whether these two works should have been recorded as fillers to Shelley's symphony cycle. They are not exercises in objective art-forms (as are the symphonies), but particular works for particular occasions. Does the very short *Introduction*, at an indicated time of 50 seconds, make any sense at all divorced from Anton Niemeyer's play, for which it was "composed ... as a literal curtain-raiser" (Keith Warsop's notes accompanying the CD)? And, likewise, does the *Festival March* have validity outside the circumstances of a society wedding, and perhaps even the particular wedding for which it was composed? That said, the recordings seem fine enough, with the important *caveat* that, in the absence of other recordings of these works, a true comparative analysis is for the time being impossible.

(c) Erinnerung an Marienbad, Op.89

CD recording by the Academy of St Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble [led by Kenneth Sillito, violin, with 10 other players on violin, viola, cello, double-bass, flute, 2 clarinets, bassoon and 2 horns] (recorded in June 1992 and issued in 1995; Philips 438 017-2)

CD recording conducted by Howard Griffiths with the NDR Radiophilharmonie, Hannover [with Symphonies Nos.7 and 9] (recorded in 2012 and issued in 2015, cpo 777 746-2; NB: the back cover of the CD indicates that this work is contained on band 9 of the disc, rather than band 8; the booklet inside does not make this error)

THE OBJECTIONS raised above in respect of the *Introduction* and *Festival March* do not apply to *Erinnerung an Marienbad*, both a more substantial and objective work. As a critic in *Musical World* described it (quoted by Clive Brown in *Louis Spohr*, p.226), "the whole is, like all Spohr's small pieces of handicraft, the perfection of graceful beauty ... It is one of the most exquisitely finished orchestral scores on a small scale".

Are "perfection of graceful beauty" and "exquisite finish", as described above, properly represented in Griffiths' performance? The answer is: unfortunately, not adequately. Griffiths' is a somewhat languid, almost saccharine performance. An element of crispness, and verve, and bounce, is ideally needed if the *Musical World's* critic's description of the work is in any way to be borne out and justified.

But all these criticisms are met and decisively answered in the gorgeous and breath-taking recording made 24 years ago by the St Martin's chamber players (for a copy of which I am indebted to Keith Warsop). In this performance the description by the *Musical World's* critic is vindicated as thoroughly as one might dream possible. Otto Klemperer used to insist on playing Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll* with a chamber group, not a full orchestra (the spectacular results can be heard on Columbia 33CX 1809, the fourth side of Klemperer's recording with the Philharmonia of Bruckner's Seventh Symphony). On the evidence of these two recordings of Spohr's Op.89, by the St Martin's players and by Howard Griffiths, it ought now for the future to be considered equally mandatory to perform this work too with a small chamber group rather than full orchestra.

16. Der Fall Babylons Overture, WoO.63

CD recording conducted by Howard Shelley with the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana [with Symphonies Nos.3 and 6] (recorded in March 2009 and issued in 2010, Hyperion CDA 67788)

CD recording conducted by Matthias Stanze with the Brunswick State Orchestra [as part of the complete oratorio] (from the live performance in Brunswick, 3rd-6th December 2013 and issued in 2014, Coviello Classics COV 91406)

Broadcast performance conducted by Meredith Davies with the English Chamber Orchestra [as part of the complete oratorio] (on BBC Radio 3, 28th December 1984)

W. S. ROCKSTRO, writing in 1887 (in the 9th edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*), was exceptionally laudatory about Spohr's oratorios. Howard Shelley's 2009 recording of this overture is a 'commercial first', but regrettably one is hard put to it, on this evidence, to come to a judgment even approaching Rockstro's and other Victorian assessments of the work.

This is not entirely Shelley's fault. As I suggested in looking at the Fourth and Seventh Symphonies in the main *Conspectus*, it is enormously difficult to recreate 'out of nothing' a performing tradition and 'platform of consciousness' for a work which has slipped completely from general public knowledge. Nonetheless, an oratorio overture should be a more amenable prospect than an unusual and challenging symphony.

The Spohr Society has in its archive a recording of the overture made in 1984 by the English Chamber Orchestra conducted by Meredith Davies, and this offers the possibility of cross-checking to some extent what Howard Shelley has given us in the new recording. And since the release in mid-2014, there is also now the complete Brunswick recording of the oratorio conducted by Matthias Stanze.

The opening *Andante*, based (in Keith Warsop's words in the accompanying notes) on the "lamenting chorus of the enslaved Israelites on the banks of the Euphrates near Babylon", is more amply drawn by Shelley (1m.54s.) than by Davies (1m.37s.). But in truth even Shelley does not go far enough. This is music of infinite yearning, of an almost overwhelming sweep of emotion, in which there should be no holding back. The listener should be engulfed by the tide of sound unleashed, and both Shelley and, to an even greater degree, Davies leave us some appreciable distance short of that.

Stanze takes very marginally longer than Shelley for this opening passage (1m.55s. as against Shelley's 1m.54s.), but there is a strange disconnectedness and detachment in Stanze's conception, almost Scandinavian in its emotional objectivity. This sits uncomfortably with what I have stipulated as necessary, "an overwhelming sweep of emotion"; and so, as things stand, I tend to favour Shelley here for now. Let us hope that in due course for both a broader and more overwhelming realisation of this particular passage.

In this context, remarks and observations about, and quotations from, Reginald Goodall made by John Lucas in his 1993 biography *Reggie: The Life of Reginald Goodall* are most relevant. Goodall — as quoted by Lucas — makes the point repeatedly (e.g. on pages 115 and 163 of the book) that the greatness and impact of Wagner as composer lies in his "harmony" and "counterpoint", which must be adequately brought out by the conductor — Goodall was of course a supreme master of this where Wagner was concerned. The same point, essentially, has been made by Benjamin-Gunnar Cohrs in relation to Bruckner's Fifth Symphony: "The meticulous attention that the composer paid to musical detail is evident in the highly complex score of the Fifth, where there are even passages set in tenfold counterpoint" (p.12 of the booklet accompanying Nikolaus Harnoncourt's RCA Red Seal recording of this work). And this same kind of observation and analysis regarding 'best performance' also applies to other 19th-century composers such as Spohr and Raff. Specifically, the "lamenting chorus" theme which opens *The Fall of Babylon* overture should be all-enveloping in its tonal range, and the full ambit and spectrum of Spohr's "harmony" and "counterpoint" — to repeat Goodall's terms — should be represented faithfully. This involves all orchestral players playing actively and imaginatively to the limits of their individual lines, and would lead consequentially to what is reported on p.193 of the Goodall book of Act I of Goodall's *Tristan* in Cardiff: "surging forward on a high tide of rhythmic energy, much of the first act came near to engulfing the senses". The "lamenting chorus" theme in *The Fall of Babylon* is fully capable, interpreted rightly, of achieving just such an overwhelming effect.

One other feature of this first section of the overture deserves special comment: the prominence given in it by Spohr to the clarinet. In his initial use of this instrument, Spohr was following the lead of his beloved Mozart (Clarinet Quintet, Clarinet Concerto), and his own four clarinet concertos were composed in 1808, 1810, 1821 and 1828 respectively. There were other composers too who wrote concertos for the clarinet in the late 18th or early 19th century: Weber, Leopold Kozeluch, Franz Krommer and Bernhard Crusell. And the *Adagio* for Clarinet and Strings by Heinrich Baermann, long thought to be a youthful composition of Richard Wagner, also belongs to this tradition, which was to lead in time to Wagner's haunting use of the bass-clarinet in *Tristan und Isolde* and the prominent clarinet part in the slow movement of Raff's Third Symphony (1869) — which is almost a clarinet concerto movement in its own right. Spohr's dependence in 1840 on the clarinet in the opening section of his overture marks an important mid-way point of development between the earlier concertos and *Tristan und Isolde* in the 1860s, and what Spohr achieves in this respect should in no sense be underestimated.

The second 'element' of the overture — what Keith Warsop, in the aforementioned notes, describes as "a vigorous theme in the major" — emerges as more successful under Meredith Davies (55 secs.). Davies is particularly forthright and effective in his handling and direction of the brass instruments here; and also shows an acute rhythmic sense.

Shelley, by contrast, underplays and undercharacterises this section, taking it more quickly (50secs.); and the result is disappointing. Stanze takes marginally longer for this section (1m.2s.), and his performance is on a par for effect with that of Meredith Davies. After his detached and somewhat

emotionless start to the overture, Stanze is increasingly effective, going from strength to strength as the overture proceeds.

The third — and largest — ‘element’ of the overture is what Keith Warsop has described as “the march of the victorious Persian army ... featuring a piccolo and side drum”; and he adds that “This march theme recurs as a leitmotif during the oratorio, most significantly in the ‘fall of Babylon’ scene”. Meredith Davies, at 4m.43s., is again rather fuller and more expressive here than Howard Shelley (4m.26s.). But even in this apparently extended section of the overture, Spohr the miniaturist is in fact at work, and the section is structured in Spohr’s favoured ‘ABA’ pattern, with the Persian March comprising the ‘A’ parts, and a somewhat modified version of the second ‘element’ of the overture (the “vigorous theme in the major”) the ‘B’ part.

The Persian March displays much of the flair and audacity of Berlioz at his striking best. It needs a ‘no holds barred’, ‘all guns blazing’ approach. And although Meredith Davies shows greater sense of rhythmic verve than Howard Shelley, neither performance really succeeds in the end in fully capturing the outrageous and outlandish elements of the Persians’ attitude, so vividly portrayed by Spohr. Stanze is without much doubt the best of the three conductors here, and has the longest performing time (5m.16s.); but perhaps a future conductor will succeed in portraying an even more pronounced rhythmic swagger, which is certainly inherent in the music.

I have written at considerable length about this overture, and perhaps owe it to readers to explain why. I regard the overture, both in its dramatic effects and tonal extent, as among the finest of Spohr’s orchestral achievements. And it thus becomes important that it should be understood properly, and that future performances attempt to do it justice. Ideally it needs the skills of a Beecham or Stokowski or Klemperer to bring it to full life. Let us hope for a performance at that level one day!

17. Mass in C minor, Op.54

WHILE I WAS ENGAGED on the body of this *Supplement*, a relatively out-of-the-way LP recording of the Mass came my way (from an antiquarian record-shop in Berlin). And since this work stands rather apart from anything else in Spohr’s total output, it seemed a natural extension of the *Supplement* to include here a comparative review of the LPs from Berlin and other recordings of the Mass. The details of the recordings are as follows:

Mass in C minor, Op.54 [with Three Psalms, Op.85]

2-LP recording conducted by Raimund Hug, with soloists, the Freiburg Cathedral Choir and the Freiburg Cathedral Male and Female Youth Choir

(recorded in April 1980 and issued in 1980, Aurophon 11023 on labels, 11025 on sleeve)

Mass in C minor, Op.54 [with Three Psalms, Op.85, conducted by Dietrich Knothe]

CD recording conducted by Michael Gläser, with soloists and the Berlin RadioChoir

(recorded in June 1991, and issued in 1993, cpo 999 149-2)

Mass in C minor, Op.54 [with Three Psalms, Op.85, and Mendelssohn, Three Psalms, Op.78]

CD recording conducted by Jaroslav Brych, with soloists and the Prague Philharmonic Choir

(recorded in May-June 1998 and issued in 1998, Praga Digital PRD 250 117)

Mass in C minor, Op.54

Recording (conductor unspecified) by the Cantores Carmeli (singers of the Carmelite Church), Linz (available on YouTube, 2014)

Clive Brown explains well on p.147 of his *Critical Biography* the circumstances which led to the composition in 1821 of the Mass in C minor:

On the way to Paris he had spent some time in Heidelberg, where he was greatly interested to hear rehearsals of sixteenth-century Italian church music by Anton Thibaut’s choral society. Daily visits to Thibaut’s library had allowed him to familiarise himself thoroughly with the style of the music, and now with leisure to compose again he decided to try to produce an *a cappella* mass for double chorus in ten parts, in which he aimed to combine the ‘ancient style’ of church music with all the resources of modern harmony. The result was chromatic music of such difficulty that his first attempt to have it sung, by the Leipzig choral society, was an utter failure and it was not until some years later, when the mass had been published in a somewhat simplified version by Peters, that he heard a satisfactory rendering of his conception by Zelter’s *Singakademie* in Berlin.

In the notes accompanying the cpo recording Hartmut Becker also draws attention to the Russian influences on Spohr: “A[nother ... aspect of the tradition of sacred vocal music ... left traces in Spohr’s Mass in particular: the liturgy of the Russian Orthodox Church. St Petersburg had been the destination of the eighteen-year-old Spohr’s first trip abroad with his violin teacher Franz Eck in 1802-3. The Christmas, Easter, and other liturgies the young musician experienced there left an indelible impression on him. Their enduring influence ... we would search in vain to find in the mass literature of Viennese Classicism” (booklet, p.13, translation by Susan Marie Praeder).

That a non-Catholic composer should think it important to compose a Mass had of course a precedent in Bach’s Mass in B minor. And W. S. Pratt, writing in 1910 (in *The History of Music*, published by Pitman, London), observed of Bach’s Mass that “Bach, a Protestant and apparently not writing for ritual use in a Catholic service ... saw ... in the text of the Mass ... possibilities of gigantic artistic expression. The result is a monumental sublimation of ritual music, treated not as an accessory of a church service, but as an end in itself” (p.261). I think something similar must also inevitably have been true in the case of Spohr. For him, as for Bach, the Mass would have been an artistic “end in itself”, in terms of musical form and musical treatment.

According to the timings presented with the recordings of the Mass, Hug is in every movement slower than the others:

<i>Kyrie</i>	Hug 4m.47s.	Gläser 4m.6s.	Brych 3m.28s.	Linz 3m.14s.
<i>Gloria</i>	Hug 8m.47s.	Gläser 8m.	Brych 7m.36s.	Linz 7m.43s.
<i>Credo</i>	Hug 8m.23s.	Gläser 7m.25s.	Brych 8m.16s.	Linz 7m.52s.
<i>Sanctus</i>	Hug 4m.16s.	Gläser 3m.41s.	Brych 3m.4s.	Linz 3m.21s.
<i>Benedictus</i>	Hug 3m.17s.	Gläser 2m.35s.	Brych 1m.54s.	Linz 2m.21s.
<i>Agnus Dei</i>	Hug 4m.49s.	Gläser 3m.55s.	Brych 3m.43s.	Linz 3m.28s.

Immediately, in the *Kyrie*, the difference between Hug and the others is strikingly evident. Gläser’s is a good, clean performance, very well recorded; but, interpretatively, it does little more than skate over the music’s surface, avoiding danger. And the Prague and Linz recordings are so fast, comparatively, that, although both superlatively well sung, they represent a surging, even overwhelming, view of the music wholly different from Hug’s sensitive and questing exploration. For 1980, Hug’s Aurophon recording is surprisingly amateur and lacking in tonal range, with the result that climaxes tend to be congested.

But these failings are more than made up for by the extraordinary perceptiveness and courage of Hug’s interpretation. Mystery and awe and reverence breathe everywhere through this performance, which evokes an other-worldly grandeur and nobility which are surely what the composer intended. Interpretatively, there is thus no contest between Hug and the others, for, on the whole, they are simply not in the same league. But Hug’s slow speed also poses its problems; it pushes the singers to the limits of their capabilities and — one senses — here and there almost beyond them. But, miraculously, the singers somehow manage to hold their difficult lines without breaking or wavering, and in the end their achievement is all the greater for Hug’s daring in skirting the abyss.

And, in a nutshell — so as not to make this review over-long —, what Hug achieves in the *Kyrie* is repeated, in essence, in each of the five other movements. There is a cumulative grandeur in Spohr’s overall conception which, time and time again, anticipates to a degree the sound-world of Bruckner in his Masses.

I limit myself to very brief remarks on the remaining five movements. In the *Gloria* Hug’s slow speeds enable him both to be more tender and inward in the middle section (“Domine Fili unigenite”) and more impressive (by a long distance!) in the concluding fugue (“in gloria Dei Patris”). And another important consideration is also evident. At Hug’s tempi the extraordinary range and combination of Spohr’s choral harmonies lie more clearly revealed, and one is constantly struck by the composer’s daring, his imaginative groping into a world largely uncharted and unknown. This, again, is of course a characteristic, later on, of Anton Bruckner.

In the *Credo*, although I still favour and prefer Hug’s performance, the competition is stiffer than anywhere else. Brych’s Prague rendering, at 8m.16s., is only seven second faster than Hug overall, and is itself a most impressive realisation of the movement. There is a simple unadorned definiteness about Brych’s interpretation here that makes one wonder how he could be so ‘right’ in this movement and yet

fall short by such a considerable distance in the other five. Hug is more expressive, and again his emphasis on Spohr's extraordinary harmonies is finely and sensitively judged; and he moulds the different sections of the movement into an ultimately more satisfying whole.

In the last three movements (*Sanctus*, *Benedictus* and *Agnus Dei*) Hug is again to be preferred by a long distance; he is more than half-a-minute slower in each movement than Gläser (his nearest rival time-wise), and in short movements that is a very considerable amount. The Prague and Linz recordings are so fast that too much is missed: the surge of sound — as suggested earlier — is outwardly effective purely physically, but ultimately without the inner meaning so effectively conveyed by Hug.

Both Gläser and Brych provide perfectly good performances of these three movements in purely practical terms. But something wider and deeper is missing: it is as though blinkers restrain the breadth of vision in fact possible. And it is that breadth of vision, *par excellence*, that is present consistently in Hug's performances of the movements. It is as though the music belongs in a wider and nobler framework, outside the normal constraints of time and place. No praise can be too high for Hug's achievement here.

Thus elsewhere, writing of the background thought-world of Havergal Brian's *Gothic* Symphony, I described the first movement as a place where "the artist stands unblinking on the brink of the vast unknown of infinity". Very few creative artists have managed this achievement successfully in music. Apart from Havergal Brian in the *Gothic*, Tallis exemplified it in some of his Motets, and Gluck in the aria "Che farò" in his *Orfeo* and in his final choral piece *De Profundis*. And Bruckner's Ninth Symphony also inhabits this world, as does the slow movement of Elgar's Third Symphony (as completed by Anthony Payne). Hug's performance of Spohr's Mass is the outstanding achievement that it is for the reason that Spohr too is shown, like Brian and Tallis and Gluck and Bruckner and Elgar, to have a rightful place in this very select company. (One would never come to this conclusion on the basis of the Berlin, Prague and Linz recordings of the Mass!) It may thus well be the case, in my view, that the Mass, Op.54, is, for this reason, Spohr's greatest musical creation.

The vast, questing nature of Spohr's Mass, so finely revealed in Raimond Hug's magnificent performance, makes one long equally for a performance and recording of Spohr's unfinished *Requiem*. The movements completed by the composer up to early 1858 would make a viable small performance-unit in themselves, and although the *Offertorium* is missing, together with the *Sanctus*, *Benedictus*, *Agnus Dei*, and final *Lux aeterna*, an overall balance of sorts could be achieved by rounding off the movements that survive with a repeat of the opening *Requiem aeternam*. Let us sincerely hope that such a project might become a reality at some stage in the future.

I should like to end this piece on Spohr's Mass by correcting an error that occurred in a letter from me published in 2013 in *The Irish Times*. Martin Adams had written an article in that newspaper on 2nd October 2013 in which he dismissed J. W. Davidson's evaluation of Spohr as a composer of lasting importance. *The Irish Times* then published the following letter from me on 5th October:

Classical reputations

Sir, – It is unusual to see Louis Spohr mentioned in the columns of *The Irish Times*. But as the author of the 28-page *Conspectus of the Recordings of Spohr's Symphonies*, published by the Spohr Society in 2009, I must take issue with Martin Adams's view (Classic Music, Arts & Ideas, October 2nd) that "JW Davidson was proved wrong" in his declaration that Spohr's music "will survive until art is on its deathbed."

Perhaps we are mistaken to concentrate so much on outward "reputation" (Adams's word) rather than inner integrity and meaning beyond the fickleness of public perception. How many of those who casually now dismiss Spohr have actually studied his music for themselves in detail? If only they would do so, they would find themselves set before a feast beyond reckoning.

I suggest for a start Symphony No.9, the Mass for soloists, two five-part choirs and orchestras, and the Nonet, which are masterpieces of genius in their respective genres. And perhaps too, before judgment is so dismissively cast, Clive Brown's 1984 book *Louis Spohr: A Critical Biography* should be read and taken to heart. – Yours, etc,

(Dr) MARTIN PULBROOK,
Enniscoffey, Co Westmeath.

I was surprised to read in it the words "the Mass for soloists, two five-part choirs and orchestras"; because what I had written was "the Mass for soloists and two five-part choirs (no orchestra)".

Since this *Irish Times* letter is available for consultation on the internet in its mistaken, published form, I am glad, for the record, to make this necessary correction here.

Finally, I have not heard, and therefore do not include in this review, the performance of Spohr's Mass performed by the BBC Singers directed by John Poole which was broadcast on BBC Radio 3 on 24th July 1984 at 10am.

18. Jubilate Deo, WoO.65

RAIMUND HUG'S outstanding interpretation of the Mass (which, having been recorded in 1980, was given again in Freiburg Cathedral in 1986) persuades me to append a brief notice of his one other Spohr recording (apart from the Three Psalms, Op.85), the *Jubilate Deo* (of 1815), for soprano, chorus, solo violin and orchestra. This, recorded in 1993-94, is included (as the seventh of 14 small items, and, at 5m.7s., the second longest in performing time) in the following CD:

"Jubilate Deo (Festliche Motetten zum Kirchenjahr)"

Lucia Brosemer (soprano), Ildiko Moog-Ban (violin), Freiburg Cathedral Youth Choir and members of the Freiburg Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Raimund Hug. Ars Musici CD 232190.

Hug, born in 1935, studied theology in Freiburg and Munich before being ordained to the Catholic priesthood in 1960. He became a Monsignor in 1986, and a special papal prelate in 2002. His real love was church music, and after study in Vienna, Innsbruck and Basel, he was appointed Cathedral Kapellmeister in Freiburg in Breisgau in 1969. A long line of distinguished choral recordings followed over the years with his Freiburg forces, of which the Spohr Mass in 1980 was one, and the *Jubilate Deo* another.

The *Jubilate Deo* is a short work, lasting just over five minutes on performance. Gabriela Krombach, writing in the booklet accompanying the CD, observes that "Spohr's sacred works lead something of a shadowy existence ... alongside his operas and oratorios, his symphonies and chamber music ... [But] the colourful harmonies in the [*Jubilate Deo*] show Spohr to be one of the most important composers of the Romantic period" (translated by Clive Williams).

In fact, because of its shortness, the *Jubilate Deo* is inevitably a less ambitious work than the Mass. It is also a more difficult work to classify, on account of its unusual combination of performers. The obbligato violin part is not unlike that of the Eighth Violin Concerto, "in modo d'una scena cantante", with the violin being in effect a second 'voice' alongside the soprano.

The *Jubilate Deo* is in consequence a work largely *sui generis*, for which no ready parallels or comparisons exist elsewhere. And Raimund Hug, together with his soprano, Lucia Brosemer, and violinist Ildiko Moog-Ban, provides a both effective and memorable performance. The legacy of Mozart is everywhere evident, but as Gabriela Krombach noted in her piece quoted from earlier, the work's "colourful harmonies" also take us into a world lying beyond late Mozart.

Concluding Remarks

IN CONCLUSION I wish to acknowledge my very real debt of gratitude to my son, Roger, who has helped and succeeded in a way I would not initially have thought possible in tracking down many of the out-of-the-way LPs and CDs referred to in the course of this *Supplement*. Without that extraordinary help this survey would have been much less comprehensive than it is.

And then I must also express my especial thanks to Keith Warsop for his constant help in a whole variety of ways while the sections of this *Supplement* were in preparation and being written. Sections 2, 3, 4, 5, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 (c) and 16 in particular have benefited from K.W.'s unfailing generosity of advice and through his referencing and provision of recordings.

Then I am particularly grateful to Steve Kirk, of YesLet Canada Records, Turtle Creek, Mississauga, Ontario, who got Victor Feldbrill's LP containing the *Faust* Overture to me within ten days of first being contacted about it, in circumstances of great pressure; and similarly to the firm Importcds, of Shepherdsville, Kentucky, who, again, under severe restraints of time, ensured that I received Gennady Rozhdestvensky's recording of the same work as promptly and expeditiously as possible. The *Supplement* would have been in an important sense defective if these two recordings had not been included in it.

In addition I should like to express a particular hope and wish, in circumstances where the whole point of the *Conspectus* and *Supplement* has been the bringing nearer and achieving of a 'platform of consciousness' in respect of the works discussed.

There are certain Spohr performances not easily or readily available commercially, and these need to be better known. I can see an opening for five CDs, if these could somehow be issued either individually or as a combined set of recordings of historical importance:

- CD1 Raymond Leppard's 1979 broadcast of the Seventh Symphony, with the slow movement of Norman del Mar's 1984 broadcast of the Eighth as a filler;
- CD2 Eugene Minor's 6th June 1998 performance of the Tenth Symphony, with the first and third movement of Václav Neumann's 1990 broadcast of the First as a filler;
- CD3 Raimund Hug's recordings of the Mass and *Jubilate Deo*, with Victor Feldbrill's 1977 recording of the *Faust* Overture and Max Schönherr's 1982 broadcast of the *Der Zweikampf* overture as a filler.
- CDs4 Gerd Albrecht's 1984 broadcast of *Jessonda* complete.
and 5

If these could be generally available, all the necessary materials would at least be in the public domain, so that the 'platform of consciousness' in fact attainable and attained in respect of these works did not continue to remain something elusive and generally unknown.

Dr Martin Pulbrook,
The Walnuts,
Enniscoffey,
Mullingar,
Co. Westmeath
September 2016

Footnote by Keith Warsop

The *Jubilate Deo* is also recorded along with 11 other pieces on Elch Music EM 0210-4 (from 2002), with Hubert Hopfgartner conducting the choir and orchestra of the Stadtpfarrkirche "Maria Himmelfahrt", Bruneck. The soprano is Ingrid Kaiserfeld and the violinist Günther Ploner. This performance takes 4m.53s., compared with Hug's 5m.7s.

A new recording of the Mass, Op.54, along with the Three Psalms, Op.85, came out in November this year on Carus 83.291 with Frieder Bernius directing Kammerchor Stuttgart. His playing times are very close to those on Dr Pulbrook's preferred Raimund Hug version: Kyrie 4m.39s.; Gloria 8.57; Credo 9.03; Sanctus 3.56; Benedictus 2.27; and Agnus Dei 4.15. Naturally, this release came too late to be taken into consideration by Dr Pulbrook.

Turning to *Erinnerung an Marienbad*, Dr Pulbrook accepted my suggestion that he should ignore two other recordings of the work. That conducted by Alfred Walter with the WDR Rundfunkorchester of Cologne on Capriccio 10848, a disc entitled 'Marienbader Elegien' which includes a number of other short dance pieces associated with the spa town, does not really merit discussion as the conductor halves the playing time by ignoring the repeats.

Spohr's own four-hand piano version played by David Branson and Andrew Davies cannot come under genuine comparison with the two covered here performed in orchestral and chamber scoring. This piano recording was first issued on RCA LP GL 25227 in 1979 and reappeared in 1994 on a Helicon tape cassette, HRC 941.

It is worth pointing out here that while Dr Pulbrook was working on his *Supplement*, Naxos began releasing the original Alfred Walter Spohr symphony recordings from Marco Polo on this budget label. These are straight reissues with unchanged couplings and booklet notes. Obviously, the releases do not affect Dr Pulbrook's comments at all but it does mean that these recordings become easily available at a lower price than any rivals. The catalogue numbers are: 8.555500: Symphonies 1 and 5; 8.555540: Symphonies 2 and 9; 8.555533: Symphonies 3 and 6; 8.555398: Symphony 4 with the *Faust* and *Jessonda* overtures; and 8.555527: Symphonies 7 and 8 (this final CD due for February release).

In 2015 Naxos also brought out the 1985 Marco Polo version of the Second Symphony with Choo Hoey conducting the Singapore Symphony Orchestra, on 8.573507, and keeping its original coupling of Franz Lachner's First Symphony. In addition, CPO has now reissued all five Howard Griffiths CDs in a box set at a special price on 555 1092.