

SPOHR AND THE CD NOTE

by Keith Warsop

FOURTEEN years ago, as the era of the commercial LP record drew to a close, an essay by the present author, 'Spohr and the Sleeve Note', appeared in the 1989 Spohr Journal. It suggested that 'it is instructive to examine the sleeve notes of recordings of Spohr's music since the long playing record was introduced in the early 1950s to see how the annotators' perceptions of the composer have changed over the period as more and more of his works have been revived.'

The dramatic change in attitude was clearly illustrated in this survey which started with the note accompanying the first widely available Spohr LP, the 1953 Vienna Octet version of the Nonet released on Decca LXT2782. That anonymous note said that: 'As a composer, Spohr's reputation has greatly declined. He wrote in a wide variety of forms ... but although his religious music long enjoyed a vogue in Victorian England, especially the celebrated oratorio *The Last Judgment*, the greater part of his voluminous output is now forgotten.' It added: 'Spohr's originality lay chiefly in his feeling for colour. In harmony this led him into excesses of chromaticism which give much of his music a somewhat faded air.' Leonard Duck, the note writer for another early release, HMV ALP1462 on which Yehudi Menuhin and Gioconda de Vito played sonatas and duos, said that Spohr's 'solidly built German style is vitiated by a too frequent recourse to sliding chromatic progressions.'

As the various sleeve notes were surveyed, changes in attitude became apparent until, in 1988, the note by Heinz Holliger, for the Novalis LP of the E minor concertante for violin, harp and orchestra, could say: 'Upon listening to the introduction of the first movement of the Concertante in E minor for the first time, there are very few people who would be able to guess that the work was written in 1807. Neither Mendelssohn nor Schumann was born yet, Schubert only ten years old, and Weber's *Freischütz* still awaiting its inception, but the bold, chromatic harmony and the intensely colourful and refined orchestration of this work foreshadow Romanticism at its most mature. In this early work, recorded here for the first time, all the elements of Spohr's unmistakable personal style have reached their full flowering; an amazingly powerful and imaginative harmony, an innovative and resourceful treatment of the instruments, and an often almost excessively tender lyricism are moulded into a classical form which constituted Spohr's ideal practically throughout his over fifty-year-long career as a composer.'

Our 1989 essay concluded: 'Herr Holliger's mention of Spohr's "bold, chromatic harmony" and "amazingly powerful and imaginative harmony" shows what a long road we have travelled since the "excesses of chromaticism which give much of his music a somewhat faded air" of 1953. In the sleeve notes to Spohr recordings over the past 36 years we can follow the milestones along the road to rehabilitation for the very facet of his style which used to be so roundly condemned.'

That Novalis LP was also released on compact disc, a medium which was first launched in 1983. Since that launch some of the Spohr LPs we surveyed have been reissued on CD along with their original notes and we will not include them in this survey of the 20 years of Spohr compact disc notes. We must not expect to find such a startling development in the attitude to Spohr as that which marked the LP era. Nevertheless, some important views are put forward in the notes now under consideration.

In the 1989 essay, sleeve notes by members of the Spohr Society of Great Britain and the

Internationale Louis Spohr Gesellschaft came under the microscope but the growth of the Spohr discography means that an unbalanced and highly partial summary would appear here if such notes were now to be included. Therefore, the notes on some 50 CDs contributed by ourselves and our German colleagues are ignored. These include those by the present author, Clive Brown, Robert Jordan, Maurice Powell and Chris Tutt of the SSGB, and by Hartmut Becker, Nikolaus Friedrich, Christian Fröhlich, Dietrich Greiner, Herfried Homburg, Franziska Rinckens and Martin Wulforth of the ILSG.

Also put to one side is Kingdom KCLCD2004 on which the Beethoven Broadwood Trio perform Spohr's first two piano trios. Michael Freyhan's excellent note reached us at the end of 1988 and so was just in time to be included in the 1989 essay. About half-a-dozen further CDs have been ignored as they carry notes of the briefest biographical scope and do not merit consideration but even so, we still have around 40 CDs left for examination.

Among the CDs issued from LP originals comes Acanta 43508, recorded in 1982, on which the soprano Helen Donath, the clarinetist Dieter Klöcker and the pianist Klaus Donath perform songs with obbligato clarinet. Along with the inevitable 'Der Hirt auf dem Felsen' by Schubert and Spohr's *Sechs deutsche Lieder*, Op.103, are also pieces by Franz Lachner and Kalliwoda. Herr Klöcker, from whom we will hear on a number of other CDs, has an intriguing theory about Spohr's music. He says (in a rather awkward English translation): 'Although the "romanticised classicism" of Louis Spohr is of much annoyance to some, it is this very mixture that has enabled his music to survive. Both warmly intimate and dazzling with virtuosity, the music is full of thematic invention and is as ruthless as regards its treatment of the instruments as Beethoven's was. Extremely precise and quite unmistakeable, this Spohrian style expresses itself in his vocal compositions too.' Comparisons with Beethoven, as here, is perhaps the major development to be found in the notes which accompany CDs of his music, an attitude unthinkable fifty years earlier.

A selection of Spohr's works for violin and harp are played by Ursula Holliger (harp) and Thomas Füre (violin) on Jecklin-Disco 573-2 of 1986. Here Walter Labhart tells us that 'Spohr experimented like no other musician of the Romantic period with unusual scoring, making a name for himself with numerous bold instrumental combinations.' He goes on to say that Spohr 'enriched the Romantic harp repertoire with contributions of undoubted importance.' Later he points out that Spohr wrote these pieces for his wife and adds: 'These works express the virtuosity of the married couple's playing as directly as the composer's rich melodic invention and harmonic refinement. While preserving basic classicistic work forms, the tradition-conscious yet frequently innovatory composer managed to combine violinistic cantabile with emphatically expressive or playful, musicianly elements to form a lively tonal language. If Spohr sticks to classical models with his preference for expressive suspensions and embellishments inserted in the middle of melodic lines, which became the essential stylistic stock-in-trade of his instrumental works up to about 1820, he points well into the future with sentimental episodes that are sometimes intensified into powerful emotion, and with heavily chromatic phrasing: this is especially true of his modulations that anticipate Wagner, and the undermining of the harmonic foundation.'

Next came Koch Schwann 311088H1 in 1989 with the Quartet-Concerto and two early sets of variations for solo violin and string trio, Opp.6 and 8. Carl de Nys covers many of the usual points found in comments on Spohr but makes the particular point that his symphonies 'were precursors of a much later genre, the symphonic poem' and that his violin concertos 'were also way ahead of their time.' Furthermore, he suggests that 'a recital devoted to his songs would distil the quintessence of the whole romantic era.' Of Opp.6 and 8, he says: 'In these two early

works the young Spohr showed a remarkable mastery of string writing, combining elements of both chamber music and concerto style.' He also notes that Spohr rarely suffered from 'the finale problem', commenting on the Quartet-Concerto that 'final movements are often a disappointment, but in this case the Rondo is in no way inferior to the other two movements.' He also points in this work to 'Spohr's complete command of harmony and modulation.'

Another 1989 CD was Calig CAL50887 which included the first recording of the Harp Trio along with the C minor sonata for violin and harp, and the cello version of the sonata, Op.113. Sylvia Sowa-Winter writes here that 'Spohr's extensive œuvre combines sensibility, pathos, and great tonal and harmonic richness with the formal and melodic intentionalities of the classical period.' She also opposes the view of Spohr as a Biedermeier composer, pointing out that typical elements of this style, emotionalism and sentimentality, are not at all characteristic of Spohr's compositions.

The year 1989 was proving a good one for Spohr CDs for Hyperion CDA66300 was released then, volume two of 'The Clarinet in Concert' with Thea King playing music by Julius Rietz, Gustaf Adolf Heinze and Étienne Solère along with Spohr's *Alruna* Variations. An unusual experience to find that Spohr is the only well-known composer included! Michael Freyhan's brief note says that Spohr's comment on his opera, *Alruna*, in his autobiography 'reveals an ability for ruthless self-criticism.'

And still the Spohr CDs came in 1989. The important Marco Polo release of the Fourth Symphony (8.223122) conducted by Alfred Walter was the precursor of recordings of all nine published symphonies under this artist. Keith Anderson's extensive note is mainly a distillation of musical dictionaries. It offers almost no opinions or insights into the composer and his music but it does help the listener to follow the programme of the symphony.

Our old friend Dieter Klöcker writes the notes for Orfeo C213901A of 1990 on which works by Meyerbeer, Baermann and Busoni accompany Spohr's Danzi Fantasia, Op.81 and the clarinet quintet version of the variation movement from his Notturmo, Op.34. Herr Klöcker quotes some criticism of Hermstedt from Spohr's autobiography and goes on to say: 'If Spohr had only begun his critique by taking a look at his own figurations! Even today, some of his clarinet pieces seem to have been written against the instrument; nevertheless, the quality and richness of the music keeps drawing musicians into "Spohr-some adventures" (Sobek).'

We stay with Herr Klöcker on Koch Schwann 314018, 'Virtuoso Operatic Arias for Soprano and Obligato Clarinet' (1991), which contains pieces by Mozart, Schubert, Crusell, Nicolai, Vogler, Von Poissl and Škroup as well as 'Ich bin allein' from Spohr's *Faust*. Herr Klöcker mentions Spohr's present-day neglect and adds: 'This neglect is unjust, particularly when considering the outstanding quality of his works. Spohr was productive in all areas, and he also created memorable works in the operatic domain ... There are still a number of exciting works of his waiting to be rediscovered.'

One of these 'memorable works in the operatic domain' was released the same year on Orfeo C240912H, a complete recording of *Jessonda*, certainly among Spohr's masterpieces. However, Jürgen Schläder, in his notes, is not very complimentary about the plot of the opera. He says: 'To this day the plot's slight dramatic capacity and the work's flawed dramatic structure have proved to be crucial obstacles to attempts to revive *Jessonda* on the operatic stage ... The contemporary praise for Gehe's supposedly splendid libretto, uncritically repeated even in modern researches, is scarcely understandable today.' He goes on to pick the plot to pieces but makes the interesting point that 'the leading role really falls to the lyric tenor Nadori, although within the drama he remains only a subsidiary figure as informer for the Portuguese general, while Tristan d'Acunha, on his side, embodies the leading male role in the drama through its emphasis on love and

courageous deeds, yet in the bass-baritone register is characterised only as a soldier and not as an enthusiastic lover. Finally, the allocation of soprano to bass (Jessonda and Tristan) and mezzo-soprano to lyric tenor (Amazili and Nadori) breaks with all the conventions of romantic operatic action.' We suggest that perhaps Spohr deliberately attempted to break with these conventions in order to avoid writing a 'production-line' opera.

Prof. Schläder, though, is highly positive about the music: 'Against these obvious weaknesses of dramatic construction stand Spohr's subtle musical character-drawing and his pioneering musico-dramatic concept.' He adds: 'The diversity of musical expression, from instrumented *secco-recitativo* to motivically developed *accompagnato*, testifies to Spohr's superior powers of artistic construction.' He sums up: 'He was successful with character-studies of subtle individuality, particularly in the women's arias. The chromatic intensification of the melodic line and harmony, typical of Spohr's compositional style, as well as the colourful instrumentation, bringing out the lyrical character, give Amazili's aria (No.19) a trait of deep-seated happiness, and Jessonda's two arias (Nos.7 and 27) the character of quiet resignation. In the precise formulation of this sensitive musical depiction of the soul lay Spohr's strength as a dramatic composer; here he endowed the German operatic repertoire with genuine pearls of the literature of the aria.'

Substantial Spohr releases continued in 1993. Sony Vivarte SK53370 brought period instrument performances of the Sextet, the First Double-Quartet and the String Quintet in G major, Op.33/2. Here Kenneth Slowik's notes in the main quote from Spohr's memoirs about the recorded works although he does mention the Sextet's 'extraordinary beauty' and after pointing to a contemporary reference which said that the work was one of the finest and most captivating of all Spohr's works, he adds: 'On hearing the sextet today, we can but concur.'

Pamela Weston had much more to say in her notes for Clarinet Classics CC0006 which was devoted to music associated with Spohr's clarinetist Hermstedt. Miss Weston points out that Hermstedt 'landed a veritable treasure trove of eight solo works from Spohr: 4 concerti, the Six German Songs, *Alruna* Variations. Potpourri on Themes from Winter's *Opferfest* and the Variations on a Theme of Danzi.'

She notes that Hermstedt and Spohr were drawn together 'by two significant facts: both loved Mozart and both were, *inter alia*, performers on the violin.' She adds: 'Spohr's devotion to Mozart is well known and indeed his melodic writing has the same stamp of delicious spontaneity we find in Mozart.' Apart from pieces by Mozart, Paer, Iwan Müller and Spohr's *Alruna* Variations along with 'Ich bin allein' from *Faust*, this CD also contains his *Sechs deutsche Lieder*, Op.103. Of these, Miss Weston says: 'This splendid group of songs ... contains much variety in both mood and treatment of the clarinet. The florid writing of nos. 1, 3 and 5 gives the player fine scope for dramatisation; the lullaby, no. 4, affords peaceful contrast, having the instrument fluttering softly around a vocal line of just three notes. Nos. 2 and 6 have proved popular on their own.'

Perhaps the most important 1993 Spohr release was the complete recording of the 1852 version of *Faust* on CPO 999247-2. Frank Harders-Wuthenow provides a wide-ranging booklet essay which suggested that Spohr was 'the missing link' in German operatic history between Mozart and Weber. The author also makes serious allegations against two great composers whom Spohr championed. He says: 'Beethoven and Wagner (whose *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* Spohr attempted to have staged in Kassel against the will of the Prince Elector) had no thanks for Spohr, only enmity. The numerous pre-conceived notions about Spohr originated here and were in part responsible for the oblivion his œuvre suffered later on. His music was said to be "soft", "sentimental", "unimaginative", or even "bourgeois" (German "biedermeierlich", but the epoch

of cultural history known as the Biedermeier period, 1815-1848, began only after Spohr's first major compositional period). Prejudices, once established, are hard to do away with, and those against Spohr have persisted right up until the present. His music was either not performed or performed in stylistically inappropriate fashion because we simply overlooked the commanding position he had held in the development of romantic music, above all in that of the German romantic opera.'

Having fired this broadside at two sacred targets, the author turns his attention to Spohr's opera and the merits of its music and characterisation. He discusses Spohr's use of leitmotif and says: 'Spohr employed this recent discovery in the area of musical presentation with astonishing mastery over wide stretches.' After discussing some examples of Spohr's use of leitmotif, Herr Harders-Wuthenow points out an essential difference between Spohr's *Faust* and Weber's *Freischütz*: 'If in Weber the demonic seems to be only a means for reinforcing the bliss of the bridal garland and the woods, then in Spohr the idyll is not merely endangered but has no chance. The libretto and the music refuse to produce a happy ending, the D major finale of the *dramma giocoso*'.

Furthermore, he claims: 'In his exploration of emotional worlds and artful inclusion of atmosphere in music, Spohr again and again ventured out into new areas of expression known neither to his great model Mozart nor to Beethoven and Cherubini and thus earned the right to be called an early master of romantic emotional and atmospheric magic.' The author points to the Röschen/Franz/Mephisto terzetto in which he says that 'a year before Schubert's "Gretchen am Spinnrade" Spohr hit upon an astonishingly similar musical solution for Bernard's text based on Goethe's "Meine Ruh ist hin". Restless string movement in sixteenths, fitful knocking in the accompaniment, and short-limbed melodic usage in the vocal part.'

Herr Harders-Wuthenow moves on to the magic potion scene at the wedding feast. He says: 'The moment when Kunigunde begins to feel the effect of the magic potion is accompanied by a major caesura. In what might be called an anticipation of cinematic techniques, the ball setting fades out for a moment, and when Kunigunde mentions the magic circle, real time seems to stand still ("Wie in einem Zauberkreis hält es mich in seiner Nähe"). Characteristically, it is precisely here, while resorting to an eminently romantic motif, that Spohr suspends the last functional relations of major tonality and for a moment penetrates deep into the territory of Tristan harmony. The music might be said to lose its footing, and the resources of chromaticism and enharmonic change are brilliantly employed to convey the theatrical idea.'

He concludes: 'Spohr's opera may be experienced as a magnificent, self-contained music drama, as the first full-fledged setting of the Faust theme and as a milestone in the development of German romantic opera.'

In 1994 Naxos released two CDs of Spohr's clarinet concertos, Nos. 1 and 3 on 8.550688 along with the Winter Potpourri, Op.80, with Nos. 2 and 4 plus the Danzi Fantasie, Op.81, on 8.550689. Keith Anderson, this label's 'house' annotator, as usual sticks mainly to factual material culled from musical dictionaries strung together in a readable and informative way but he does venture to put forward one or two points of his own. He says that 'while much of his violin music, the duets, concertos and the *Violinschule*, remain of importance for students of the instrument, and compositions like the Nonet are still heard, much of Spohr's work is only now undergoing a slow process of revival.' He adds: 'Spohr's concertos for the clarinet are in a measure exceptions to this general neglect of his work. They come at an important stage in the development of the instrument and its repertoire and thus hold a special position among players.' Of the first concerto Mr Anderson says that although Spohr (misprinted Weber in his note!) 'Claimed ignorance of the instrument before writing this concerto, he nevertheless demonstrates

a sure handling of the special qualities of its contrasting registers and its effectiveness in arpeggios, rapid scales and ornamentation, as well as in sustained operatic melody.'

Howard Smith wrote the notes for the 1994 excellent Hyperion recording of the Nonet and the Octet (CDA66699) in which he tells us that Spohr's reputation in his own time 'clearly rivalled that of Schubert, Schumann, Weber, Berlioz and others.' He later says: 'Time has treated Spohr more shabbily than several of his contemporaries. What a contrast from an era (170 years past) when his musical "star" was so much in the ascendant.'

In discussing the Nonet, Mr Smith says: 'Typically, Spohr's inventive powers were fuelled by challenge and he makes conspicuous use of all nine "voices"; mindful of Tost's requirement that the Nonet should emphasise individual characteristics of each instrument.' He concludes: 'The entire work is skilfully crafted and to this day retains the interest and appeal it held for those first, enthusiastic Viennese audiences.'

Turning to the Octet, Mr Smith remarks on Spohr's variety of invention, saying: 'There is little in the first movement resembling construction processes found in the Nonet.' The variation movement on Handel's 'Harmonious Blacksmith' theme produces reference to 'Spohr's inexhaustible invention, a trait which performers warmed to, for it captivated both instrumentalists and audiences alike. Once again Schubert may readily spring to mind yet the movement retains much which typifies Spohr's affirmative gifts, and his alone.'

He offers a sensitive summing up: 'In our century it has been said that Spohr was "too often derivative and facile ... most willing to accommodate audiences which sought entertainment rather than edification." More enlightened authorities find he had a true and worthwhile place in the musical continuum. A "minor Romantic"? Perhaps. But one who does not deserve the neglect that even now surrounds much of his work. These enchanting chamber pieces reveal something of the "voice" that time may even now vindicate.'

Our final 1994 release, on the Belgian label Arcoboleno AAOC93642, presents the three sonatas for harp and violin, Opp.113-115. The anonymous note is brief but says that these works 'have an important place among his music. These sonatas are full of charm ... They represent interesting technical challenges generally for the harp.'

1995 was the year of the piano trios and the first recording to arrive was Chandos CHAN9372 which featured trios three and four. Veteran Spohr annotator Robin Golding began his note by recycling for about the fifth time his paragraph first written in the mid-1950s and unrevised since, despite the gradual exploration of Spohr's output: 'In consigning the music of this genial and prolific composer to almost complete oblivion we deprive ourselves of much innocent pleasure.' He also refers yet again to the lines in *The Mikado* linking Spohr with Bach and Beethoven. Once past this dross, however, Mr Golding is surprisingly informative and credible. He says that Spohr 'was an extraordinarily fluent and fertile composer. Of the five trios, he says: 'It seems extraordinary that these remarkable and technically very demanding works, which are conceived on a large scale, use the three instruments in a highly imaginative way and contain many instances of thematic relationships between movements, have been dropped entirely from the concert repertory.' His descriptions of the two trios recorded are detailed and generous; in the finale of No.3 he points out that development 'is not confined to the conventional place between exposition and recapitulation'; he refers to the 'very substantial development section' in the first movement of No.4; notes the 'pronounced and often piquant rhythmic profile' in its *Menuetto*; and, after referring to the composition of the finale while Spohr was taking the cure in Carlsbad, says: 'He called it "der Sprudelsatz" (the bubble movement), and one can almost hear the effervescing waters of the spa in the music.'

After complete sets of the trios on Naxos and CPO (neither covered here), a further one

appeared on Orfeo C352952H with notes by Michael Freyer-Frerichs. He has a fascinating theory to explain Spohr's neglect, as follows: 'Like other composers of his generation, he was overlooked and forgotten for many years. This is owing, at least partially, to the expectations of audiences used to listening to the Viennese classics and the works of the Romantics – Schubert, Mendelssohn and Brahms. We have difficulties with pre- and early Romantic works because both stylistically and tonally they do not conform to our preconceived notions.'

He says that Spohr's piano trios 'are among the most important written for these instruments in the mid-nineteenth century, comparable with the slightly earlier works of Mendelssohn (1839/1845) and Schumann (1847/1851). Spohr's compositional skill is evident not only in his handling of the outer form but also in his treatment of the musical material within the individual movements. Today's interpreters and listeners, however, must let themselves be drawn into the peculiarities of Spohr's style: theatrics and sharp contrasts are not part of this early Romantic repertoire. The harmony has a flowing character and tends to mask the central tonality.'

Herr Freyer-Frerichs points to the first trio as 'proof of Spohr's compositional power; there isn't a trace of groping or uncertainty.' He goes on: 'A particularly conspicuous characteristic of Spohr's compositions is his preference for chromatic themes. Harmonically ambivalent, these themes generate an implicit uneasiness, which is intensified by the tendency to blur the metre and phrasing of his erratic melodies. The beginning of trio No.1, opus 119, is a perfect example of this compositional technique. The extremely short presentation of the main key (E minor) consists of only two quarter notes. Later the motif is varied to such an extent with accidentals and delayed resolutions that the listener is unable to perceive a harmonic centre.'

More insights follow: 'One consequence of Spohr's style is that he does not present harmonic conflicts in the development and resolve them in the reprise to the extent that other composers do. He does move further away from the main key in the development than in the exposition or reprise, but the most characteristic feature of his developmental sections is his play with the thematic material presented in the exposition.'

Then: 'Spohr's works are often criticised for their monotonous rhythmic motifs, but in the piano trios the scherzo movements prove the opposite. Towards the end of the first part of the scherzo (opus 119) there are almost jazz-like rhythmic and metric shifts in the piano.'

One final point is made by Herr Freyer-Frerichs which needs correction. He says: 'There is an unusual compositional feature in the scherzo of opus 119. In the reprise of the scherzo Spohr combines the scherzo and trio themes, thereby creating a kind of developmental section in the scherzo movement. Felix Mendelssohn followed the same procedure in his piano trio in C minor, opus 66, which he dedicated to Louis Spohr.' It is not Op.119 which contains this special feature but trio No.2, Op.123.

One last 1995 release was a CD called 'The Journey of Love through Life' (Serendipity SERCD2300) which included Spohr's *Sechs deutsche Lieder*, Op.103, along with Schumann's 'Frauenliebe und -leben', Schubert's 'Der Hirt auf den Felsen' and another setting of 'Frauenliebe und -leben', this time by Franz Lachner. The purpose of this CD was to raise money for Jessie's Fund, a charity designed to bring music to children in hospices. As a motto for this aim, lines from Spohr's setting of Geibel's 'Sehnsucht' are quoted at the head of the notes (Oh, the bounds are so narrow and the world is so wide, and time is so fleeting).

In his notes, Michael Fields says that 'Spohr takes a random flip through a life-long collection, viewing several unconnected scenes which each stir the heart in their different ways. "Sei still mein Herz" is a song of torment at disillusionment; "Zwiegesang" by contrast takes us back to an innocence which we cannot imagine will ever know such anguish; "Sehnsucht" portrays a wistful longing for all that there is to see and do and discover – painfully aware that

life is too short and we are never really free enough to follow our heart's true desires; "Wiegenlied" is a gentle lullaby, while "Das heimliche Lied" speaks of a different sleep – the easeful death that calls to a lonely heart; finally, "Wach auf" ends on a note of joyful optimism, reminding us that life and love are all around just waiting for us to wake up to them.' That seems to us a genuinely perceptive 'back of a postage stamp' summary of Spohr's set of songs.

Bayer Records BR100264 of 1996 offered Spohr's harp and violin sonatas Op.113 and 115. The anonymous notes are brief but the author points out that the opening of Op.113 'bears an amazing similarity to Beethoven's C major piano concerto, but the energetic march-like unity of the latter is soon replaced in Spohr by dynamic contrasts, playful chords and richer harmonies, thus dissolving the somewhat rigid symmetry of the classicists in favour of an unrestrained mode of composition.' Of the final rondos, he says: 'they do not follow the classical sequence; elements of variation and interpolations blur the strictness of the traditional form and bear witness to Spohr's tendency to compose in a freer, romantic style.'

A period instrument performance of Spohr's well-known Eighth Violin Concerto, Op.47 (the *Gesangszene*) is on Hyperion CDA66840 of the same year. There are also concertos by Viotti (the also well-known No.22 in A minor) and Mysliveček plus Schubert's Rondo in A major, D.438. Robert Dearling, who writes the notes, refers to the 'unassuming freshness, vigour and variety' of Spohr's violin concertos. He categorises the slow movement as 'an aria-like interlude of grave beauty' while the finale is 'for Spohr, unusually passionate but does not neglect the composer's standard trademark of melodic elegance, nor his obligation to provide the soloist with rewarding opportunities for display.'

The short-lived Carlton Classics company issued John Denman's versions of Spohr's third and fourth clarinet concertos on its Imp Masters label (3036600082) with the *Alruna* Variations and the Winter Potpourri also included. In her notes, Paula Fan calls Spohr 'one of the most extraordinary musical figures of his time.' She goes on to say that Spohr's clarinet compositions, with the exception of the first concerto, were left to gather dust. 'Only in the latter part of the 20th century have these works been rediscovered, one by one, and brought once again to life.'

Miss Fan continues: 'Within his lifetime, Spohr was hailed as a master. After his death, however, his reputation suffered a steady descent, and it has been only in the last few decades that the stereotypic idea of Spohr as a mere composer of endlessly modulating technical challenges has given way to reassessment his place in musical history. In the works presented here, one hears echoes of his model, Mozart, not only in the song-like shaping of the lines, but in the magical way the solo clarinet alternatively complements the imaginative orchestration, and then rises above, as if to take the listener to new musical heights.' She adds: 'Spohr's sobriquet of "the forgotten master" is well deserved, for he was both a key stepping stone in the development of musical romanticism, and a true craftsman, who perhaps understood the delicate balance between virtuosity, lyric expression and musical depth better than any composer of his time.'

Still in 1996, Dieter Klöcker puts in another appearance as the note writer for Orfeo C410961A, a coupling of the Octet and the Piano and Wind Quintet. He mentions Beethoven's Septet and says that 'in subsequent years no works for wind and strings were written that caused a stir', adding: 'Into this vacuum from 1800 until Schubert's immortal Octet of 1824 bursts the almost 30-year-old Spohr in 1813 with compositions for octet and nonet.'

Herr Klöcker says that Spohr's 'numerous printed string chamber works, and also the solo works for violin and for clarinet, provide evidence that in these works large musical gesture finds just as much room as intimate emotional value.' Of the Octet, he says: 'It is understandable that throughout his life Spohr particularly valued the work. Its fresh, original invention is shown not

only in the flanking outer movements, but also in the Variations and especially in the Minuet, which in reality presents an impassioned scherzo full of dæmonic power.'

Turning to the Quintet, he tells us that 'this work, from the master's best and most inspired creative period, is distinguished by its accomplished organisation and melodic expressiveness. Its most beautiful ideas are found in the Larghetto.' He concludes: 'While the majority of Spohr's works lead a somewhat shadowy existence in today's musical life, his chamber music in mixed scoring has survived the passage of time. In it he preserves his originality and at the same time shows how impressively the "composing virtuoso" has at his command the means of "early Romantic expressiveness". Thus he succeeded with ideas that would probably have been denied him in traditional forms.'

Clarinet CDs were the feature of 1997. On Datum DAT80008, Luigi Magistrelli was the soloist in Spohr's chamber music with clarinet and also wrote the notes, so giving us the performer's insight into Spohr's clarinet style. He says: 'In all the clarinet works of Spohr an extremely brilliant and virtuoso style is frequently evident, typical of his violin pieces.' This CD also includes a performance of Spohr's *Sechs deutsche Lieder*, Op.103, and here Signor Magistrelli notes: 'The human voice can be blended with the clarinet, thus getting surprising results ... This splendid cycle of songs is made up of a wide variety of situations of different character.' He ends his notes with some general comments: 'One constant element in the clarinet music of Spohr is the use of all the registers of the instrument; from the bottom of the chalumeau register to the last possible note, B flat, through long scales and difficult arpeggios recalling, as already mentioned, the typical violin technique ... Although he has not been very much considered in our century, he would deserve, without doubt, more consideration. We hope that this CD can give him the right appreciation he deserves.'

Tudor 7009 offered the first two clarinet concertos plus the *Alruna* Variations. The notes, by Christian Ekowski, point out that Spohr 'is one of the many composers whose name is generally known while their works only rarely appear on concert programmes. Midway between two epochs – the Classical and the Romantic – he finds it hard to win through against, on the one hand, Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Ludwig van Beethoven and, on the other, Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy and Johannes Brahms. Contemporary taste was too short-lived and too unsubstantial to develop a lasting effect. This in no way means that his [compositions] should be seen as inferior.'

Herr Ekowski goes on to say that the clarinet concertos 'are superlative evidence of his inventiveness' but uses quotations from Spohr's autobiography in discussing the three recorded works.

More substantial notes by Paula Fan accompany Carlton Classics 3036600552 which contains John Denman's recordings of the first two clarinet concertos, the orchestral version of the Danzi *Fantasie* and Weber's *Concertino*, Op.26. She repeats her general introduction from John Denman's previous Carlton Classics CD and goes on to explain the provenance of the Danzi *Fantasie*'s orchestral material: 'The version heard here with orchestral accompaniment came to light through the efforts of the distinguished American clarinetist David Glazer, who discovered this Schmidt publication in Marburg, where much of the Spohr Archive was stored for safe-keeping during World War II. Curiously, this edition, which bears the same plate numbers as the Schmidt string quartet version as well as the consecutive publication number, does not appear in the catalogue of Spohr's works.'

Miss Fan describes the work as follows: 'The Fantasy opens in tumultuous fashion with brilliant clarinet arpeggios over a stormy accompaniment, which quickly subsides, leading to the gentle theme ... Spohr intersperses the sequence of increasingly challenging clarinet figuration

with a sweetly melancholy reharmonisation of the theme, and with a sudden eruption of the passionate opening material. The piece finishes with a dazzling variation ending on top C, in which Hermstedt's immense technique would have been on full display.'

The slow movement of the first concerto 'is full of harmonic subtlety' with 'a series of interrupted or deceptive cadences, that in Mozartian fashion, treats the listener to a most tender, lyrical ending' while the finale 'is full of fiendish humour interspersed with truly devilish leaps and bounds. Most surprising is the plaintive coda which recalls the mood and harmony of the *Adagio* opening of the first movement, which floods the close of the work with quiet despair.'

In the first *Allegro* of the second concerto in which 'much of the movement is filled with martial sounds decorated with sparkling clarinet filigree, a lovely singing theme halfway through provides a moment of repose. At the climax of the movement, the clarinet emerges from the orchestral texture in a series of fiery arpeggios which lead into an ascending triplet passage to altissimo C.' Miss Fan mentions the 'lovely interplay' of the winds in the slow movement and its 'haunting coda which brings the movement to a poignant close.'

There was a vintage year for Spohr CDs in 1998 with as many as seven coming under consideration here. On Es-Dur ES2029, one of a series of 'Music at the Court of Gotha' we had first recordings of the Concertante for two violins, Op.48, and the Concertante for violin and cello. The final piece was the Potpourri on Themes from *Jessonda* for violin and cello, Op.64.

The notes by Walter Meißner focused on Spohr's years at Gotha, telling us: 'There is no doubt that the both productive and circumspect Court Kapellmeister was able to leave his stamp on the musical life of the Thuringian town with its "Residenz", but equally his years in Gotha were of crucial importance in the professional and personal development of the young artist.' He mentions that in the Concertante, Op.48, 'the unusual but most appealing instrumentation of the second movement is noteworthy: the intimate cantabile of the solo instruments is accompanied only by the lower strings (1st-3rd celli and double basses) and at certain points a horn.' In the Concertante for violin and cello 'an unusual feature is the unexpected return to the thematic material of the substantial *Adagio* introduction, before the lively 6/8 *Allegro* drives forward with growing virtuosity towards the brilliant finale.'

He summarises the qualities of these Gotha concertantes in this fashion: 'The two works have in common the forceful virtuosity, sophisticated dialogue between the solo instruments and wide ranging technical means and effects. Yet the thematic material is nevertheless dealt with in a consistently perceptible fashion, cantabile and expression are never neglected and attention is paid to transparency and balance in the orchestral accompaniment. Bright in character, romantic in spirit: both pieces offer the finest musical entertainment on a high level, whilst extreme difficulties in interpretation lend the works additional appeal.'

Turning to the later Potpourri, Op.64 (1823), Herr Meißner says: 'The violin and violoncello are able to display their brilliance in parts that are virtuosic but not pushily so and which complement one another down to the last detail. They give a work which may not take a leading position in Spohr's overall creative output but is nonetheless characteristic of his compositional achievement, both weight and originality.'

'German Romantic Opera Arias' feature on Beaux Authentics 051 whose composers include Paul Wranitzky, Winter, Lortzing, Conradin Kreutzer, Franz Lachner, while Spohr qualifies for three tracks with arias from *Der Berggeist*, *Der Alchymist* and *Die Kreuzfahrer*. The notes are by Jürgen Schläder whom we have already met in our survey of his notes for the Orfeo set of *Jessonda*. Here he rather plays down Spohr's attempts at forward-looking stage works and suggests that 'it is more the lyricism of separate scenes than the powerful musical drama that is interesting in Spohr's operas.'

Under a section headed 'Problems of aria form' Prof. Schläder says that song-like arias 'have long been typical for the German opera, characterising very sentimental moments.' However, 'Louis Spohr went another way – quite the opposite – towards the individual characterisation of figures or dramatic moments using subtle harmonic effects. [In the *Kreuzfahrer*] Emma's cry to God for help – in expectation of death – gets its lyrical intensity from a range of different keys and countless excitements crammed into the tiniest corners. It's not the form that carries the expression of suffering, but the harmonically interesting vocal line. In Paola's aria from the *Alchymist*, Spohr illustrates a passionate lament of unrequited love in a mass of chords, only sometimes matching the D minor tonic. These small arias, with their individual form, take the place of asides in the major traditional solo scenes in Spohr's operas, like Alma's desperately hopeful reflection about the fight against a superior spirit in *Berggeist*. Spohr lets the dramatic aspect of the scene follow the Italian model with a recitative and two contrasting aria sections. But the musical mood doesn't change from the intimate Larghetto (*Hoffnung! Du von Himmelshöhn*) to a triumphal Allegro molto (*Sei nun, Hoffnung, die mich trog*) – instead, the same emphasis is reinforced to produce bright jubilation.'

Spohr is partnered by Mauro Giuliani on Stradivarius STR33371, 'Lieder with Guitar' which includes the guitar versions of his song sets, Opp.37, 41 and 72 as well as the Romanza 'Rose, wie bist du' from *Zemire und Azor* (which is better known to English musicians as 'Rose, softly blooming'). A rather awkwardly-translated version of Alberto Fassone notes deals with Spohr's position 'between Romanticism and Biedermeier' and suggests that 'Biedermeierlich' is 'within Spohr's abundant output, the persistent Mozartiano-classicistic component, moulded early on into a cult of craftsmanship in the impeccability of form and in the eurhythmic sense of proportion.' He goes on: 'Constant harmonic experimentation is however one romantic trait that we may find, the untiring exploitation of the possibilities of chromaticism – especially in the inner parts.'

Signor Fassone does not use 'Biedermeier' at all in a pejorative manner and suggests that 'it will be possible in future to carry out an examination of the works of the composer that should finally gather together the aesthetic specificity, without removing the limits.' After this, he turns to Spohr's songs, saying that in these 'the delicate, melancholic melodic effusion, the artifice of the chromaticism when employed in the interpretation of the text, might have borne fruit that were not to nourish the repertoire of the *Hausmusik* of the time, but whose influence has been demonstrated on such composers as Schumann, Hauptmann and Burgmüller.'

The setting of Goethe's *Mignon's Lied*, Op.37/1, is found to be 'a wonderful example of flexibility in the declamation of text (the formal cohesion hinges about the periodic return to F major on the refrain "*Dahin! dahin!*")', with a polymetric outpouring which recurs also in *Der erste Kuß*, Op.41/5, an impassioned *Liebeslied* with fascinating chromatic tints'. He quotes Clive Brown's opinion in ranking Op.37/3, *Die Stimme der Nacht*, as 'the true gem of the cycle' and says that 'with its appealing suppleness in the vocal line – over a restless rhythmic continuum which recalls Schubert's *Gretchen am Spinnrade* – in its adherence to the psychological pathways taken by the text, supported by the usual precious harmonics.'

John Warrack, a regular commentator on Spohr for many years, writes the notes for Classic FM 75605570192 on which Spohr's first clarinet concerto, the two by Weber and the latter's concertino receive period instrument treatment. After detailing the collaboration between Spohr and Hermstedt on the concerto, he says: 'The result was a work of great charm and brilliance. Away from the violin on which he was himself a great virtuoso, Spohr does not write with the assured bravura of his violin concertos; but the opening movement has a delicacy in the brilliance which is of a different order to Weber's and the Adagio (in which the clarinet is accompanied

only by strings) has a calm lyricism which contrasts effectively with the bright finale.'

A further clarinet CD of 1998 was Tudor 7043, Spohr's third and fourth concertos and also the Winter Potpourri. Christian Ekowski's biographical notes are reprinted from the earlier Tudor CD but more significant are additional notes by Mario Scherrer on the clarinet pieces. He says: 'They partly reflect his musical development, from the youthful exuberance and magnificent variety of ideas in the first two concerti ... written respectively at 24 and 26, through the rather extrovert brilliance of the 3rd concerto in F minor (1821) to the last work of this genre, the noble and distinguished 4th concerto in E minor (1828).'

Later he says: 'Spohr was opposed to facile effects, preferring his music to work its spell from within. The orchestration displays his springy rhythms, delicate and colourful timbres and romantically chromatic harmonies. Even where the instrumentation is more schematic, as in the 3rd concerto, its transparency favours the soloist's bravura escapades. The nuances of timbre are fascinating, particularly in the dialogue between soloist and instruments of the orchestra (flute in the first, celli and double basses in the second movement); they contribute to the work's articulation and are yet another proof that it is high time Spohr regained his Olympian status.'

The 'Olympian status' longed for here seems taken for granted on Praga Digitals PRD250117 which contains Spohr's Mass, Op.54, the Three Psalms, Op.85, and Mendelssohn's Three Psalms, Op.78. The writer, Pierre E. Barbier, says that Spohr was an essential link between the heritage of Haydn and 'the full expression of Romantic splendour with Mendelssohn, Schumann, Brahms and ... Richard Strauss!'

Turning to Spohr's Three Psalms, he says: 'Spohr breathes a seemingly naive and radiant emotional power into them, enabling him to mask his skill in opposing a concertante discourse and the simple alternation between vocal groups, homophonic writing and recourse to particularly skilful fugal forms. The final fugue of *Psalm CXXX* superposing two of the final lines of the text, *Er wird erlösen Israel von seiner Sünden Schuld* ('And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities') and *Denn bei dem Herren ist Güte* ('For with the Lord there is steadfast good'), is not only a grandiose rhetorical figure, but the affirmation of a style which will find its culmination under the successive signatures of Mendelssohn, Brahms and Bruckner.'

In conclusion he states: 'The present programme seeks to show the importance of Spohr's contribution to the continuity of the German choral tradition. That musician, highly appreciated during his lifetime, both by the public as well as by his peers, updated a genre which had no further liturgical destination. The fact that he was one of the masters of the Romantic oratorio, with such successes as *Die letzten Dinge* (*The Apocalypse*, 1826) and *Des Heilands letzte Stunden* (*The Saviour's Last Hours*, 1834-1835) at the same time opened the way to Liszt's *Christus* and the *Requiem* of ... Verdi.'

Finally in 1998, we had the first recording of Spohr's solitary piano sonata, Op.125, on KASP 57591. The note by the performer was also the story of a personal discovery. Donald Isler wrote: 'Two years ago I turned on the radio one day and caught the middle of an unfamiliar chamber work which seemed of such quality that I thought it might have been written by Schubert. It turned out to be music of Spohr, and when just several days later, during a conversation about lesser-known 19th century composers, Karl-Ulrich Schnabel, son of Artur, told me, "My father also had a high opinion of Spohr", I became particularly motivated to search for Spohr's piano works.'

As there were just two of them, the sonata and the short Rondoletto, Op.149, Mr Isler filled out his disc with Schubert's D major sonata, D.850. Discussing Spohr's sonata in A flat, Mr Isler says: 'The first movement shows the composer's harmonic daring almost immediately by pulling away from the tonic key towards a flirtation with G major on the way to the second theme, which

comes in the traditional key of the dominant. Further unusual harmonic relationships and rhythms, plus lively finger work, make this a strong movement.' He mentions the 'lovely intermezzo' which is the second movement, the 'most interesting use of rests in the theme' of the Scherzo which together with its 'beautiful Trio section in the middle of it, show again how often Spohr liked to look for other interesting tonalities to visit.' The finale 'combines charm and brilliance, plus Spohr's usual rhythmic and harmonic ingenuity, and some light-hearted pomposity.'

Our first 1999 CD includes Spohr's *Danzi Fantasie*, Op.81, on Column Classics 99168 which is entitled 'The Virtuoso Clarinet'. Also featured are Weber's *Clarinet Quintet*, Crusell's *Clarinet Quartet*, Op.4, and Baermann's popular *Adagio* from his Op.23 *Quintet*. Clemens Romijn, in his notes on the Weber piece, states: 'This quintet is not chamber music. The clarinet is not treated as a constituent of equal standing, but very much like a dazzling solo part of a concerto.' In contrast, he says of the Spohr (in a rather clumsy English translation): 'This is not an enjoyable and lightweight virtuoso piece only to show off Hermstedt's technical skill, or a kind of applause-music for the soloist, while the strings being humble servants in the shadow. It belongs to the type of fantasy-variation, with strong rhapsodic elements in the introduction, prevailing democracy between the voices, and the variations being both brilliant and poetic character-pieces. This piece belongs to the best of the nineteenth century clarinet's repertoire.'

Centaur CRC2448 offered Spohr's *Septet*, Op.147, Elfride Andrée's *Piano Quintet* in E minor and Sigfrid Karg-Elert's piano and wind quartet *Jugend*, Op.139, the link between these works being their performance at a Wisconsin music festival. James Berkenstock, artistic director and bassoonist of the Midsummer's Music ensemble which feature on the CD, is proud of his group's support for Spohr. He says they performed several of his works in recent seasons including the *Nonet*, the *Piano and Wind Quintet* and the *Sechs deutsche Lieder*, Op.103, in which he praises 'the charming use of clarinet'.

Turning to the *Septet*, Mr Berkenstock points out that 'all the instruments contribute substantially (more than one finds for instance in the two Hummel septets) despite a vigorous piano part.' He concludes: 'The finale is a vigorous and charming movement that reminds us that Spohr belongs more to the Schubert or Mendelssohn camp than to that of Brahms.'

On Hungaroton HCD31866 we have Spohr's three duos for two violins, Op.39. Csilla Pethő offers substantial and well-judged notes and after surveying the development of the violin duo, says: 'The greatest boom of the genre is represented by Spohr's works which, apart from exploiting all the possibilities of the harmonisation, can be considered the climax of the genre from the points of view of content as well as form.'

Discussing the first duo in D minor, Mr Pethő says: 'At the first presentation of both the first and second themes the basic principle that is present throughout the whole cycle can well be observed, i.e. the completely equal role of and the dialogue between the two violins. Its slow movement unfolds 'just like in some of the slow movements of Haydn or Mozart.' In the finale, 'the second theme is a more and more relaxed musical material with a dotted rhythm, which Spohr treats in an unorthodox way, instead of the expected F major he introduces it in B flat major, then he builds a sequence of one of the motifs with the help of which he unexpectedly modulates into E flat major, the closing key of the exposition.'

Of the second duo in E flat major, he says: 'The choice of key calls our attention to the fact that the apparently capricious tonal arrangement of the third movement of the D minor duo is a deliberate aspiration to achieve a unity of the three compositions within the cycle. By applying different types of movements however, he manages to achieve a variety. The opening movement of the E flat major duo is a slow movement in the sonata form ... Spohr applies a customary form

in an unusual position and thus breaks the domination of sonata allegros in the series.'

This duo's second movement is a minuet and Mr Pethő points out that 'in the canon structured main part the composer introduces another, not yet used, possibility for treating the two violins equally.' The finale 'is made special by the fact that the area of the second theme has substantially been increased. The theme itself appears in two keys both in the exposition and in the recapitulation which are in a third related connection with each other.'

He points out that Spohr uses a similar formal principle in the third duo in E major: 'It begins with a slow introduction which is followed by a regular exposition. The elaboration, however, is omitted and in its place the slow introduction is heard again but this time in C major, in the third related key of E major. The form establishing role of the slow introduction and the frequency of the third related connections highlight the fact that Spohr, although he claimed that he considered Mozart his model and idol, had drawn a lot on the art of Beethoven.'

The final 1999 disc, Arsis AC10-99067-2, paired Spohr's Piano and Wind Quintet with that by Mozart. Niek Nelissen attempted to write notes relevant to the approach of the new millennium by suggesting that it is always tempting to approach history by way of round figures. In the case of the two recorded works, he considers 1800 and the changes between the musical worlds of Mozart and Spohr, sitting on either side of this boundary.

He says: 'The two pieces on this CD symbolise the said change. Mozart's KV452, which dates back to 1784, completely falls within the Viennese tradition of Classicism; Spohr's opus 52 from 1820, on the other hand, is beginning to show elements of nineteenth-century Romanticism. Although the two pieces of music have much in common, they obviously belong to two entirely different traditions.'

Of Spohr himself, Mr Nelissen says: 'Even though the importance of Spohr's compositions may have been overrated during the nineteenth century, the balance, unfortunately enough, struck to the other side during the twentieth, as is so often the case when extremist views are corrected later on. During the twentieth century, Spohr's music was described as old-fashioned and rather dull. Recently, however, there seems to have been renewed interest in his music because of its high degree of professionalism and rather catchy sounds.'

He then goes on to make what would, some fifty years ago, have been considered an incredible and ludicrous claim: 'What the 1820 composition shares with Mozart's music is that it is pure chamber music, with a piano part that might well be described as utterly virtuoso and yet does not create the impression of being a solo part, as was the case with Beethoven [in his Piano and Wind Quintet, Op.16].' Spohr being given the preference over Beethoven!; who would have thought that could ever happen?

The minuet of Spohr's quintet is said to sound 'like the precursor of the gracious and thoughtful scherzi used by Brahms in his symphonies.' Then 'the lively finale convincingly rounds off this unique and perfect piece of chamber music.' Summing up, we have: 'After the age of the nineteenth-century virtuosos, Spohr's music became forgotten. And it was not until recently that the quality of a piece like opus 52 was suddenly appreciated once more.'

From 2000 comes Pavane ADW7423 which offers flute and harp versions of Spohr's sonatas opp.16, 113 and 114 along with the C minor sonata. The note by Dominique Dujardin tells us that Spohr 'composed highly expressive music that seduces the listener with its melodic freedom and virtuosity – especially the violin part – and also with his manner of modulating and chromatic inventiveness – and in this he was ahead of Wagner. The sonatas with harp are described as 'major works of the chamber music repertoire' and as 'generous and tender', they 'are marked by a strong virility, tempered by the elegiac softness of the slow movements.'

Danacord DACOCD538 is entitled 'Of Shepherds, Romance and Love' and focuses on music

for soprano, piano and clarinet so, inevitably, Spohr's *Sechs deutsche Lieder*, Op.103, appear alongside offerings from Schubert, Kalliwoda, Meyerbeer, Conradin Kreutzer, Nicolai and Berwald. The notes, which are marked copyright of Marilyn Meeker, state that 'Spohr was a true renaissance man of the nineteenth century' but then lift virtually unaltered and without acknowledgment a whole chunk of our own essay on Spohr included in our Society's section of the Hyperion website! She does add, however, that 'it has taken over a century for the western music world to get past Spohr's musical "oddities" (his music is mostly represented today by a septet, octet and nonet which offered opportunities for rare combinations of instruments) to discover the pleasures available in such music as this set of songs, Op.103, an assured balance of formal classicism with not only harmonic but timbral inquisitiveness.'

With Deutsche Grammophon's Archiv Produktion 469074-2 we reach 2001 and a selection of songs by Spohr, Beethoven and Meyerbeer. In Spohr's case these are the six songs with obligato violin, Op.154, from 1856. The author of the notes, Sieghart Döhring, does not seem to have done much research into Spohr as he says 'it is not known whether these pieces date from around this time [i.e. 1856]', whereas full details of how they came to be written appear in the closing pages of Spohr's autobiography, the part added by his family after his death.

The author does say that it is 'the involvement of an obligato violin that lends them a sense of unity in terms of their sonorities.' He goes on: 'The use of the violin often serves to lend dramaturgical weight to the words: in no.3 ("Töne"), flickering scales etch in the "strings" soft entreaty", while in no.4 ("Erlkönig") the violin accompanies the ghostly apparition's words with virtuoso passage-work and in no.5 ("Der Spielmann und seine Geige") it embodies the instrument referred to in the text. In the other songs both violin and piano are used to sustain the underlying mood of meditative melancholy.'

We close our survey with Hungaroton HCD32119 of 2002, the violin duos in F major, Op.148, and D major, Op.150. Although this CD was sponsored by the Spohr Society of Great Britain we had no input into the booklet notes, written by Enikő Gyenge. He considers that 'for the audience today he is a genuine classic: his natural musicality, his richly lyrical melodies, come through and are celebrated by the public.'

Of the duos in general, he says that Spohr 'marked with his violin duets the culmination of the genre. The rich variety of the ways in which he used his instrument and the depth of the message he conveyed prove him a master.' Turning to the two recorded duos Mr Gyenge says: 'The two violins carry parts of an absolutely equal rank, and they present the themes twice, one after the other, playing alternately the melody and the accompaniment. The two voices suggesting a dialogue provide a chance for genuine virtuosity, particularly in the transition and development phases of the fast movements. Like a series of "through-composed" solo cadenzas, the improvisation-like parts of the two violins create here an impressive mixture of a free and a strict structured texture.'

The development of the Spohr CD note has not shown the dramatic turnaround in attitudes which could be traced through those written during the LP era but nevertheless there have been important advances in his reputation. By 2003, a work by Spohr had been compared to one by Beethoven and found superior; another author told us that 'Spohr again and again ventured out into new areas of expression known neither to his great model Mozart nor to Beethoven and Cherubini'; while a third writer called for Spohr to be restored to his former Olympian height and yet another claimed, perhaps a little over-ambitiously, that for audiences today Spohr is a genuine classic. These are seeds which may well have an important influence on future perceptions of Spohr. Perhaps 'Spohr and the Internet Music Resource Note' will one day be a challenge to be tackled by a post-2020 author!