

Louis
Spohr
1784 - 1859

The exciting discovery of a forgotten Master.

Thursday, October 22, 2009 7:30 p.m.

Harris Concert Hall

THE UNIVERSITY OF
MEMPHIS
Rudi E. Scheidt School of Music

In cooperation with
The SPOHR SOCIETY of the United States of America
Memphis, Tennessee

Louis Spohr

*April 5, 1784 in Braunschweig

† October 22, 1859 in Kassel



Psalm 23 Op. 85 No. 2
1832

Gott ist mein Hirt
The University Singers
Lawrence Edwards, Director

Moses Mendelssohn
(1729-1786)

Lenena Brezna, Shannon Unger
James Harr, Marcus King

Was treibt den Waidmann
in den Wald WoO 92
1825

Seraphine's Song from the drama
„Der Erbvertrag“

Wilhelm Vogel
(1772-1843)

Immer dasselbe! WoO 124
1856

Es wogt wie steigende Wellen

Auguste Linden
(1826-1855)

Zigeunerlied Op. 25 No. 5
1809

Im Nebelgeriesel

Johann Wolfgang v. Goethe
(1749-1832)

Thränen WoO 108
1842

Was ist's, o Vater, was ich verbrach

Adelbert v. Chamisso
(1781-1838)

Mitternacht WoO 97
1839

Die Wolken ziehen schwarz und hoch

Franz Dingelstedt
(1814-1881)

- Das heimliche Lied Op.103 Nr.5 *Es gibt geheime Schmerzen* Ernst Koch
1837 (1802-1858)
- Wach auf Op. 103 Nr. 6 *Was stehst du bange und sinnest nach* Poet unknown
1837
Susan Owen-Leinert, soprano
Dan Phillips, horn
Carina Nyberg Washington, clarinet
Kevin Richmond, piano · Sandra Ramawy, piano
-
- Rondo *Vivace* Op. 67 No. 2 Yehudi Menuhin, violin
1824 Louis Persinger, piano arr.: Persinger (from: Three Violin Duets)
- Barcarole *Andantino* WoO 38 Bruce Erskine, flute
1845 Kevin Richmond, piano
- An Sie am Clavier Op. 138 *Pulse höret auf zu schlagen* Johann Karl Braun v. Braunthal
1848 James Harr, tenor (1802-1866)
Amy Nguyen, piano
- Adagio WoO 35 Lecolion Washington, bassoon arr.: L. Spohr (Op. 115)
1817 Kevin Richmond, piano
- Walzer Op. 89 *Erinnerung an Marienbad für Kleines Orchester*
1833 (Performed by Johann Strauß 1833 in Vienna)
Arthur Hart, piano arr.: Haslinger, 1834
- Oskar! Umsonst! WoO 75 *Szene für Sopran (Rezitativ und Arie)* Poet unknown
1805 Lenena Brezna, soprano
Arthur Hart, piano
- FAUST WoO 51 *Ouverture Op. 60*
Romantic Opera in two acts Pour deux pianofortes à 8 mains
Libretto: Joseph Karl Bernhard Arrangée par Gustav Martin Schmidt (1840)
1813 Sandra Ramawy · Kevin Richmond, piano 1
First performance: 1816 in Prague; Amy Nguyen · Arthur Hart, piano 2
conducted by Carl Maria von Weber

WoO = work without Opus number.

For the first time the complete Lieder by Louis Spohr are published at DOHR VERLAG, Köln, Germany, edited in 12 Vols. by Prof. Susan-Owen-Leinert and Michael Leinert. www.dohr.de/autor/spohr.htm

The aria "Oskar! Umsonst" is published for the first time at MERSEBURGER VERLAG in Berlin / Kassel; edited by Dr. Wolfram Boder, the Academic Consultant of *The Spohr Society of the United States of America*.

www.louis-spohr-society.org

Louis Spohr - the forgotten Master

In his essay “Louis Spohr - Ruhm und Vergessenheit eines Komponisten zwischen Romantik und Biedermeier” the German musicologist Peter Rummenhöller appeals for a revision in the evaluation of the composer Louis Spohr (1784 – 1859) and states: “Almost none of the above mentioned [Spohr’s composer colleagues are meant] were able to unite Beethoven’s achievements in such a way with the new tendencies of the Romantic like Louis Spohr.”

Spohr’s life spans a time period in which very different musical directions and styles emerged and were accepted. In literary history, this period, with the designation “between Goethe-time and Realism” proves what is quite applicable to Spohr’s life and work, in that it encompasses the time of the “Biedermeier”¹, also that of the “Vormärz”² and the “Junges Deutschland”³.

At this point, let that be sufficient for the characterization of the evolving times in which Louis Spohr lived and worked.

Spohr’s personality was characterized by a pronounced sense of justice and a strong ability to assert himself. To that extent Spohr, particularly when it came to the political situation of the times, was not by any means an “old master of Biedermeier” or a Romantic dreamer turned away from the world. To cite one example, in 1852 he brought a lawsuit against the local reigning nobleman, the *Kurfürst* (elector) Friedrich Wilhelm von Hessen, to the upper court of Kassel because of “illegal salary extraction”.

Spohr’s political attitude is to be recognized clearly as liberal. He dedicated his string sextet in C major, Op. 140, to the revolution of 1848. On March 10, 1851 he wrote to his English friend Edward Taylor⁴: “I hope nevertheless to yet experience, that the German people throw off their chains again and drive the demoralized princes out of the country!”

He also stated at one point that if the political situation did not improve in Germany, he would be forced to consider immigration to the United States of America.

That brought him into some difficulties during the restoration period. With his assertive manner he succeeded, despite large resistance, to produce Wagner’s “Der Fliegende Holländer” in 1843 and in 1853 “Tannhäuser” at the Hoftheater in Kassel.⁵

Spohr was, next to Paganini, the most famous violin virtuoso of his time, as well as an internationally esteemed teacher (with 200 students⁶), a recognized conductor throughout Europe and a composer whose works were successfully performed everywhere during the 19th Century.

¹ “Biedermeier”, politically refers to restoration in the period between the years 1815 (Vienna Congress) and 1848 (beginning of the civil revolution) in the countries of the German federation and Kaiser-ruled Austria. Culturally the expression refers to the development of culture and art in the middle class (for example house music, interior decoration and fashion design), and the literature of the time.

² “Vormärz” designates the period of time between the Vienna Congress in 1815 (end of the Napoleonic rule in Europe) and the March revolution in 1848.

³ “Das Junge Deutschland” is the name for a literary movement of young, liberal-minded writers during the period of the Vormärz, around 1830, which was intensified by the July revolution in France. They became very active as journalists and their writings in 1835 about the resolution of the Federal Parliament were forbidden.

⁴ Edward Taylor (1784 – 1863) was the translator of several works of Spohr’s and the librettist of the oratorio *The Fall of Babylon*.

⁵ **Richard Wagner** was sought by warrant throughout Germany because of his involvement with the Dresden rebellion of 1849. After 1853 in the state of Hessen, the performances of the works of the composing “barricade fighter” were prohibited until 1866.

⁶ Among others: **Ureli C. Hill**, the founder and conductor of the **New York Philharmonic Society** and publisher of the American edition of Spohr’s *Violinschule*, and **Frederic Pacius**, known as the “father of Finnish music” and the composer of the Finnish national anthem.

Many of Spohr's works are characterized by unusual versatility and willful experimentation, in regard to both ensemble composition (double string quartets, string quartet with orchestral accompaniment, etc.), and in the musical form and harmony (chromaticism).



Carl Heinrich Arnold: *String Quartet in Spohr's home* (Kassel, ca. 1835)

In several of Spohr's compositions (string quartets, double string quartets and operas) one finds themes and motives that anticipate the **Tristan chords of Wagner** ("the gateway to new music").



String Quartet Op. 4, No. 1 *Adagio* (1804/1805)

In 1848 Spohr was distinguished with the *Pour le mérite* and in 1853, with the *Bayerische Maximiliansorden*. His second wife Marianne Spohr registers more than 38 honors or "*Ehrenbezeugungen*" that were bestowed upon Spohr during his lifetime, among them were the appointment to the London Musical Society as honorary member and honorary diplomas from Buenos-Aires, New York, St. Petersburg, Stockholm, and Rome as well as from Holland.

SUSAN OWEN-LEINERT

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“Now that Mendelssohn is dead, Spohr holds the position of the first composer of the day, without a possible rival.

No master has done more to advance the art in the highest department of composition, and as he has produced master-pieces in every style, his genius may be pronounced universal.”

The bond of friendship between the composer colleagues Mendelssohn and Spohr is documented with two dedications:

Louis Spohr dedicated his only piano sonata in A-flat major, Opus 125 (1843) to “*Herrn Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy freundschaftlichst gewidmet*”. The 25 year younger Mendelssohn reciprocated in 1845 with a dedication of his last piano trio No. 2 in c minor, Op. 66 to Louis Spohr.

Ludwig van Beethoven, Carl Maria von Weber, Robert Schumann and Johannes Brahms, among others, honored and respected the work as well as the personal achievements of Louis Spohr.

“Regarded by many contemporaries as worthy of a place beside Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven in the pantheon of the greatest composers, he has, together with Gluck and Cherubini, been allotted a considerably lower status by posterity. Mozart’s *Le Nozze di Figaro* and Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* were both composed during Spohr’s lifetime; his own work looks Janus⁹- like towards the formalism and clarity of the Classical tradition, and the structural and harmonic experimentation associated with 19th- century Romanticism.”

Clive Brown. *Louis Spohr. A critical biography.*
Cambridge University Press 1984



⁹ There is a reference in this quote to the Roman god Janus, the one with two faces, one directed forward and one directed backward.

Psalm Op. 85 No. 2 Gott ist mein Hirt (1832)

The second and last-published major a cappella vocal work by Louis Spohr appeared over a decade after his *Mass: the Three Psalms* Op. 85 set to a translation by Moses Mendelssohn. Spohr composed these psalm settings in April and May 1832 in Kassel, shortly before he began work on his momentous Symphony No. 4 in F major op. 86 *Die Weihe der Töne*, and intended them for the St. Cecilia Society, a choir with which he had been involved in systematic cultivation of Bach's Oeuvre in Kassel since 1822. The fruits of these labors had included the performance of a number of cantatas and motets and the revival of the *St. Matthew Passion*, planned for 1827 but delayed until 1832 because of opposition from the court. Spohr had performed early Italian sacred music with the St. Cecilia Society in the 1820s, including polyphonic works by Leonardo Leo (1694-1744), Gregorio Allegri (1582-1652), and Antonio Lotti (1667-1740). The assignment of the singers in the *Three Psalms* corresponds to that of the *Mass*; three vocal units are employed, but in the later work Spohr was content with a four part design. The distinction between Coro minore and Coro maggiore in the *Mass* is lacking in the *Three Psalms*.

Stylistically, the *Three Psalms* are distinguished from the *Mass* above all by the directness with which Spohr conveys the affect-content of the texts. Of course, the German psalm translations by Moses Mendelssohn were much better suited to this purpose than the Latin of the ordinary of the mass. This fact had already been demonstrated in Heinrich Schütz's great psalm settings, which Spohr probably did not know. Even so, it is fascinating to see how Spohr approached his task from a similar angle. Schütz too had set contemporary texts and had developed similar musical solutions - when judged by the standards of another period.

The concerted action of the sound groups alternates with pure alternation and culminates in a major concluding fugue in Psalms 8 and 130. These fugues again attest to Spohr's study of Bach.

In contrast, Psalm 23, the second piece of Opus 85, is almost entirely of homophonic design and significantly shorter than the framing pieces. The work as a whole again exhibits a three-part structure, a fact also reflected in the choice of principal keys: C major, G major, C minor/C major.

After 1832 only a few ranking German composers occupied themselves with a cappella sacred vocal music.

HARTMUT BECKER

Lieder

Throughout a time period of more than 50 years Spohr dealt with the art form Lied (not counting the early songs of 1802, taking into consideration that the composer in his "Lebenserinnerungen" refers to them as lost).

The result is 105 one and two voiced Lieder, with two - or four - handed piano accompaniments. An obbligato instrument is added in Op. 103 *Sechs deutsche Lieder* (clarinet), in Op. 154 *Sechs deutsche Lieder* (violin) and in WoO 92 *Was treibt den Waidmann in den Wald* (horn).

It is remarkable that the composer chose texts from the most varied sources; from anthologies or volumes included in his private library, to, and above all, magazines, newsletters and periodicals of different varieties.

Some of these authors wrote under a pseudonym. That was particularly the case with the women poets. In the "Lexicon deutscher Frauen der Feder" one finds page-long lists of pen names of women poets, from a time in which one could not dare, due to social standards and repression, to write under their actual name. Also from the circle of family and friends, Spohr received inspiring texts to set to music. The spirit of the time is reflected in the Lieder of Spohr: the inconceivable variety of literary circles and societies with their authors, some of whom are today hardly known at all.

Obviously the prominence of the author did not matter to Spohr, but more so, whether the text

inspired him, whether it evoked music. Therefore under the titles of some Lieder, no poet's name is written, or that of a completely unknown person, without dates of birth and death. . In such a case the text can only speak for itself and the fact that Spohr selected it.

Although Spohr did not set texts of Eichendorff, Mörike or Heine, he did not select under any circumstances only unknown authors for his Lieder. Goethe is represented with eight Lied compositions. Chamisso, Geibel, Tieck, Hoffmann von Fallersleben, Uhland, Walther von der Vogelweide, and the French poet Victor Hugo are also represented. They belong, with others not mentioned here, without question to the literary elite of that time.

Several of Spohr's Lied compositions were casual commissions, others written on behalf of princes and publishers, or developed for magazines and anthology collections. This should not lead to the conclusion (unfortunately already wide spread) that Spohr's achievements held a subordinate role in the Lied repertoire of the 19th Century. The opposite is the case. Spohr can be accepted as a path finder for an unmistakable and original type of German Lied style that Robert Schumann, Johannes Brahms and Hugo Wolf further developed.

Spohr's Lieder are crafted with an exemplary, sensitive text interpretation, which require of the interpreter an acute skill of vocal declamation. Some are boldly written with harmonies that point toward the future, while others, in their lyric simplicity show a large wealth of melodic ideas. The composer's extensive knowledge of the "human instrument" is evident in his treatment of the vocal line. Typical characteristics of the late romantic period are recognized already here in many of these Lieder, for instance the bold and innovative widening of harmonies in the voice leading of the piano accompaniment. Spohr of course never goes beyond the boundaries of tonality, however some formulations indicate a development that leads to the vocal works of Hugo Wolf, Hans Pfitzner and even to Max Reger (see, among others, the Lied from 1850 *Zuleikha* WoO 119 No. 1).

Throughout his life, from the first Liederheft Op. 25, composed in 1809, Louis Spohr developed a progressive, individual style that deeply enriched the German Art Song of the 19th Century.

SUSAN OWEN-LEINERT

www.louis-spohr-society.org/Spohr_Vocal_Music.htm

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Oratorios: Das jüngste Gericht WoO 60, Die letzten Dinge (The last judgement) WoO 61, Des Heilands letzte Stunden (Calvary) WoO 62, Der Fall Babylons (The Fall of Babylon) WoO 63. Several other works of religious and secular Choral Music. Requiem WoO 74 (unfinished).

Operas: Die Prüfung WoO 48, Alruna die Eulenkönigin WoO 49, Der Zweikampf mit der Geliebten WoO 50, Faust WoO 51, Zemire und Azor WoO 52, Jessonda WoO 53, Der Bergeist WoO 54, Pietro von Abano WoO 56, Der Alchymist WoO 57 (based on a novel by the American author Washington Irving: *The student of Salamanca*), Die Kreuzfahrer WoO 59.

Violinschule WoO 45. Louis Spohr's Grand School of Violin Playing. Translated and edited by his pupil Ureli Corelli Hill. First American Edition, June 1839. New York: Firth & Hall, 1. Franklin Square.

Many of Spohr's works are recorded and available on Compact Discs.

www.louis-spohr-society.org/discography.htm

Was treibt den Waidmann in den Wald

What drives the huntsman in the forest
to hunt for wolf and bear,
to look each frightful form
in the face without flinching?
Love calls him to press on,
love makes him bold,
for love he has gone out into the wild,
because love is well disposed to courage.

What drives the Knight into battle,
out to bloody combat,
if death crashes from a thousand barrels,
his prey strikes only in the distance?
Love calls him to press on,
love makes him bold,
for love he has gone out into the wild,
because love is well disposed to courage.

What gives courage to the poor heart
to strive after high favor,
what enflames him with sweet pain
to the victories, or to death?
Love calls him bold,
the lover will pull against,
courage will reconcile his skill
and love must crown the loyal one.

Immer dasselbe !

It undulates like increasing waves
into the heart,
and longing desires swell
the sick mind.

It throbs with fearful beats
the poor heart,
it wants to lie in rest
with its pain.

It knows no other request
as quiet peace,
who is it that wants to defend
the heart, its fear?

Already it has renounced
what it wanted,
it has not even complained,
as it should have.

But still it cannot find peace,
that breaks him,

a heart can only overcome,
but never forget.

Zigeunerlied

In the foggy drizzle, in deep snow,
in the wild woods on a winter's night,
I heard the hungry howl of wolves,
I heard the screech of owls,

Wils wau wau wau!
Wito hu!

I shot a cat once by the fence
Anna the witch's black cat;
there came by night seven werewolves to me,
they were seven women from the village.

I knew them all, I knew them well:
Anna, Ursula, Kathy,
Lisa, Barbara, Eva, Beth;
forming a circle, they howled at me.

Then I loudly named them all:
What do you want Anna? What do you want
Beth?
They shook themselves, they jolted,
and ran howling away.

Thränen

What is it, oh father, that I have done?
You break my heart and you don't care.
I have relinquished him as you ordered,
but not forgotten him, it is no secret.

He lives yet in me, I myself am dead,
and above me looms your strict commandment.
When heart and will are broken
your poor child asks for only one thing.

When soon my tired eyes close,
and perhaps tears will pour from yours;
there at the parish wall, by the elderberry shrub,
where mother lies, there also lay me.

Mitternacht

The clouds form black and high,
the tired stars sparkle dully.
Is my maiden perhaps still awake,
my darling in the distance?

The wind sings its lullaby
and pounds on windows and trees.
Does she imagine me over here
sunken in loving dreams?

The surge sleeps, the world is still,
the night has banished the day.
My hot heart will not sleep,
it can only cry and love.

Das heimliche Lied

There are secret pains
Whose lament is never tongued;
Borne deep in the heart
They are unknown to the world.

There is a secret longing
That always shies from the light;
There are hidden tears
A stranger does not see.

There is a quiet sinking
Into an inner world
Where peaceful meadows beckon,
Lit by the gleam of stars,

Where, all boundaries fallen,
The soul raises to Heaven
And with jubilation
Confides its thoughts to the lips.

There is a quiet passing
Into silent, desolate pain,
And no one is allowed to see
That heavy-pressed heart.

It does not say what it needs,
And though it breaks with grief,
Tortured to death and bleeding,
The stranger does not see it.

There is a gentle slumber
Where sweet peace abides,
Where quiet rest heals the cares
Of the weary soul.

There is yet a lovely hoping
That soars above all worlds,
Where, open to another heart,
The heart lies filled with love.

Wach auf

Why do you stand there brooding with fear?
Ah, so long does love stay awake!
Do you hear the ringing all around?
The birds are singing with such sweet sounds.

Soft leaves are sprouting from the rigid branches,
Life is flowing through bough and twig.
Little drops are gliding from the forest hollows,
The brook leaps with abundant strength.

The heavens bow towards the clear waves,
The blueness is wondrously revealed,
A bright flourish of shape and sound,
An endless yielding to endless impulse.

An Sie am Clavier

Pulse, stop beating
through the breast lifted by storm;
Listen! She sacrifices now the muses
in the sanctuary of the tone art.

Thoughts of her are dared only
to remind of my existence
only an idea without form
opens to me Elysium.

Allow her to glide through the heavens
from the earth, these tones,
the muses through the heavens
the earth is not their territory.

Every note freeing the strings,
carries, as if from the Pirien source,
from soul to soul
through the worlds as a song!

How they tremble, how they rustle,
how they caress, how they shake,
these sounds through my life,
and no single tone is meant for me!

Only hidden may I listen,
believing only that you would complain
also about me, may I tell her,
now what I already suffered.

Oskar! Umsonst WoO 75, was described by Louis Spohr as a “great vocal scene”. The composer wrote this aria in 1805. Only a short time previously he had taken up the post of the concertmaster in the court orchestra of Gotha. The aria was written for Sophie Elisabeth Susanne Scheidler, a famous court singer in Gotha and the mother of his fiancée, the harp virtuoso Dorette Scheidler (1787-1834). Obviously Spohr’s efforts with both ladies were successful; he married Dorette on February 2nd of the following year. The author of the verses has never been established. The source material on which the text is based is clearly identifiable. It is James Macpherson’s “Ossian”: at the beginning of the *Croma episode* Malvina laments the loss of her beloved Oskar, the heroic son of Ossian, who was killed due to treachery. This aria was successfully performed on several occasions by Spohr’s mother-in-law at court concerts in Gotha. It was also heard in Leipzig on December 16, 1805.

For the first time after more than 200 years this aria has been published and will now be performed at our Spohr Concert in Memphis, Tennessee.

Oskar! Umsonst!

Oskar! Oskar! In vain!

My pleading words echo in the distance only
despair,

alone in the lush spring landscape
incredibly my songs of desire die unheard!

My dear love in the other world,
drinks the sweet fragrance of another kind of
flower.

I am no longer able to lovingly soar about him,
can no longer breathe together heaven’s air.

Ah, I can only paint golden pictures
which awake memories
and through the lust-filled pain of my complaint
I conjure back the happy times.

While my Oskar was with me,
the spring landscape seemed to smile at me
and time escaped, lightly dancing.

I wove flowers for him into a crown
to adorn his ruler’s head.

In his shining hair I saw his youth and pride
bloom.

But now he is gone forever my cherished golden
star.

What I adored is now far gone.

And time has escaped, no longer dancing,
nature is no longer gleaming and full of love.

Heavenly suspicion!

Once I saw my dearest nearing with infinite love
to celebrate the eternal union,
embracing me with burning love.

In wild bliss I feel my heart beating with raging
desire.

And I, blessed, take him to my breast,
Reveling in long-vanished pain.

Special thanks to

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The Spohr Society of the United States of America is very pleased to announce that this event received the attention from the German Music Magazines “Neue Zeitschrift für Musik” and “Das Orchester” as well as from the Internationale Spohr Gesellschaft in Kassel, Germany and the Spohr Society of Great Britain.

The Spohr Society of the United States of America

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The Spohr Society of the United States was founded in January 2008
by Prof. Susan Owen-Leinert (Rudi E. Scheidt School of Music, The University of Memphis)
and Michael Leinert (Intendant, Dramaturg, author).

**Our aim is to promote the music of Louis Spohr (1784 – 1859) in the United States
and other countries, with the focus on his mostly forgotten Lieder, oratorios & operas.**

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