

The Norfolk and Norwich Triennial Festival had an important part in the spread of Spohr's music in England and provided the setting for one of his greatest artistic triumphs. (see note No.1.)

The first work of Spohr to be heard at the Festival was an abridged version of the oratorio, 'The Last Judgement' in 1830 (see note 2). The moving spirit behind this performance was Edward Taylor (note 3), Spohr's great champion in this country. In a letter to J.S. Patterson he had written; " 'The Last Judgement' was sent to me from Germany. . . I showed it to Sir. G Smart (note 4), upon whom it made an equally strong impression; and we decided it should be produced at the next Norwich Festival." Taylor, after seeing the vocal score, wrote to Spohr for a full score; this was sent with a letter expressing gratitude that this major work be given in England at such an important festival. The work had an even greater success when given in full in 1833. The next festival was a disappointment with a poor standard of performance and unsatisfactory receipts. 'A Christian's Prayer' ('Vater Unser'), (see note 5.) one of Spohr's best choral works, was presented, but made little impact because of the weakness of the choir and orchestra.

Taylor then managed to persuade the Festival Committee that if they could get Spohr himself to play and conduct at the next one, they would have more chance of success. Spohr was pleased to accept the invitation and in September 1839 he set off for Norwich. In his first concert on September 17th he performed his concertino 'Sonst und Jetzt' (see note 6), but this received only luke warm applause. The centrepiece of the Festival was, of course, the oratorio 'Calvary' (see note 7). There had been strong opposition to the performance by the Puritan party in Norwich and a concession was made by removing the separate part for Jesus. The publicity brought by this dispute in fact helped to ensure a full house for the performance. The work had been thoroughly rehearsed by Taylor and Spohr and made a tremendous impression. In the words of one reviewer: "The effect was most awe-inspiring", and for many who were present it was to be one of the greatest musical experiences of their lives.

After the success of 'Calvary', Taylor asked him to return for the next Festival with a new oratorio and provided him with the text of 'The Fall of Babylon' (see note 8). Spohr was looking forward to attending the Festival in 1842 and was most disappointed when the Electoral Prince refused him permission to make the journey. The performance of the new oratorio went ahead with Taylor conducting and had considerable success. "'The Fall of Babylon' is not so concentrated in its effect as 'The Last Judgement' nor is it so impressive as 'Calvary'; but it is perhaps more dramatically perfect than either."

Spohr did not participate in another Norwich Festival, but some of his works were included in every festival up to 1875. In 1845 there was another performance of 'Calvary', but the choir and orchestra were poor and the work made much less impression. This illustrates again the importance of a fine, committed performance if any work of Spohr is to make real impact. Spohr himself was one of the great conductors of the age and was able to present with great effect not only his own music, but also the works of his contemporaries; including some he did not particularly care for such as Beethoven's 9th symphony. He, his pupils and his friends like Taylor were able to convince many music-lovers of the time that his best music contained a great deal more than just the surface charm; which is all that some of to-day's critics can see in it. (see note 9)

In 1848 'A Christian Prayer' was given again, this time with great success, but in the next two festivals only short excerpts from 'Calvary' and the operas 'Faust', 'Jessonda' and 'The Alchymist' were given. In 1857 audiences heard the cantata 'God, Thou art Great' (see note 10) and the 9th symphony, 'The Seasons', which was said to contain all Spohr's ceaverness but bot the same inspiration. For the next festival the committee decided to revive 'The Last Judgement' as a tribute after hearing of Spohr's death the previous year. Various shorter works was given at succeeding festivals and the 'Fall of Babylon' was revived in 1869, with 'God, Thou art Great' in 1875. The aast work to be given was the Sinfonia from 'The Last Judgement' in 1890.

NOTES . . . by Maurice Powell.

1. . . The first Festival took place in 1824.
2. . . This was Spohr's second oratorio, composed in 1826. His first, and unpublished oratorio 'Das junste Gericht' was composed in 1812 and first performed that year at the Erfurt Festival.
3. . . Spohr's closest friend, a lecturer at London's Gresham College.
4. . . Sir George Thomas Smart (1776-1867), organist, conductor and composer. Ha began as a violin pupil of Salomon, the impressario who brought Haydn to London, and became a champion of German music in England. Weber died in his London home. He was one of the original members of the Philharmonic Society of London (formed 1813) and appeared as conductor no less than 49 times between the years 1816 and 1844. His last concert (March 25th 1844) included works by the most significant composers at work during his long, industrius life: Mozart, Beethoven, Rossini, Cherubini, Weber and Spohr, whose 1st symphony was given.
5. . . 'Vater Unser', Text by Mahlmann, was composed in 1829. A second 'Vater Unser' with a text by the German poet Klopstock was composed in 1838. This second work is unpublished but is considered by the Spohr Society to be the finer of the two works. The text of the first 'Vater Unser' consists if seven stanzas, the last line of each stanza being a line of the 'Lord's Prayer.' The form of the work is a 'Cantata' for orchestra, chorus, soprano, alto, counter-tenor, tenor and bass soloists. There are nine numbers.

6. . . The concertino 'Sonst und Jetzt' opus 110 ('Then and Now') is the third of Spohr's three concertinos for violin and orchestra that were published as the 12th, 13th and 14th Violin Concertos. Composed in February, 1839, it is linked with the 'Historical Symphony' (1839) in that it attempts to reflect the changing musical styles of past eras. It is not one of Spohr's most significant compositions.
7. . . 'Calvary' or 'Das Heilands Letzte Sturden' ('The Last Hours of the Saviour') was composed in 1834/5 amidst tragic personal circumstances for Spohr. His beloved Dorette died in the November of 1834 as the composer was about to begin work on part two of the oratorio. According to Spohr (Autobiography Vol. 11 pages 218-9, of the English translation, 1865), the "clash" with certain elements of the Norwich clergy was resolved before the performance, after the oratorio had been condemned from the pulpit and defended in the Press. No mention is made of the part of Jesus being cut in any way.
8. . . 'Der Fall Babylons' was composed in 1840 to a text by Edward Taylor. The Spohr Society possesses a short sketch for part II of the work in the composer's handwriting.
9. . . Lowell Mason, writing his 'Musical Letters from Abroad' (Da Capo Press 1967) attended the 1852 festival (it was postponed a year in 1851) and regretted the absence of a Spohr work:
 

"The success of Spohr's oratorios was represented as having been entirely satisfactory, and we wonder why the directors of the Norwich Festival who had the honour of first bringing out those great works, should not, at least, cause one of them to be performed on every Festival occasion. There certainly must be other reasons than those of musical merit, since at the Festival, the present year, two original oratorios (so called) have been performed, which, to say the least, are vastly inferior to either of those of Spohr. The love of novelty is undoubtedly one of these reasons; the announcement of something new, or to be performed for the first time, always influences many, even though the newness should consist in but the name of the thing, as in the present instance."
10. . . 'Gott, du bist gross', opus 98, composed in 1836; a Cantata for orchestra, chorus and soloists.