

# SENILITY OR THE WISDOM OF AGE? STUDIES IN SPOHR'S 'CRUSADERS'

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*In this article the author has summarised in English the results of his Magister Artium dissertation Altersschwäche oder Altersweisheit? – Studien zur Oper „Die Kreuzfahrer“ von Louis Spohr submitted at the Humboldt-University of Berlin in September 2000.*

THERE is not much literature on Louis Spohr's last opera *Die Kreuzfahrer* ('The Crusaders', composed 1843-44, first performance in Kassel on 1st January 1845). The few authors commenting on this opera at all have established a critical cliché that needs a new and deeper discussion. In general the opera is said to be a weak and senile work of the aged Spohr, lacking freshness and spontaneity (Brown 1984, p.290) as well as not having 'the fresh, brilliant colour that a soldier's life necessarily needs' (Wassermann 1909, p.69). The fact that this opera was a great success at its first performance in Kassel and in the Berlin performance initiated by Meyerbeer (26th July 1845) is either ignored or ascribed to the general respect that was paid at the time to the merited 'good old master' Spohr whom the critics of the day did not want to insult.

In my Magister Artium dissertation (Humboldt-University of Berlin, 2000), I took a critical look at *The Crusaders* and came to the conclusion that it is by no means a weak work. It is, on the contrary, a very interesting and modern composition. Here I would like to give a short summary of the results and observations of my dissertation.

The literature mentioned above mostly overlooks the fact that almost all contemporary critics had a very positive view of *The Crusaders* (cf e.g. *Signale für die musikalische Welt* 1845, p.61; *Königlich privilegierte Berlinische Zeitung* 28th July 1845; *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 24th year 1846, p.73). Already, the first performance on 1st January 1845 in Kassel was a great success which was to be continued in four further performances that year. Meyerbeer arranged a performance in Berlin on 26th July 1845 which was conducted by Spohr himself. In the review of this in the *Königlich privilegierte Berlinische Zeitung* (28th July 1845) Ludwig Rellstab stresses the 'freshness' and 'so many moments of fiery power' in the composition. And the *Signale für die musikalische Welt* (2nd year, number 29, 1845, p.91) reports stormy applause and ovations for Spohr and his opera.

Mendelssohn asked Spohr for permission to give a concert performance in the Leipzig Gewandhaus. Here the third act of the opera was given on 26th March 1846. Again the reviewer of the *Signale für die musikalische Welt* (April 1846) states that this evening 'showed us the certainty that Spohr's creative powers are far from having gone cold, that they are still capable of the most lively activity.'

But in the late 19th century a generally devaluing attitude towards the opera began to replace the former admiration. It is probably not accidental that this disapproval occurs in the years after 1871. The aspects under which the opera was to be seen later on are already indicated in the only negative review of the 1840s. It was published in the journal *Das neue Europa* (18th August 1845) and, quite unlike the positive reviews, was to be quoted from often by later authors. The reviewer finds fault in the opera's 'vague, lyrical blur of feelings' that did not fit into his idea of German virtues. In 1909 Rudolf Wassermann missed the freshness of military life in the opera.

In 1875 Spohr's late operas were generally classified as 'weaker' by Franz Brendel in his book *Geschichte der Musik* (p.304). For *The Crusaders*, he justifies this judgment especially by the inappropriate 'choice of the text, a subject that cannot possibly be of interest to anybody today' (p.522). Apart from that, he emphasises: 'The musical invention [...] has a lack of freshness'<sup>1</sup>. These two reproaches – the pointless subject matter and the lack of freshness – are constantly repeated in all the succeeding literature without being subjected to any re-examination at all (cf Corder 1884 and Ehrenhaus 1911). The authors of the 20th century simply go on repeating the critical cliché. They even add another by postulating a regression in Spohr's use of leitmotif in this opera.

The analyses in my dissertation proved that all these points of view can be contradicted. Obviously there is a lack of deep discussion on the work, probably because the common critical cliché made this seem unnecessary. Firstly, the choice of text is by no means inappropriate. Most authors have simply failed to see what the opera is really about. Spohr did not want just to depict picturesque medieval scenery. *The Crusaders* deals with how dogmatic thinking can turn basically good principles into inhuman suppression. The only way to avoid a catastrophe is by responsible action and independent thinking.

In contrast to the general opinion, the use of leitmotif is especially advanced in *The Crusaders*; it has just never been analysed properly. There are no fewer than six leitmotifs in the opera (*Fidelio* motif, *chivalry* motif, *hell* motif, *stereotype phrase*, *Maria* motif and the *Emir's march*) which are used in a way far beyond the common standards of the time, anticipating later Wagner.

Finally, freshness was not Spohr's main objective in his composition although there is no want of musical beauties. Spohr wanted to 'adjust the music exactly to the action' as he told his friend Moritz Hauptmann in a letter (13th February 1845, quoted from La Mara 1886, p.65). In another letter, to Wilhelm Speyer, he explained his compositional purposes and described himself as happy to see that his 'effort to bring dramatic singing back to the former simplicity of Gluck's period gained so much success here [i.e. Kassel], even with the great mass of the public and to see that an audience can be brought to enthusiasm without coloratura, without excessive noise, even without sugary, easily-sung melodies' (Speyer 1925, p.279). As we see, Spohr was primarily aiming to discover new ways in the composition of opera.

In what follows I would like to discuss the results of my dissertation concerning these three main points.

### **1. On the subject matter**

Certainly the libretto of *The Crusaders* is not of high literary quality but neither are most opera librettos. What is more important is the idea that stands behind it. To understand the deeper meaning of the subject of *The Crusaders* it is necessary to have a closer look at its plot. For this reason I present it here in more detail.

'Not only for the period of the 11th century but also for our own times, the subject gives an excellent picture of life.' Thus wrote the reviewer of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (24th year, 1846, p.73) about the subject of the opera.

The story is derived from the play of the same name by August von Kotzebue which was first performed for the opening of the Berlin Playhouse at the Gendarmenmarkt in 1802. Using this source, Louis Spohr and his second wife, Marianne, wrote the libretto of the opera themselves.

The action takes place at the time of the first crusade in 1097. The scene is the camp of the crusaders near Nicaea and the nearby convent of the Hospitalers.

In the introduction (No.1) we learn from talk in the camp that Balduin von Eichenhorst, previously believed dead, has been ransomed from Turkish captivity by his friend Bishop

Adhemar and the pair are now approaching the camp.

Meanwhile, we see in the following scenes his bride-to-be, Emma von Falkenstein, deciding to enter the convent of the Hospitalers. Disguised as a pilgrim, she had been searching for Balduin but failed to find him. Now that she believes him to be dead she is determined to become a nun despite the warnings of the gatewoman at the convent.

Later, the abbess Cölestine tells the gatewoman that she wants to take revenge on Emma, who is the daughter of a faithless lover of her youth. But the gatewoman tries to convince her that the best revenge would be to love the girl.

In the following recitative (No.10) Cölestine teaches Emma the severe rules of the order that forbid every contact with men except for nursing. Even pity is thought to be sin. To stress the point she shows the distressed Emma a false door behind which an amorous nun was buried alive. Nevertheless she finds Emma resolved to take her vows without the usual probationary year and she gives her the order name of Maria.

The finale of the first act takes us back to the camp where some crusaders are trying to rip off the veil of a young Turkish girl who had been captured by Bohemund. They ignore her pleas and references to her religion which demand that she retains the veil. Only Balduin steps in to support her. Just then, her father, a Turkish emir, appears with his retinue and asks Bohemund to free his daughter for a high ransom. Bohemund first rejects this but finally agrees to fight a duel with the old man, the winner to take the girl. Balduin is unable to watch this and so fights on behalf of the old Emir. His arm is injured by Bohemund but Balduin finally defeats him and sets free the grateful Emir and his daughter.

At the start of the second act, the Emir and his daughter rest in a grotto. Here they meet Balduin who is on his way to the convent for treatment to his injured arm. Balduin rejects any reward for his good deed.

The following scenes take place in the convent. Balduin's squire announces the arrival of his master who was wounded fighting for a Turkish girl. The abbess needs to hear no more to confirm that her prejudice against men is once again proved right. Still, she believes it her duty to give Balduin the necessary nursing. This is to be Maria's (that is Emma) first trial. In No.19 Emma recognises her patient as her fiancé. They embrace each other happily but are separated immediately by the horrified abbess who has hastened onto the scene. She screams for revenge and ignores Balduin's claim that he was engaged to Emma before a priest. The injured Balduin has to obey the outraged Cölestine ('Heaven's bride is dead for you!') and the crowd of nuns. He can only retreat with his squire.

In the duet (No.22) the abbess talks Emma, who has a clear conscience, into renewing her vows by convincing her of Balduin's faithlessness, telling her he was wounded in a fight for a Turkish girl. The sympathetic gatewoman corrects this mix-up in a recitative (No.23) and Emma is now ready to flee with her and Balduin through a secret passage. But this plan fails in the finale of the second act (No.25). The fugitives are captured by Bruno and his troops who had been called in to help by Cölestine. Now neither pleas nor offered riches can calm down the outraged abbess who is certain that 'only blood can wash the sins from this desecrated church.' The desperate Balduin is forced to leave, accompanied by Cölestine's derision and her announcement that Emma is to be buried alive that very day.

The third act starts with an aria by Balduin (No.26). In the recitative he bemoans his faithless friends: 'They would have plundered their ally, robbed the poor compatriot without any compunction but when they heard it was to do with a nun, when I spoke the dreadful word of convent, each shyly crept away in silence.' In his following aria he gives vent to his desperation. Now Bruno enters to a march (No.27). As it is his duty to protect the convent he is unwilling to

help his friend and former lifesaver Balduin. This pushes Balduin over the edge of despair. Already a chorus of nuns can be heard from the church in the background to initiate Emma's live burial. Just then the Emir arrives. He is willing to set free his Christian slaves and responds to Balduin's distress by offering to help him. Together they depart to rescue Emma.

Meanwhile Emma asks the abbess for poison and a merciful death instead of the horrible entombment that is awaiting her but her pleas are in vain. So she sings a last prayer (No.35), forgives her murderers and the nuns prepare to entomb her.

Just in time the Turks, led by the Emir, storm the convent in the finale (No.38). The Emir rescues Emma and leads her into Balduin's arms as Cölestine curses the couple. At this stage Bishop Adhemar arrives. As Emma and Balduin had been betrothed before a priest, the Bishop revokes Emma's convent vows. All except for Cölestine join in a final chorus of jubilation as the opera ends.

The reviewer of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* who was quoted above continues his remarks on the subject of *The Crusaders* as follows:

*'There are several striking points in it: the disappointed hopes of the crusaders, their disagreements, their wavering morality; they themselves led but deceived by clerical cunning and still shying away from it as if from an invincible power; without actual independence they follow someone else's influence and still have to carry its bad effects later on. [...] one individual wants to break through the prejudices of that time but, shyly, even his most faithful friend retreats from him; there is just one source of help left, not from brothers-in-arms or compatriots but from the enemy's side. The Muslim teaches the Christian gratitude and faith and by his influence everything comes to a happy ending.'*

To my point of view, that is exactly what this opera is about. Balduin is the only crusader who really lives the Christian ideals that were used to justify the crusade. For the other crusaders, these ideals have turned into moribund values which they carry along like icons to justify their actions. At the same time they are also captives of these moribund values. Balduin is the only one who is able to break free from them when they turn out to be moribund. He is able to do so because he lives the ideals in their original sense and does not carry them along as moribund values.

This is shown when he fights for the Emir and his daughter for reasons of Christian charity while the other crusaders believe that the fight against the infidel generally to be good and the fight against a Christian generally to be bad, no matter what the circumstances might be. Even when attacking a Christian convent Balduin does not betray his Christian faith and ideals. On the contrary, he defends them against a dogmatic institution.

Now it is important to note that Spohr does not condemn the church in general. He rather wants to criticise dogmatic tendencies and stubborn ideology<sup>2</sup>. Sadly but truly, this is more topical in our own day than ever. In this respect, the subject of *The Crusaders* turns out to be very modern. This was already indicated in Kotzebue's play but a comparison between that and the opera's libretto shows that the point was made even more emphatic by Spohr and his wife. They particularly omitted all those passages in which Kotzebue gave some individual touches to various crusaders and nuns. So, in the opera, both groups appear as more unimportant masses. On the other hand this puts more stress on the characters of Balduin, Emma and the Emir and their struggle against stubborn ideology.

## **2. New ways in opera composition**

As we can see from his letters, Spohr wanted to find new ways of composition in his last opera. On 19th February 1845 he wrote to Adolph Hesse: 'The style of this opera is completely different from the style of my other operas.' His aim was 'to be genuine in expression and really dramatic.'

The form of the pieces of music and the recitatives is essentially different from those common so far.' He found it difficult to find such forms that 'give room for the development of musical thoughts and figures.' In his memoirs (*Selbstbiographie*, Spohr 1955, p.284) he uses the term 'music drama' for this opera. This term is also used in the review of the first performance of *The Crusaders* in Kassel (*Signale für die musikalische Welt* 1845, p.61).

In this context it is remarkable that Spohr did not give up the division of the opera into numbers. It is divided into three acts and 38 numbers and would take about two hours to perform. But the formal pattern is not so much shaped by these numbers but rather by the arrangement of several major scenes. The attempt at a through-composed opera is made by weaving the rather few closed forms into a web of arioso recitative passages.

The separation of the numbers tends to be blurred either by continuation of the text or by harmonic means. Connection is also made through the use of motifs. Thus we find whole scene complexes connected by similar motifs. Also, motifs are used to mediate between the numbers by anticipating motifs of a following number as for example between No.6 and No.7. Here No.6 ends with falling sigh motifs that go on to dominate in No.7. In the first section of the finale, (No.38), the motivic material of No.37 is continued. The last four bars of the duet (No.2) are organised in 6/8 time although the duet as a whole is in 3/4. Thus the 6/8 metre of No.3 is anticipated.

Furthermore, several numbers are grouped in scene complexes that are structured by the use of leitmotif and instrumentation. The connection between these scene complexes is made by the same means that are used to link the numbers. Remarkably, almost all of the scenes follow each other in the interval of a falling major third. There is also an attempt at an associative use of tonality. A key plan is noticeable even though it lacks the scope that Wagner reached in *Parsifal*.

### **3. On the use of leitmotif**

Finally, I would like to discuss the advanced use of leitmotif in *The Crusaders*. I am aware of the difficulties of the term but as I cannot think of any better I will use it to describe the phenomenon in the opera.

My analyses of *The Crusaders* shows that the use of leitmotif goes far beyond the standard of the time. This has gone unnoticed in the literature on the opera, probably because most authors have repeated the common cliché about its weaknesses. In fact, there were only two leitmotifs in *The Crusaders* known previously: the *Maria* motif and the *Emir's march*. But there are more than these and they are used in a much more distinct way than has been observed so far. The true meaning of the leitmotifs can only be understood by following their development throughout the opera which matches that said to be typical in the late operas of Wagner. Even scene complexes are structured by the use of leitmotif. It is true that Spohr did not match the contrapuntal web of leitmotifs that Wagner was to reach in his *Ring* but, to my view, a foundation stone was laid by Spohr in his opera. The derivation of leitmotifs from each other and their combination is also used by Spohr in *The Crusaders*.

Another indication to support my thesis that Spohr concentrated on the use leitmotif even in his old age is given by his 1852 revision of his opera *Faust*, originally composed in 1813. The revision was made for a performance in London which had been put on at Queen Victoria's special request. In his revision, Spohr strengthened the use of leitmotif. In *The Crusaders* we find a direct link to *Faust*. The *hell* motif that was used in *Faust* to mark the work of hell reappears in *The Crusaders*. Of course there is neither the metaphorical hell nor its personalised representative Mephisto in *The Crusaders*. Here, the hell motif is used to mark the evil done by men. How this happens and what this stands for can only be seen when observing its use and development in the course of the opera.

The *hell* motif of *Faust* is shown in **music example 1**. It first appears in *The Crusaders* at the end of aria No.7 (bar 107ff). In this aria Emma has decided to enter the convent. She comments on her decision with the words 'Away! My eternal doom calls.' After these words we hear the *hell* motif (see **music example 2**).

As in *Faust*, we have a descending broken chord moving in quarter notes over a held chord (of the six-four in C minor). To my mind the relationship – whether consciously decided on by Spohr or not – to the *hell* motif from *Faust* is evident and is easily heard.

Of special interest is the process to which this motif is subjected in the further course of the opera. Because of its complexity I can give here only a reduced summary of it. Altogether the *hell* motif appears six times in *The Crusaders* (No.7, bar 197ff; No.20, bar 86ff; No.25, bar 27ff and bar 139ff; Balduin's 'desperation aria', No.26, is dominated by it as well as his 'insanity scene', No.29).

The relationship to the *hell* motif from *Faust* and the circumstances in which the motif appears in *The Crusaders* are to my view good reasons to accept that it represents the evil done by men. Now it is interesting to observe that the motif is more and more integrated into the church scenes in the course of the opera. In other words it is more and more adapted to the musical structures in these scenes. One can almost say that it finds its home there. It always appears in connection with Cölestine who represents a church hidebound by dogmatic ideology (another indication towards this is that the motif does not appear in connection with Cölestine's personal revenge).

So one can say that the evil is disguised under the coat of ideology. Only Balduin turns against that. In his scene No.29 the *hell* motif is unleashed again. Thus he takes the motif back into the daylight and points at the inhumanity disguised by ideology.

A quite similar process is to be noticed for the most clearly shaped leitmotif of the opera, the *Maria* motif which is actually a theme rather than a motif. It is the only leitmotif Greiner notices in the opera and he quite correctly names it *Maria* motif and not *Emma* motif, as it only appears in connection with Emma in her role as the nun Maria. We find it in its complete form in numbers 17, 19, 22, 25 and 34. This complete form stretches in its core across four bars (see **music example 3**). These reappear, apart from some minor variants which are typical of Spohr, exactly in all the mentioned examples. The initial bar can vary as well as the continuation.

This motif does not represent the 'femininity, the loveliness of Maria' as Karl Wörner supposes (Wörner 1932, p.161). To my view it rather represents the straitjacket in which Emma is to be bound in the convent. This means that the motif does not stand for Emma as she is but for the nun Maria as Cölestine would like her to be. This can be observed in the staging but is also shown musically. This leitmotif puts single elements into a strict system that gives connection to Emma's first scenes (numbers 3-7). In these numbers, these mini-motifs representing Emma are freely circulating musical material. The *Maria* motif orders them into a severe four-voice arrangement that is hardly to be changed.

It is only when Emma tries to escape from her imprisonment that this arrangement is broken as well. Thus the *Maria* motif is literally torn to smithereens when Emma recognises Balduin in No.19 (equating to the removal of her veil in the scenic representation). In No.20 the *Maria* motif is still torn apart. It needs Cölestine to 'catch' Emma again, that is to talk her into renewing her vows, to make the motif reappear in its complete form (in No.22).

This context is strengthened in several other passages of the opera. I would like to mention one more that seems to me like a personal comment of Spohr. At the start of the duet, No.28, Bruno sings a phrase that is clearly derived from the *Maria* motif. Here he rejects Balduin's plea for help with the words 'Here my arm is bound by duty and faith' (No.28, bar 1ff).

Another leitmotif in *The Crusaders* is one I call the *stereotype phrase*. Greiner found it twice in the introduction and takes this as evidence for Spohr's declining powers. But he overlooks the fact that this phrase appears altogether 17 times in the opera and is used to mark the stereotyped thinking and action of the crusaders as well as others. Greiner's judgment seems to be based on a musicology which for a long time did not see opera as an art for the stage but rather as absolute music. No one would blame a writer for putting stereotyped phrases into the mouths of his characters if he wanted to show them as lacking in independent thought. To blame a composer for the same thing is to forget that opera is not absolute music but is bound to the stage action.

It is also overlooked that this phrase is used to make formal connections. In the introduction (No.1) it appears nine times and is one of three motifs that dominate this scene. It can also be seen as a cadential clause (see **music example 4**). To my mind this phrase represents once more the crusaders as an un-independent group. It seems improbable that the phrase appears 17 times because Spohr's powers were on the wane, especially because it is the only such phrase. If Spohr's creative strength was really on the decline, one would expect many more such phrases.

Finally, I would like to present the *Emir's march* as another leitmotif in *The Crusaders*. It announces the arrival of the Emir in No.12, bars 47-88, and does so also in the introduction to the second act (No.13). The instrumentation of the march is especially characteristic. Besides the standard orchestra of the opera (two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trombones, timpani and strings), triangle, bass drum and cymbals are added. These instruments belong to Turkish janissary music and are reserved only for the Emir.

But more characteristic than the fact that a Turkish Emir is represented by a Turkish march is the circumstance that this march is not warlike at all. It begins in a minor key (E minor) which is continued in the harmonic structure. The first phrase does not lead to the dominant B major as one would expect but to the minor dominant B minor, a triad caused by the omission of the leading note of no dominant character at all. Even in the second section of the march (bars 64-73) which is composed in the major key, almost every major triad is immediately followed by its minor mediant.

Above all, this march represents musically the cautious way in which the emir always approaches. The A-section of this ABA-shaped march always mediates to the music that was heard before. This peaceful and cautious musical characterisation of the Emir is paralleled in his behaviour on stage. In his first scene (No.1) he appears as a 'poor father', begging for his daughter's freedom. When we hear his march for the second time he is on the retreat and the third time it is heard when he returns to free all his Christian slaves. The only warlike action of the Emir is to help Balduin to rescue Emma. In these scenes (numbers 33 and 38) he is consequently not accompanied by his march. In some way the Emir appears to be related to Lessing's *Nathan* and Spohr's music seems to stress this.

The leitmotifs in this opera are also used to connect wider complexes of scenes. This can be shown for instance in an analysis of the introduction to the first act. It is sub-divided into four bigger parts (*Andante con moto*, bars 1-95; *stringendo*, bars 96-193; *Allegro moderato*, bars 193-289; *Allegro*, bars 290-346). These four parts have a strong inner connection and so they seem like a through-composed section. This is mainly achieved by the use of leitmotifs that are woven through it quite like the 'web of main themes' of Wagner.

The first such motif is established already in the ninth bar of the orchestral introduction. It is a quotation from Beethoven's *Fidelio* where it appears in the dungeon scene immediately after the melodrama. It then dominates the duet of Rocco and Leonore 'Just hurry up, just dig freshly'. In a way, that is exactly what the crusaders do in Spohr's opera, digging and filling graves. Because of its origin I call this the *Fidelio* motif. In *Fidelio* it appears in A minor (see **music**

**example 5)** while in *The Crusaders* it first appears in B flat minor, the main key of the opera, and is obviously related to Beethoven's motif (see **music example 6**). One can assume that Spohr, who knew *Fidelio* well and performed it in Kassel in two different productions, quoted Beethoven consciously. The fact that in Spohr's time musical quotation was regarded as showing a mark of respect may shed some light on the too-readily assumed hostility of the late Spohr towards Beethoven. In the finale of the second act (No.25), the *Fidelio* motif will reappear.

The second motif that dominates the introduction I call the *chivalry* motif. It represents a clichéd view of chivalry that also marks its dark side disguised under its outward coat. In its core it had already appeared in the orchestral introduction. In the fifth bar we hear the first part of the motif for the first time, played by the trumpets and oboes. This instrumentation will remain typical for the *chivalry* motif. Its first part consists of three sixteenth triplets on the tonic followed by a held dominant. Through this character of a military signal the meaning of the motif is indicated. In bar 106ff it appears with the harmony of tonic-subtonic of the six-four-tonic-minor tonic-minor subtonic of the six-four-minor tonic. This harmony is now bound to the *chivalry* motif (it is, by the way, almost exactly the harmony of the *Maria* motif).

The third motif dominating the introduction is the *stereotype phrase*. The analysis of this scene in my dissertation showed how Spohr structured the introduction with these three motifs, established connections and invented meanings which went beyond the music. In this way he shows us a rugged and estranged world into which the crusaders are set as a starting point for the whole opera.

Spohr nowhere indicated that he was attempting to depict freshness in the life of the crusaders. That is also shown by his use of the 'Altdeutsches Soldatenlied' (old German soldiers' song). This song does not appear in Kotzebue's play and Spohr probably took it from Johann Gottfried Herder's 1779 published collection of folksongs or from the first volume of *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, published in 1806/08 by Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano. In contrast to other settings of the text (e.g. by Albert Methfessel 1814 or Fr. Silcher 1820) Spohr did not turn it into an idealised soldiers' song but stressed especially the 'closeness to disaster' and the 'gruesomeness' that Goethe also found in it:

*'It might be delightful to sing in times of peace [...] but in war and the first closeness to disaster something like that becomes gruesome.'* (quoted from Eichler 1889, p.250).

Thus Spohr composed his opera *The Crusaders* and followed very closely the stage action. This can also be analysed in other scenes of the opera.

#### **4.Summary**

A closer look at Spohr's last opera reveals that the accusations made against it do not stand up. But its reception history shows that this closer look has been mostly denied since the middle of the 19th century. Add to this the fact that the critical implications of the subject matter were certainly understood by the Catholic church. Thus, performances of the opera were forbidden by the censorship in many Catholic cities, so hindering widespread knowledge of *The Crusaders*.

There was also damage done to its reputation from another side. Spohr had hoped that Wagner would stage his opera in Dresden, especially in view of his own efforts for Wagner's works in Kassel where he performed *The Flying Dutchman* in 1843, the second production of the opera right after its premiere in Dresden. In his letters to Spohr, Wagner gave encouragement to this hope for quite a long time and always stressed how much he would like to see it performed.

But by May 1846 it became clear that *The Crusaders* would not be performed in Dresden. Wagner blamed the theatre directors for that but it seems quite probable that he himself did not wish to see the opera staged there.

In his memoirs, *Mein Leben*, he makes some devaluing remarks on *The Crusaders* and so did



serious damage to the work's reception as they have often been quoted without any serious questioning of their validity.

The cliché of the work's 'senility' also had its starting point here. Even if the original rejection in Dresden really goes back to director Reissiger, Wagner probably encouraged this rejection while at the same time in his letters to Spohr he expressed his great enthusiasm for the work.

The surprised Spohr received back the 'pretty well soiled and handled' (Spohr 1955, p.304) score with a short comment from director von Lüttichau. The fact that the score was 'well soiled' makes me think that Wagner, who always studied new compositions carefully, might have done so with *The Crusaders*. If he did so he must have noticed many of the musical merits I have described above and had probably seen them as being in competition with his own musical plans which he wanted to promote as his very own original inventions.

Thus the reception history of *The Crusaders* was obviously harmed by Wagner's devaluing judgment, the Catholic censorship and prejudices which found the opera's basic idea to be politically inconvenient. Instead the subject matter was declared to be 'inappropriate' and the composition 'senile.'

In keeping with the general idea behind its subject matter, a plea for independent thinking rather than dogmatic ideologies, *The Crusaders* itself demands an open ear and a close look at the on-stage action. It seems ironical that a work demanding such close scrutiny has had to suffer a reception history which rejected exactly that.

Spohr's last opera is by no means disabled by 'senility', rather it is strengthened by the humanist wisdom of age. The work has been misunderstood and one reason for this might be its political attitude which is inconvenient to many even today. Also, Spohr was not a man who would propagate his thoughts aloud or impose them on anyone. As Herfried Homburg puts it, he was much more willing to 'liberate mankind through enlightenment, the example of humanitarian action and to establish the supremacy of mind and reason.' (Homburg 1968, p.6). So Spohr made it more easy for his critics to overlook his viewpoint.

Spohr's opera is also of high interest for our own time. The misuse of ideology can be found in many forms of politics and especially today it is used in more subtle ways than ever. It becomes possible to fight wars in the name of humanity or kill people in the name of religion. So it would be a valuable move if theatres would rediscover this forgotten work of Spohr's and search out appropriate ways of staging it. I am quite sure that the results would be extremely interesting and so would further investigations of *The Crusaders* by the world of musicology.

## Sources

Full score:

Autograph missing (almost certainly destroyed in Second World War)

Copies.

– Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Mus. Ms. 21.009.

– also: set of 46 parts, Mus. Ms. 29741.

– Brunswick (the author has used a film of the Brunswick score in the archive of the Internationale Louis Spohr Gesellschaft, Kassel).

Piano arrangement

– Louis Spohr, *Die Kreuzfahrer*, arranged for piano by the composer, Hamburg and Leipzig (Schuberth) 1845.

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#### Notes

1. Nevertheless, he finally values the formal progress: 'In its formal aspects the work is one of the first monuments of the new direction.'
2. This is paralleled in the character of Bishop Adhemar who symbolises the ideal church or the church not as it is but as it should be.

**The musical examples appear on the two following pages.**

## Examples

### Example 1

**Faust**

snakes from an abyss arc hissing to me!  
 Schlan - - gen vom Ab - grund, sie zi - - - sen he - - rauf!

**Allegro molto**

### Example 2

105 Emma *stringendo*

Glo - cke zu der Gruft. *f* Hin - weg! mein e - wi - ges Ver - häng - nis ruft!  
bell calls for the tomb. A - way! my e - ter - nal dis - as - ter calls! *motif in*

strings *ff*

deep bell in Es bassoon + Vc.

108 [Emma enters the convent]

Fl. I and VI. I

Tempo lmo

dimin.

p

deep bell in Es (on stage)

### Example 3

A musical score for the song 'The Rose Tree'. It consists of four staves. The top two staves are for the vocal melody, and the bottom two are for the piano accompaniment. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The melody is simple and catchy, with a repeating phrase. The piano accompaniment provides a steady harmonic foundation with chords and moving lines.

Example 4

Robert 68

Die Lan - go - wei - - - - - le.  
the bo - - - - - re - dom.

strings

(No. 1, bar 68 f)

Example 5

*pp*

Example 6

*p*