

A CONSPECTUS OF THE RECORDINGS OF SPOHR'S SYMPHONIES

by Martin Pulbrook

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Introduction

I FIRST FELT the need and desirability for some kind of survey of the Spohr symphonies more than 40 years ago, when I began collecting records. I bought my first Spohr LP, the Saga recording of the Nonet, as a 17-year-old in August 1965. Heifetz's disc of Violin Concerto No.8 followed in January 1967, and the Vienna Octet's version of the Octet in January 1968. In the 1960s there were no Spohr symphonies listed in *The Gramophone Classical Record Catalogue*, and Spohr had no individual chapter in a key book such as Ralph Hill's *The Symphony* (1949).

Little did I imagine back in the 1960s that I would be the person eventually to put together the survey which I then felt to be desirable. But there has been a certain relief and satisfaction on my part in at last completing the *Conspectus*, and I hope others too will find it of some benefit.

I wish to begin this review by listing certain exceptional recordings of works by other symphonists. As will become evident, there is a logic in this procedure. The recordings I have chosen are:

Mozart Symphony No.41; Abendroth (Eterna)
Beethoven Symphony No.5; Klemperer (VOX)
Beethoven Symphony No.6; Mravinsky (Melodiya)
Beethoven Symphony No.7; Beecham (HMV)
Schubert Symphony No.9; Kakhidze (HDC)
Mendelssohn Symphony No.4; Klemperer (VOX)
Schumann Symphony No.2; Klemperer (Columbia)
Bruckner Symphony No.1; Neumann (Decca)
Brahms Symphonies; Koussevitzky (Music & Arts)
Bizet Symphony; Stokowski (Decca)
Tchaikovsky Symphony No.6; Mengelberg (Telefunken)
Dvořák Symphony No.8; Beecham (HMV)
Elgar Symphonies Nos.1 & 2; Solti (Decca)
Mahler Symphony No.1; Adler (TAH)
Sibelius Symphony No.2; Beecham (HMV)

One could easily extend this list, and indeed extend it considerably. But the question to be asked is: "How is it possible to put it together in the first place?" – or perhaps better: "Why do these records stand out as exceptional?"

Two things can be said in response. These particular performances have emerged out of a situation where a good and sometimes exhaustive tradition of interpretation has been built up for the works concerned. Such a tradition constitutes a sort of 'platform of consciousness' for both interpreter and listener: the territory traversed by, say, Beethoven's Fifth Symphony or Brahms' Fourth is well within the ambit of common musical knowledge. Nonetheless, it remains the case that, in spite of these landmark performances, which should have set a standard thereafter, less good recordings of these works continue to be made and issued. In his 1951 VOX recording of Mendelssohn's 'Italian' Symphony Otto Klemperer pointed the final *Saltarello* movement with a speed and delicacy not even approached, let alone equalled, by anyone since.

If such disappointments can occur in respect of well-known territory, it becomes all the more explicable that, in the case of Spohr's symphonies, where there has effectively been no performing tradition at all, no

general 'platform of consciousness', performers and listeners should often feel lost. In the following reviews I suggest (for example) that performers are still groping their way to realise the full potential of the last movement of the Sixth Symphony and the first movement of the Eighth; and that a slower and more expressive performance of the *Larghetto* of the Third Symphony – more in line with the composer's metronome marking – may possibly emerge in the future. Where so much is unexplored, it is hardly surprising that interpreters here and there lose their focus, and that listeners continue on occasion to be baffled, not having any real yardstick by which to judge what is presented to them.

I do not wish to flatter myself that this article goes any great distance, or as far as may one day be possible. But I hope at least that by considering all together the evidence hitherto available, I may perhaps help towards, where Spohr's symphonies are concerned, just such a 'platform of consciousness' as I have described as existing elsewhere.

For it is I think true that if the various suggestions for 'best performance' I here outline could be put into general practice in the future, the full extent and scope of what Spohr achieved as a symphonist would then lie more clearly revealed.

Symphony No.1 in E flat, Op.20

CD recording by Alfred Walter with the Czecho-Slovak State Philharmonic Orchestra (1990, Marco Polo 8.223363)

CD recording by Howard Shelley with the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana (2006, Hyperion CDA67616)
A VAST GULF of perception and achievement lies between the First Symphony of 1811 and the Second nine years later. The Second Symphony stands on the threshold of German Romanticism, looking forward to Wagner and Bruckner; and is itself a major artistic achievement. By contrast the First Symphony depends on the past, looking back to and building on the world of Mozart.

To us now, for whom Beethoven is such a formative figure, it can be difficult to reconstruct, or see in focus, the horizons of an early-19th-century world without the looming influence of Beethoven. Sir Hubert Parry put the matter well (as repeated from an earlier edition in *Grove's Dictionary*, 1940, Vol.5, p.223) in discussing Mendelssohn's Symphony No.1 in C minor of 1824: "The predominant influence is clearly that of Mozart ... There is scarcely a trace of the influence of Beethoven ... The minuet is extraordinarily like that of Mozart's G minor symphony ... It was possibly owing to this circumstance that Mendelssohn substituted for it the orchestral arrangement of the scherzo of his octet when the work was performed later in his life". This last observation is particularly interesting, in that it illustrates both the pervasive immediate influence of Mozart and the wish to move away from it as time went on – something which perhaps led Spohr, for his part, eventually to discount his First Symphony.

In Spohr's case, in the First Symphony – and also in the case of E.T.A.Hoffmann's Symphony in E flat of 1805-1806 –, the influence is Mozart's 39th Symphony. And although we can point to the gulf between Spohr's First and Second Symphonies, a comparison between Spohr's First and the Hoffmann Symphony shows Spohr as the more inventive and recreative of the two – Hoffmann is more derivatively and even caricaturingly Mozartian. When all is said and done, we should no doubt acknowledge, with Spohr himself later in his life, that the First Symphony is not to be reckoned officially among his mature works. It was in the Second Symphony that he first found his individual symphonic voice; and when he returned later to the world of Mozart (in the second movement of the Sixth Symphony), it was with the added comprehension and objectivity of maturity.

Between Walter and Shelley there is little to choose in the opening movement of the First. Walter's time (*Adagio* 1m.50s. + *Allegro* 10m.50s. = 12m.40s. in total) is marginally slower overall than Shelley's (1m.39s. + 10m.56s. = 12m.35s.) on account of his slower introduction. But Shelley's is a fine, crisp performance, and he has my vote here.

In the slow movement (*Larghetto con moto*) there is no contest between Walter (5m.39s.) and Shelley (6m.16s.). Walter is marvellous at times throughout his Marco Polo cycle (e.g. the opening movement of Symphony No.2), while here and there he can be maddeningly insensitive: such occasions are the slow movement of the Ninth and also this *Larghetto*. Perhaps misinterpreting *con moto* – which is in this instance more an instruction not to dawdle than to set off at a half-run – Walter adopts an unsustainable speed in terms of allowing the music time to 'breathe' and simply to be itself. By contrast, Shelley is again admirable here, eliciting graceful and pointed playing from his Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana.

In the Scherzo & Trio Walter is rather more rushed (2m.44s. + 1m.33s. + 2m.45s., making 7m.2s. altogether), particularly in the Trio, than Shelley (3m.1s. + 2m.33s. + 3m.7s. = 8m.41s.). Shelley's nuanced spacing and phrasing win this particular contest without quibble.

However, a textual problem arises, which is well described by Keith Warsop (in his notes accompanying the Walter disc): "Spohr agreed with Hoffmann that the Scherzo was too long and decided to omit the standard repeats. It is still a fairly extensive movement which has a more ongoing dynamism through its range of modulation than the closed dance forms of the standard symphonic minuet or scherzo".

Although both Walter and Shelley follow Spohr's decision to omit the repeats, it is possible that E.T.A.Hoffmann's analysis was wrong, and based on an imperfect perception of what Spohr was trying to do.

Hoffmann was a brilliant critic, and mimic, and caricaturist, but without Spohr's imaginative dimension as an artist. His Symphony in E flat [recorded, for example, in 1974 by the Südwestdeutsche Philharmonie, Konstanz, conducted by Tamás Sulyok] is a much more rigidly Mozartian work than Spohr's First Symphony, and Sulyok's timings of 3m.7s. and 3m.59s. for the third and fourth movements of the Hoffmann symphony illustrate its very Mozartian proportions. Spohr, in both these movements of his First, was trying to do something much ampler; as Keith Warsop has rightly observed of the Scherzo, this movement in Spohr's First is more elaborate than "the standard symphonic minuet or scherzo". And, while we probably have in all conscience to follow Spohr's decision to omit the Scherzo repeats, it is worth pointing out that Johann Herbeck's similar advice to Bruckner in relation to the Scherzo of Bruckner's Second Symphony [evident in Nowak's 1877 score as distinct from Haas' of 1872] has the effect of unbalancing the movement in relation to the others, making it too short. The case should at least be considered, therefore, of going back to Spohr's original conception of the First's third movement, and including the repeats later omitted.

I have been somewhat less than enthusiastic both about this symphony and about Walter's performances of its first three movements. But in the fourth movement we suddenly touch pure gold, on both fronts.

Some measure of what Spohr sets out to achieve in this movement can be gauged from performing times (Walter 9m.21s., Shelley 8m.31s.) against the performing time for the equivalent movement of E.T.A.Hoffmann's Symphony (Sulyok 3m.59s.). Spohr aims for something much more than the typical Mozart or Haydn finale, and in the process drives himself well beyond the confines within which he has largely operated hitherto in this symphony. The movement takes on the form of a typical Spohr *perpetuum mobile* finale, darting now this way and now that. One great movement does not make a great symphony, but in this finale Spohr makes giant strides, in terms of his personal development, away from the Mozartian base from which he started.

Shelley gives a good performance here, but Walter – at his slightly slower speed – a truly inspired one. It is strange that Walter can suddenly 'come good' in this way after his sometimes less than perfect interpretations of the earlier movements of this work. But let nothing take away from his achievement, or of that of Spohr as composer, here.

Symphony No.2 in D minor, Op.49

LP/CD recording by Choo Hoey with the Singapore Symphony Orchestra, coupled with Franz Lachner's Symphony No.1 (1985, Marco Polo 6.220360/8.220360)

CD recording by Alfred Walter with the Slovak State Philharmonic Orchestra (1992, Marco Polo 8.223454)

CD recording by Howard Shelley with the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana (2006, Hyperion CDA67616)

CD recording by Howard Griffiths with the NDR Radiophilharmonie (2006-07, cpo 777 178-2)

THERE IS CONSIDERABLE variation of approach between the four conductors, and this is reflected in their timings for the first movement (*Allegro*):

Griffiths	10m.14s.
Choo Hoey	11m.16s.
Walter	11m.57s.
Shelley	12m.9s.

The Hanover orchestra play very well, even spectacularly at times, for Griffiths, but very big question marks hang over his interpretation of this movement. The fast speed means that much orchestral detail is

muffled or glossed over. And the surges of orchestral enthusiasm he generates have to be weighed against the lack of any coherent logical progression or musical development. The great strength of Otto Klemperer as a conductor was his concentration precisely on these things through an emphasis on linear clarity. And time and time again, in Griffiths' performance of this movement, one finds oneself longing for Klemperer's architectural clear-sightedness, for a connected sense of where one has come from and where one is going. These things are possible, for this is a fine movement, with hints of Beethoven and Weber (among others) here and there. But such a vision of what the movement could be as a structure singularly passes Griffiths by. What we are given instead is a splurge of colour and tonal effects.

Choo Hoey's Singapore Orchestra – founded only in 1979, and thus a mere six years old at the date of this recording – is, by a considerable distance, the least polished and accomplished of the four orchestras involved. They are somewhat spartan, rather than opulent, in tone, but play lithely and with commitment under Choo Hoey's precise direction. And paradoxically this unvarnished approach ends up by paying dividends. Above all, Choo Hoey imparts a taut clarity to the movement which is both effective and affecting; he provides at one level exactly what Griffiths lacks. But there is one negative element in Choo Hoey's performance of this movement: the second subject returns on recapitulation at a different speed from that used in the exposition.

Walter is noble and expansive in this movement. There are many fine aspects to his interpretation; his orchestra is richer and deeper in tone than Choo Hoey's, and his treatment of the bass lines and brass and wind instruments is of a massive range and spectrum.

This Spohr movement under Walter emerges as an important part of the German Romantic tradition alongside Weber's *Der Freischütz* and the first movement of Schumann's 'Rhenish' Symphony, a step along the path which led in due course to *Rienzi* and *Tannhäuser* and, later, Bruckner's 'Romantic' Symphony. Walter achieves a glorious realisation of this movement which, in the end, goes far beyond that of any other interpreter hitherto. After Walter, Shelley, though his tempi are right – compared with Griffiths –, seems relatively lightweight. This is not any special criticism of Shelley – simply the result of the fact that his Swiss orchestra, for all its fine musicianship, lacks the throaty depth and range of Walter's Slovak players.

Walter's rendering of this movement is one that grows on the listener with every hearing, in terms of its rightness and sheer nobility of sound and execution. It fully deserves a place alongside the exceptional recordings which I listed at the start of this *Conspectus*.

The second movement (*Larghetto*) is a perfect example of Spohr the miniaturist. Although the movement lasts only 5-6 minutes, it is made up in fact of three smaller elements, arranged in Spohr's favourite ABA structure. The 'A' parts – the *Larghetto* proper – have been well described by Keith Warsop (in the notes accompanying Howard Shelley's recording) as "a gently lyrical and richly harmonised melody". These enclose the 'B' part, "a powerful G minor section featuring prominent trumpet and drum outbursts which eventually lead to a grand climax" (Keith Warsop in the same notes).

There is a martial, perhaps even funereal, tone to this 'B' section, which seems to be built on aspects and moods taken over from Mozart and early Beethoven.

Since Spohr wrote this symphony (in March 1820) weeks before Ludwig Sand was executed (in May 1820) for the murder in 1819 of August von Kotzebue, and by all accounts Spohr was hoping (with other liberals and freedom-lovers) that Sand would somehow escape execution, it seems possible that there is deliberate and designed contemporary allusion on Spohr's part in what he writes here. Certainly a very deep and powerful emotional current runs through the 'B' section. And, interestingly, the same kind of contrast between idyllic, dream-like beauty and a harshly intruding reality recurs in the slow movement of the Ninth Symphony – likewise structured in ABA form.

Something of a paradox arises in all four recordings. Timings are:

Choo Hoey	4m.56s. (1m.42s.; 1m.37s.; 1m.37s.)
Griffiths	5m.7s. (1m.33s.; 1m.48s.; 1m.46s.)
Walter	5m.44s. (1m.48s.; 1m.56s.; 2m.)
Shelley	6m.11s. (2m.1s.; 1m.58s.; 2m.12s.)

All the conductors take the two 'A' parts at different speeds, Choo Hoey 5 seconds faster the second time round, the others 13, 12 and 11 seconds slower respectively on repeat. Such discrepancies are less than

ideal, and if it is the case – I think it is – that the slower times of Walter and Shelley better capture the mood and spirit of the music, allowing it to ‘breathe’ more easily, one might time an ideal performance at about 6m.22s. (2m.12s. + 1m.58s. + 2m.12s.).

In the third movement (Scherzo: *Presto* – Trio), Spohr the miniaturist is again in evidence, and again we have an ABA structure which, length-wise and balance-wise, acts as a foil to the *Larghetto*. With one important exception, there is little to differentiate the four performances, for which timings are:

Choo Hoey	4m.27s. (1m.51s.; 50s.; 1m.46s.)
Shelley	4m.42s. (1m.56s.; 54s.; 1m.52s.)
Griffiths	4m.46s. (1m.58s.; 54s.; 1m.54s.)
Walter	5m.55s. (2m.3s.; 55s.; 2m.57s.)

The one exception is Walter’s treatment of the end of the Scherzo on its repeat. Spohr provides a brief coda for the movement – as pointed out by Keith Warsop in his notes accompanying the Shelley recording, something that anticipates Bruckner’s practice in his early symphonies –, and Choo Hoey, Shelley and Griffiths race through the coda, so that its effect is considerably diminished. (Exactly the same error is made by most conductors with the coda of Bruckner’s Overture in G minor; Charles Adler, in his exemplary 1952 recording, is the only one to perform the coda at its correct, slow speed; and the gain is immeasurable.)

Walter is the only conductor of the four who spaces the coda at all properly. But his longer timing for the Scherzo the second time round is not solely due to the slow, impressive coda. While Spohr on this occasion marks the Scherzo to be played without the repeats – something observed by the other conductors in their respective recordings –, Walter for some reason includes the repeats, and hence lengthens this part of the movement. Despite this factor, his very slightly slower speeds all round, which are effective in terms of clarity and emphasis, tilts the balance for the movement as a whole firmly in Walter’s favour.

In the finale (*Vivace*) the four recordings are separated by a very small, even negligible, time-difference as between fastest and slowest:

Choo Hoey	6m.40s.
Griffiths	7m.3s.
Walter	7m.4s.
Shelley	7m.20s.

This is clearly a case where all the conductors in fact take the movement too fast. Keith Warsop (in his notes accompanying Walter’s CD) refers to the movement’s “life-enhancing good humour” and Bert Hagels (in his notes to Griffiths’ recording) makes much the same point: “the finale .. is emphatically mirthful”. The movement is certainly full of good humour and mirth, but it also needs to be something more.

In his notes accompanying Rickenbacher’s LP of the Ninth Symphony Hartmut Becker makes a passing reference to Spohr’s preoccupation with form and balance: “[In the Ninth Symphony] the coupling of the four movements into two ‘Abteilungen’ or sections (we encounter this term again with Mahler) occurs here only in a very superficial manner – by means of transitions”.

Although Spohr does not specify any particular ‘form and balance’ in the case of the Second Symphony, we can I think take it that the weighty first movement (as envisaged by Walter) must be balanced by something rather weightier and longer as the fourth movement. And these two outside movements then enclose the two shorter ABA movements in second and third places.

The marking *Vivace* should not necessarily be interpreted uniquely in terms of speed; it is more a depiction of an overpowering momentum, building gradually but inevitably as the movement progresses. Walter, more than the others, gives one or two glimpses, here and there, in his treatment of the bass line and brass and woodwind, of the emphases that make his performance of the first movement so memorable. At a somewhat slower speed, these emphases would stand out even more. And the movement would then assume the kind of place and proportion manifested by the fourth movements of Beethoven’s Seventh and Dvořák’s Eighth Symphonies in Beecham’s overwhelming performances.

Symphony No.3 in C minor, Op.78

10-inch LP recording by Georg Schlemm with the Frankfurt Radio Orchestra (circa 1950, Urania URLP5008)

LP recording by Tamás Sulyok with the Südwestdeutsche Philharmonie, Konstanz, coupled with E.T.A.Hoffmann's Symphony in E flat (1974, RBM Musikproduktion RBM3035)

LP recording by Gerd Albrecht with the Radio-Symphonie-Orchester Berlin (1983, Schwann Musica Mundi VMS1620)

CD recording by Leopold Hager with the Sinfonieorchester Südwestfunk Baden-Baden, coupled with Bruckner's Overture in G minor and Schumann's Cello Concerto arranged for Violin (1988, Amati SRR 8904/1)

CD recording by Alfred Walter with the Czecho-Slovak State Philharmonic Orchestra (1991, Marco Polo 8.223439)

CD recording by Howard Griffiths with the NDR Radiophilharmonie (2007, cpo 777 177-2)

THE THIRD SYMPHONY had been recorded twice, by Schlemm and Sulyok, before any other Spohr symphony was available on record at all. And within a month of Rickenbacher committing the Sixth and Ninth Symphonies to disc, in April 1983, Gerd Albrecht made a third recording of the Third, in May of that year. Only three further Spohr symphony recordings were made during the 1980s, Choo Hooey's of the Second in 1985, Alfred Walter's of the Fourth – the first CD of his cycle – in 1987, and a fourth recording of the Third, Leopold Hager's, in 1988.

The Third Symphony has, therefore, been exceptionally lucky on disc, and this relative profusion of recordings certainly makes the critic's job easier, in attempting to arrive at the 'platform of consciousness' which I articulated as desirable in my *Introduction* to this survey.

Unfortunately, however, I have been unable to listen to, and thus include in this review, Georg Schlemm's Urania recording. This LP had already been deleted when I started collecting records in the mid-1960s, and strenuous efforts to locate it recently have so far proved unsuccessful. I hope to include a comparative review of it at some future date in any supplement to this *Conspectus*.

Spohr's Third Symphony goes as far beyond the Second, in scope and achievement, as the Second had gone beyond the First. And it seems to me justifiable to equate Spohr's Second and Third Symphonies, which have a youthful freshness and ardour, to Bruckner's F minor (1863) and First (1866) Symphonies, in relation to both composers' later works of the genre. As both composers' later symphonies became more calculatedly complex – that is not meant in any sense negatively –, a certain element of the early spontaneity was inevitably lost. Bruckner's F minor and First were composed either side of the age of 40, and, similarly, Spohr was 36 and 43, respectively, at the time of the writing of his Second and Third.

It seems to me arguable that Spohr's Third Symphony is one of the five outstanding German symphonic masterpieces of the twenty years between the death of Schubert and the death of Mendelssohn – the others being Mendelssohn's Third and Fourth, Schumann's Second, and Spohr's own Fifth. (Others might wish to include in this list works such as Schumann's First or Spohr's Fourth and Seventh; I exclude the first of these because of the work's inequality after the marvellous first movement, and the second and third on account of their unconventional form, which makes them hard to categorise in standard terms.) In one sweep from beginning to end – as in the case of Schumann's Second – Spohr answers with certain conviction in his Third Symphony the various questions asked of the early Romantic symphonist, not least the vexed question of the finale in relation to the rest of the work.

Timings for the first movement of the Third – for the five of the six conductors whose recordings I have had available – are:

Walter	8m.51s. (2m.18s. + 6m.33s.)
Sulyok	8m.51s. (2m. + 6m.51s.)
Griffiths	8m.11s. (1m.54s. + 6m.17s.)
Hager	7m.55s. (1m.32s. + 6m.23s.)
Albrecht	7m.34s. (1m.46s. + 5m.48s.)

In the *Andante grave* introduction, Walter's slow speed of 2m.18s. has great dignity compared with Sulyok; the three other conductors, particularly Hager, are simply too fast. In the main part of the movement Griffiths and especially Albrecht are again too fast. Hager, marginally slower, is persuasive in his own way, but all three must yield to Walter and Sulyok, who, from their somewhat different approaches, put them in the shade. Walter is emotional and volatile, drawing marvellous playing from his Czecho-Slovak players; but Sulyok is firm and always has the movement's end in view architecturally. It

is indeed difficult to choose between these two – and perhaps there is no need to; we should be grateful for both!

A wider divergence of interpretation exists in the case of the *Larghetto* of the Third Symphony than with any other Spohr symphonic movement, as the following timings illustrate:

Albrecht	9m.58s.
Walter	7m.36s.
Hager	6m.11s.
Griffiths	5m.46s.
Sulyok	3m.54s.

This *Larghetto* was particularly esteemed by no less a person than Hans von Bülow. After listening to the glorious playing and phrasing that Albrecht conjures, at a very slow speed, from his Berlin orchestra, the listener is bound to find the other performers, with their progressively faster speeds, more and more perfunctory. At the fastest end of the scale, Sulyok's performance turns marvellous music into something merely trivial, which is all the more surprising in view of his relative success in the other movements. One is bound to wonder whether he was constrained to adopt this speed in order to fit the symphony on to one LP side; if so, he allowed himself to perpetuate a major artistic misjudgment. For his reading of this movement, as here recorded, ends up by being the least satisfactory – because most wrong-headed – realisation of any Spohr symphonic movement on record.

These various recordings of the Third Symphony's *Larghetto* serve to reinforce the point that, as performances accumulate, it becomes increasingly possible to 'place' any subsequent reading in a wider context. And it is somewhat surprising, with Albrecht's performance on record, that most recently Griffiths should have opted, for his disc in the CPO series, for so brisk a speed in this movement; for in doing so he commits himself to underplaying by some considerable distance the music's true potential.

No praise can be too high for what Albrecht achieves here. Although his performance is more than two minutes slower than Walter's, Walter in comparison gives the impression of being becalmed in places, whereas Albrecht generates a superb sense of onward flow and rich harmonic exploration. It certainly emerges as true that Spohr's natural and uncomplicated character ("dear old Spohr", as Paul David called him in his article in *Grove's Dictionary* Vol.5, 1940, p.101) finds – for the most part – its most compelling expression in slower rather than faster performances. And, in view of the fact that even Albrecht's marvellous performance is somewhat faster than the composer's metronome marking for the movement [strangely, Clive Brown, in his Spohr biography, p.195 footnote, is unaware that Spohr's marking exists, although he rightly favours "a slow tempo"], the possibility remains open (and to be hoped for at some stage!) of a future recording even more resplendent than Albrecht's in that it follows Spohr's marking more faithfully.

It is certainly disappointing in this movement that three of the five recordings are 'completely off the wall' in terms of any real understanding of and empathy with the composer's intentions.

Timings for the third movement (Scherzo. Trio) again reveal wide variation of treatment:

Hager	7m.48s. (2m.45s. + 3m.11s. + 1m.52s.)
Sulyok	6m.48s. (2m.25s. + 2m.42s. + 1m.41s.)
Walter	6m.45s. (2m.24s. + 2m.44s. + 1m.37s.)
Griffiths	6m.19s. (2m.19s. + 2m.31s. + 1m.29s.)
Albrecht	4m.23s. (1m.22s. + 1m.40s. + 1m.21s.)

Albrecht's time is shorter than the others in part because, while they all omit the repeat on the reprise of the Scherzo in line with the composer's intentions, Albrecht, improperly, does the same the first time round also, as well as in the Trio. But in any case both Albrecht and Griffiths are much too fast, with the result that the movement is turned into a breathless scramble.

Both Sulyok and Walter are very close to the indicated metronome marking, and turn in performances which must be in line with Spohr's intention. Walter in particular, in the Trio section, elicits magnificent playing from his Czecho-Slovak orchestra, and perhaps, overall, is to be preferred.

Hager's performance is difficult to sum up. Its slow tempo makes it impressive in its own way, and it builds up considerable momentum. And Hager's Trio in particular, at its languid pace, almost prefigures Richard Strauss in its orchestral opulence. But is this what Spohr intended? In the end I have to say not,

although with certain regrets. Walter and Sulyok, therefore, in that order, emerge at the top of the field in this movement.

A somewhat analogous situation to that in the third movement is again apparent in the fourth, with Walter and Sulyok, in that order, once more emerging as the front-runners. The respective timings of the five conductors are:

Walter	9m.46s.
Sulyok	9m.41s.
Griffiths	9m.12s.
Hager	7m.2s.
Albrecht	6m.33s.

Hager and Albrecht, at one level, rule themselves out of contention by not making the repeat – hence their quicker timings –, an omission which destabilises the symphony as a structure by removing the inherent and intended balance between first and last movements. In Hager's case that is a great pity, since his is a solid and often brilliantly played interpretation, a worthy ending to the symphony after his thoughtful and in many ways impressive rendering of the third movement. Griffiths too draws exceptional colour and brilliance from his NDR orchestra in this movement; but – as with his reading of the first movement of the Second – the needs of architectural structure are too often ignored in favour of what is outwardly spectacular. The end result is not wholly satisfactory, by any means. The quality of *innigkeit* ('inwardness'), so sought (and achieved!) by Otto Klemperer in his conducting would be of benefit here.

At their slower speeds Walter and Sulyok emphasise the structural cohesion of the movement better than the others (bar, perhaps, Hager), and if my vote goes in the end to Walter, that should not imply any disrespect to Sulyok. For – as in the final movement of the First and the first movement of the Second – Walter's handling of brass and woodwinds is in a class apart, and is the distinguishing feature between a very good performance (Sulyok) and a truly inspired and majestic one (Walter).

Symphony No.4 (*The Consecration of Sounds*) in F, Op.86

CD recording by Alfred Walter with the Budapest Symphony Orchestra (1987, Marco Polo 8.223122)

CD recording by Howard Shelley with the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana (2007, Hyperion CDA67622)

SIDE BY SIDE with the Seventh Symphony, Spohr's Fourth is the hardest in the cycle about which to come to definite conclusions, on account of its revolutionary shape and structure. At least in this case two recordings have been made – rather than the one of the Seventh. But if a true 'platform of consciousness' (in my phrase in the *Introduction*) is to come into existence for the Fourth, then something must happen that I also postulate as desirable in the case of the Seventh: regular performances over a period of time by as wide as possible a number of conductors. Only that process, if successful, would determine if the unusual nature of the Fourth could establish a toehold in the public consciousness, as Beethoven's 'Pastoral' and Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* have, in spite of their unusualness.

The Fourth Symphony much deserves that exposure, but whether it will happen must remain in doubt. It is at least indicative of the regard in which the work should be held that Alfred Walter chose to begin his Spohr cycle with it.

The scope and intentions of the Fourth Symphony have been fully described by Keith Warsop in an article in the 1990 *Spohr Journal*, "Spohr's Fourth Symphony: A Requiem for Germany". I do not intend here to go over the ground which has been so well covered there, and simply refer readers to that article for further details.

However, I wish here to add the following, in attempted explanation of the symphony, and understanding of it. I have referred above to Beethoven's 'Pastoral' and Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, but Spohr's Fourth is a much harder work to comprehend. Instead of the clear and simple narrative/descriptive sequence of events of the Beethoven and Berlioz works, there is something abstract, even philosophical, about this Spohr symphony which typifies the highest ideals of German artistic endeavour, and requires, for comprehension, real mental application.

The nearest clear parallel in German music is some of the mature compositions of Wilhelm Furtwängler, the 1924-36 Symphonic Concerto for Piano [slow movement recorded c.1941 by Edwin Fischer with the Berlin Philharmonic conducted by the composer; Opus Records MLG74-A], the 1944-45 Symphony No.2 in E minor [recorded December 1951 by the Berlin Philharmonic conducted by the composer; DGG

LPM18114/18115], and the 1947-54 Symphony No.3 in C sharp minor [recorded December 1987 by the RTBF Symphony Orchestra, Brussels, conducted by Alfred Walter; Marco Polo 8.223105].

As John Ardoin makes clear in his short chapter (pp.277-281) on Furtwängler's own works in his 1994 book *The Furtwängler Record*, even Furtwängler himself grew only slowly to achieving telling performances of his compositions, on account of the difficulty of expressing in performance their philosophical depth and abstract idealism. Thus Furtwängler observed of his Symphonic Concerto: "[One of the things originality can be based on] presupposes real human and artistic power and ... runs the risk of not being recognised [for what it is]. For it can only emerge in a congenial interpretation, and anyone accustomed to looking only at the material itself – like almost everyone today – is excluded from it. But precisely because of this, it remains the only possible kind [of originality], because the possibilities for the development of the material itself are exhausted, but not the possibilities of development in art" (quoted by Ardoin, p.281).

And of the Second Symphony, Ardoin, having to some extent dismissed the 1951 recording as "not com[ing] convincingly together" (p.279), observes that "By the time he reached Stuttgart [in March 1954], Furtwängler had rethought the work in many ways, even to the point of abrogating some of his printed tempo indications, and the results are majestic. The tone of the performance is set immediately with a more flowing beginning, and the piece's most heated moments are played with a headstrong directness that was missing earlier. The performance is a totality that holds together superbly" (p.280).

This digression should serve to illustrate that Spohr's Fourth Symphony, like the Furtwängler works mentioned, needs – much more than more conventional symphonies – an extended process of performance and 'inner visualisation' on the part of conductors in order for its true worth to emerge and become publicly manifest. Probably, therefore, no greater service could be done to Spohr, for this reason, than encouragement, if conductors wonder "Which Spohr symphony should I perform?", in the direction of performing the Fourth and Seventh Symphonies. Only if such more frequent performances of these works actually take place will a realistic 'platform of consciousness' in respect of them gradually, perhaps, be achieved.

It is perhaps the attempt to minimise the difficulty and extent of ~~what~~ is unknown which leads both Walter and Shelley to omit the exposition repeat in the first movement. ~~That omission~~, in a perfect world, is to be regretted: the time-balance of the first and third movements is thereby impaired (see the next paragraph).

Compared with symphonies such as (for example) Nos. 2, 5 and 8, which have an ABBA structure (timings-wise) of movements overall, Symphony No.4 is in ABAB form. The timings of Walter ('W') are marginally slower, in all movements (only just so in the second!), than Shelley ('S'), as the following figures illustrate:

- 1: 10m.27s. (W); 10m.2s. (S)
- 2: 6m.41s. (W); 6m.39s. (S)
- 3: 13m.45s. (W); 12m.49s. (S)
- 4: 7m.43s. (W); 6m.33s. (S)

Walter's slower speeds allow a greater probing into the intricacies and felicities of Spohr's scoring, and Walter elicits marvellous playing from all departments of the Budapest orchestra. And it has to be said that Walter's slower time in the third movement is in spite of the fact that he omits a short repeat at the start of the March. So Walter's tempo overall is in fact quite a bit slower. Shelley, however, is by no means unimpressive in his rather more dramatic way. Perhaps only time will tell – if or when a 'platform of consciousness' has been properly established for this work – which of the two approaches is ultimately more appropriate.

Symphony No.5 in C minor, Op.102

CD recording by Alfred Walter with the Czecho-Slovak State Philharmonic Orchestra (1990, Marco Polo 8.223363)

CD recording by Howard Shelley with the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana (2007, Hyperion CDA67622)
KEITH WARSOP HAS provided various descriptions of the overall scope of the Fifth Symphony. "The Fifth Symphony seems to reflect Spohr's ... battle to come to terms with life's slings and arrows" (notes accompanying the Walter CD); "In the fifth symphony Spohr seems to have poured out ... pent-up

emotions ... with real expressive power” (notes to Shelley’s CD). A hint as to the meaning of these “pent-up emotions” and “expressive power” may be contained in the fact that Spohr should have chosen for his Fifth Symphony the key of C minor, the same key used by Beethoven for his Fifth. For that was a Beethoven work that perplexed Spohr; he simply did not understand it, finding it rough, too forceful, and lacking in grace (*Selbstbiographie* Vol.1, p.202).

In parts of the First and Sixth Symphonies we can see Spohr building on the musical bequest of Mozart; and it is I think likely that, in the Eighth Symphony, Spohr expresses something of his debt to the legacy of Mendelssohn. Spohr was deeply conscious of his personal place in the wider musical world around him, and it seems to me probable that the Fifth Symphony was Spohr’s reply to the challenge posed by Beethoven. In effect Spohr tells his listeners: “You know that I disapprove of the force and raw power of Beethoven’s Fifth. How then should a composer present a dramatic symphony? How should such a symphony differ from Beethoven’s Fifth? What should a composer do to represent (in Keith Warsop’s words) ‘pent-up emotions’ and ‘expressive power’?”

I take it that Spohr’s Fifth is his answer to these questions. And, if that is so, it is a symphony of particular importance, both in terms of the objective that Spohr sets himself and also because the work can then be seen as a sort of testament to the values that Spohr held most dear in composing a dramatic symphony. It is a very different symphony, in terms of how it reaches its conclusions, from Beethoven’s Fifth; but the “pent-up emotions” are the result of Spohr’s whole-hearted dedication to, and expression of, his innermost artistic and symphonic ideals.

As a prelude to understanding what Spohr set out to achieve, it is well perhaps to sum up briefly the canvas filled by Beethoven in the course of his Fifth. The ‘knocking at the door by fate’ in the first movement hurls down a challenge of formidable proportions, somehow to be overcome. If the slow movement represents granite obduracy and determination in holding to the challenge, and the third a gradual ascent in beginning to surmount it, assuredly in the fourth movement the challenge has at last been overcome. A great part of the strength and power of the work springs from the complexity of the questions and obstacles posed by the first movement: truly only heroism at a superhuman level can be capable of such an eventual conquest.

J.W.N.Sullivan (in his 1927 book *Beethoven: His Spiritual Development*) puts essentially the same point of view in somewhat different terms: “Beethoven’s capacity for realizing the fundamental character of life in its two aspects of suffering and achievement, combined with his lack of flexibility, was the necessary condition for the development of his attitude towards life. That development takes the form of a synthesis. The Beethoven of the C minor symphony finds the meaning of life in achievement in spite of suffering. Fate is an enemy to be defied”. Let there be no doubt, therefore, of the magnitude of the challenge that Spohr lays down for himself in setting out to compose an ‘alternative Fifth’. We immediately come face to face with Spohr’s ‘alternative emphasis’ at the start of the first movement. In place of the hammer-blows of Fate with which Beethoven presents us, Spohr has a slow introduction (*Andante*), a passage of both richness and yearning. We enter a world not of imminent and violent threat (Beethoven), but a world of warmth and also complexity of what lies unexplored.

But this ‘world of warmth’ – what Keith Warsop describes as an “ideal state” or “Garden of Eden” image –, though it reappears in the middle of the movement in somewhat elaborated form, is cumulatively “undermined” by the “stormy main theme” which frames the movement, leading eventually to an “unsettled conclusion” (quoted words, Keith Warsop).

If we try to understand this position as described in terms of the ground traversed in the equivalent movement of Beethoven’s Fifth, it is not difficult to see the “stormy main theme” as representing the adverse circumstances of life (Beethoven’s ‘Fate’), which threatens to overwhelm the positive world of the composer-artist, i.e. Spohr himself, signified by the ‘world of warmth’ evocations of the *Andante* theme. If the end of the movement has an “unsettled conclusion”, that is because the main battle between the opposing forces – as in Beethoven at this stage – is still to be fought out; but the movement establishes in no uncertain terms the all-embracing dimensions of the struggle.

Walter, at 11m. 15s. for the movement [the Marco Polo cover, strangely, gives a completely wrong performing time of 9m.14s. here], is marginally faster than Shelley (12m.7s.), and I have to express a personal view that the faster speed here succeeds better in the end in integrating the movement into a

flowing and cohesive whole. Shelley is good, even very good, in many respects, but Walter's vision of what the movement involves is outstanding, on a par with what he achieves in the last movement of the First and the first movement of the Second.

Unlike the slow movement of the Ninth, which is in the ABA formation so beloved of Spohr, the *Larghetto* of Symphony No.5 has a somewhat unusual ABAB structure, with the second 'A' and 'B' parts shorter than the earlier ones. We may compare the third movement of Symphony No.8, where this principle is extended further to ABABAB (with the second and third 'A' and 'B' parts briefer in each case than the previous ones).

The movement is well described by Keith Warsop (in the booklet accompanying Walter's CD): "The magnificent *Larghetto* in A flat, one of Spohr's finest and most beautiful slow movements, is imbued with deep feeling and permeated with instrumental 'sighs' as it gravely searches for a resolution but despite building up to an impressive climax in which a dotted fugato phrase from the middle section plays an important role, the quest is unfulfilled and the music fades away in quintessential Romantic manner with delicate horn calls sounding from afar".

Is the opening 'A' part of this *Larghetto* 'pure' music (in the abstract) or is it – as one may suspect in the slow movements of, for example, the Eighth and Ninth Symphonies – prompted by personal emotions or response to person(s) or event(s)? I suspect the latter, but whatever such 'emotions or response' may have been, we are probably beyond the stage now where the specific motivating factor(s) can be recovered or even divined at in this case.

Something, however, must be said about the 'B' sections of this *Larghetto*, which seem to echo elements of Wagner, particularly *Tannhäuser* (1845), *Die Meistersinger* (1868) and *Die Walküre* (1870). Such Wagnerian echoes are not uncommon elsewhere, in view of Wagner's massive influence on those who came after him: Bruckner's Third Symphony (1873) was given the subtitle 'Wagner Symphony' for this reason, and the opening movement of the Third Symphony (1886) of Felix Draeseke [marvellously recorded by Hermann Desser and the Berlin Symphony Orchestra in 1942, Varèse Sarabande VC 81092] everywhere breathes the world of *Die Meistersinger* – rather as the opening movement of Spohr's Symphony No.1 breathes the world of Mozart. I have my doubts about such movements, because of the heavy dependence on the 'model'.

But, remarkably, Spohr composed the *Larghetto* of his Fifth in 1837, before the Wagnerian 'influences' mentioned above could possibly have been known. Similarly, it has been pointed out that apparent 'echoes' of (e.g.) Bruckner and Dvořák in the symphonies (1842-1845) of Franz Berwald cannot be such, on account of dates.

Such significant foreshadowings by Spohr and Berwald can only increase respect for their imaginative achievement; and help to show – if this were ever in doubt – that they were completely abreast of potential contemporary musical developments. Clive Brown, in his Spohr biography, has in several places (pp. 80, 114, 149, 160 and 178) noted apparent prefigurings of Wagner by Spohr.

There is very little to choose between Walter ('W') and Shelley ('S') in this movement:

1st 'A':	2m.35s. (W); 2m.33s. (S)
1st 'B':	1m.34s. (W); 1m.31s. (S)
2nd 'A':	57s. (W); 55s. (S)
2nd 'B':	1m.18s. (W); 1m.18s. (S)
Total time:	6m.24s. (W); 6m.17s. (S)

Walter is rather more emotional, and variable, in his phrasing and tempo, but both he and Shelley give excellent, and very well played, performances of the movement.

Hardly surprisingly, perhaps, the third movement of the Fifth has the same ABAB structure as the *Larghetto*, with the second 'A' and 'B' parts being shorter, respectively, than the first. Timings of Walter ('W') and Shelley ('S') are:

1st 'A':	1m.34s. (W); 1m.29s. (S)
1st 'B':	1m.17s. (W); 1m.14s. (S)
2nd 'A':	58s. (W); 55s. (S)
2nd 'B':	26s. (W); 24s. (S)
Total time:	4m.15s. (W); 4m.2s. (S)

Walter's marginally slower speeds end by being both more emphatic and more convincing, and Walter here coaxes spectacular playing from his orchestra.

The correspondence, structure-wise, of the *Larghetto* and Scherzo movements in the centre of the symphony must mean that Spohr intended an ABBA form for the symphony as a whole, with the two outer movements and also the two inner movements balancing each other. Hartmut Becker has rightly pointed out (in his sleeve-note accompanying Rickenbacher's recording of the Sixth and Ninth Symphonies, with reference to the Ninth) that, in his search for 'balance' between movements across the symphony as a whole, Spohr anticipates Mahler. Becker limits his observation, though, to Spohr's Ninth Symphony, on account of Spohr's division of the work into two 'sections'; in fact the phenomenon applies more widely in Spohr's works, as the case of the Fifth Symphony illustrates. This trend towards 'balance' – of which Spohr can be seen to be an early exponent – continued beyond Mahler. Richard Strauss' Symphony for Wind Instruments, Op. Posth., composed in the 1940s, similarly has a clear ABBA structure, time-wise, to its four movements.

The descending horn motto which opens the Scherzo lies somewhere in the middle of a tradition stretching from Beethoven's writing for horns in the third movement of the 'Eroica' to the third movements, respectively, of Bruckner's and Brahms' Fourth Symphonies. Spohr was familiar with Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, having taken part in the work's first performance, and the 'descending horn motto' may in particular be owed to a similar motif in the third movement of that work. It would be interesting if it could be shown that Spohr knew the 1816 realisation of Beethoven's Seventh for wind nonet [recorded by the Royal Academy of Music Symphonic Winds in 2003 on the first CD of the set RAM 020], a version which makes the similarity particularly apparent.

If the Beethoven parallel hypothesised in the analysis of the first movement holds good, we pass through endurance in the second movement (lacking, as Keith Warsop observed, any wholly positive outcome) and the glimpse of emergent optimism in the third. In the fourth movement the struggle between opposites is resumed with full intensity, initially in C minor, but the result must be triumph for the 'world of warmth' (Spohr the artist), not – as in the first movement – an indeterminate cessation of hostilities. It is no longer a question of merely 'living to fight another day'; the battle must now be won conclusively – or lost for ever. When the matter is articulated in those terms, the outcome cannot be in real doubt. And, as in the case of Beethoven, the uncertainty engendered by the key of C minor is ultimately transformed, in the triumph of the last movement, into resplendent C major.

The introductory *Andante* of the first movement, which I have described as the 'world of warmth' theme, and which recurs in the middle of the first movement, returns in modified form as the second subject of the *Presto* last movement, and helps in due course to establish the C major finale.

If the 'world of warmth' theme represents (as I think it does) Spohr the artist-composer, we may compare the last variation/finale of Elgar's *Enigma Variations*, where the theme concerned in that case, as applied to Elgar himself ('EDU'), ends the work, after a degree of self-doubt and hesitation, in a blaze of glory. Both Spohr and Elgar triumph in the end over the attendant uncertainties which have earlier threatened them. Spohr's Fifth Symphony is a milestone in its composer's creative output for the reason that it is a largely autobiographical account of the theme 'the artist against the world'. And Spohr's success in treating the theme gives this symphony a very high place in any list of its composer's most significant compositions.

Spohr's triumph, as an artist, cannot be allowed to be in doubt in the last movement; it is a contest he has to win, and in fact does win. I would qualify this 'triumph' in only one way. The 'world of warmth' theme, in the first movement, radiates reflectiveness, depth and a looking to the beyond; that is the real Spohr, Spohr the pensive idealist. But in the last movement the 'world of warmth' theme is cajoled and made to bustle along, as the *sine qua non* for fitting into the world of success and glory. Spohr manages to succeed, therefore, in the real world, but at the price of having to forfeit a degree of his reflective and other-worldly idealism.

If Beethoven's Fifth provides the structural embryo for what Spohr sets out to achieve in his Fifth, it is nonetheless other Beethoven works on which Spohr relies for musical details. Throughout the movement there are repeated hints of the last movement of the 'Eroica', and here and there (in Spohr's use of emphatic chords) of the *Coriolan* Overture too. Above all, in the matter of strict working out and

development of themes and ideas, the model of the last movement of Mozart's 'Jupiter' is never far away. It is in one sense natural that, in completing his most personal (in autobiographical terms) symphony hitherto, Spohr should thus acknowledge his abiding debt to his beloved Mozart.

As regards the two recordings, the situation is very similar to that in the first movement. Shelley is marginally slower; his orchestra play with precision and brilliance, but there is something calculated, almost statuesque, about his performance. Walter's faster speeds, allied to idiomatic and emotional expressiveness of a very high order, in the end prove considerably the more telling.

However, Walter in one respect makes a serious and surprising misjudgment. As his timing (7m.12s.) illustrates, compared with Shelley's (10m.30s.), he omits the repeat at the beginning of the movement. To compare like with like, Walter's time with the repeat would be 9m.59s., Shelley's without it 7m.34s.

Klemperer always made the repeat in the last movement of Beethoven's Fifth, and – quite apart from this parallel – there are overwhelming structural reasons for making it in this Spohr symphony. I have suggested that the symphony as a whole has an ABBA form, with parity and balance of the two inner and outer movements respectively. Without the last-movement repeat, the Shelley/Walter timings of 7m.34s./7m.12s. are by some distance out of balance with the first-movement timings (12m.7s./11m.15s.). The with-repeat timings of 10m.30s./9m.59s. bring the first and last movements more into the balance which is an integral feature of the work.

Symphony No.6 (*Historical*) in G, Op.116

LP/CD recording by Karl Anton Rickenbacher with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra (1983, Orfeo S 094 841A/C 094 841A)

CD recording by Alfred Walter with the Czecho-Slovak State Philharmonic Orchestra (1991, Marco Polo 8.223439)

THE GERM OF THE IDEA that led to the *Historical* Symphony (1839) was not in fact Spohr's own. The year before Spohr composed the work, Mendelssohn held a series of 'historical' concerts in Leipzig (in February and March 1838). These covered: 1, Bach, Handel, Gluck, Viotti; 2, Haydn, Cimarosa, Naumann, Righini; 3, Mozart, Salieri, Méhul, Romberg; 4, Vogler, Beethoven, Weber. And Sir George Grove observed (in his *Dictionary* as reprinted in 1940, Vol.3, p.397) that these concerts "excited great interest ... it is easy to imagine what a treat they must have been".

Spohr modifies Mendelssohn's outline plan to a degree, but the basic debt is plain to see. And, as Clive Brown observes in his *Biography*, the 'Historical' Symphony was preceded in February 1839 by the Concertino for violin and orchestra, Op.110, to which Spohr gave the title 'Sonst und Jetzt' ('Then and Now').

Spohr's later symphonies have often had a bad press (compared with those that came before). Hartmut Becker, in the sleeve-note to the Rickenbacher recording, compares Symphonies Nos.6-9 with Nos.2-5, and comments: "Although [these later compositions] still maintain a high standard of compositional technique and present some interesting formal innovations, their flow of ideas had become thinner and their style exhibits those characteristics of mannerism – of a static self-satisfaction with what has been attained – which separates them from the imagination, intellectual vigour and temperament of the earlier works".

That is potentially unfair and misguided, certainly in relation to Symphony No.6. More to the point is a remark made by Robert Schumann (as noted in *Grove's Dictionary*, 1940, Vol.5, p.101) specifically about the *Historical* Symphony: "Napoleon once went to a masked ball, but before he had been in the room a few minutes folded his arms in his well-known attitude. 'The Emperor!' 'The Emperor!' at once ran through the place. Just so, through disguises of the [Sixth] Symphony, one kept hearing 'Spohr', 'Spohr' in every corner of the room".

The first movement of the Sixth, the movement in the style of the 'Bach-Handel period, 1720', divides naturally into four parts: a brief *Largo grave* introduction followed by a traditional ABA movement, the outer 'A' parts of which (*Allegro moderato*) enclose a slower middle section (*Pastorale*). Walter is considerably broader in this movement than Rickenbacher (7m.25s. as against 5m.47s.), but the overall timings are somewhat misleading, since it is necessary ideally to consider the individual tempi of each of the four parts of the movement. Rickenbacher comes to the task with high credentials. He took up a position as vocal coach and Kapellmeister at the Zürich Opera House in 1966, when Otto Klemperer was

living in Zürich, and the sleeve-note of the recording notes that “Klemperer, who referred to him as ‘one of the ablest conductors of the younger generation’, particularly fostered his career”. Nonetheless, he makes a misjudgment at the start of the Sixth’s first movement, not differentiating enough between the slow tempo of the *Largo grave* introduction and the *Allegro moderato* that it leads into. His time of 41 seconds for the introduction compares unfavourably with Walter’s 52 seconds, a tempo which allows the music to breathe as it should.

But Walter immediately undoes the good impression created so far by absurdly slow speeds for the ‘A’ sections of the movement, 2m.25s. and 1m.52s. against Rickenbacher’s 1m.41s. and 1m.23s. Walter turns the music here almost into heavy-handed affectation or parody, which most certainly should not be the case. By contrast, Rickenbacher here judges the required tempo to perfection.

In the ‘B’ part of the movement, the difference is less pronounced: 2m.16s. (Walter) as against 2m.2s. (Rickenbacher). Both performances catch the spirit of the music well, but perhaps in the end Walter’s marginally slower speed is preferable by way of contrast.

On the basis of these observations, an ideal performance of the Sixth’s first movement might be timed at 6m.12s.: 52s. (Walter) + 1m.41s. (Rickenbacher) + 2m.16s. (Walter) + 1m.23s. (Rickenbacher).

In the second movement (*Larghetto*), the ‘Haydn-Mozart period, 1780’, there is again a considerable tempo-difference between Rickenbacher and Walter. Rickenbacher proves himself a very crisp and brisk Mozartian – not unlike Klemperer in his 1938 *Haffner* Symphony (Los Angeles, Symposium) and 1950 *Linz* Symphony (Paris, VOX) –, and his performance of the movement takes 6m.29s. Whether such an approach is entirely justified even for Mozart is questionable. Beecham’s exceptional 1930s’ recordings of the *Haffner* and *Linz* with the L.P.O. are more relaxed, less hard-driven, than Klemperer, and have more grace and wit into the bargain.

And what should above all be evident is that this Spohr movement is not simply Mozart. To some extent interpreters and critics have been misled, I think, by the period-labels which Spohr has attached to the movements of this symphony, and have tied up themselves – and hence their interpretations – too closely to the respective period features involved. Spohr was (in the metaphysical sense) – he acknowledges this himself – ‘a disciple of Mozart’, but the second movement of the Sixth Symphony is much more than a simple mirroring of Mozart. Schumann’s observation, quoted at the beginning of this section, that constantly beneath the period-labels “Spohr ... Spohr” can be detected, is absolutely correct. In modern parlance the movement might be described as a “Romantic Elegy by Spohr on the world and legacy of Mozart”.

The movement then is Mozart viewed through the optic and filter of Spohr’s perceptions; and it is ultimately, in consequence, a Spohr movement not a Mozart movement. It is important to establish here this simple enough principle – obvious when it is stated – as it will also have a bearing on our understanding of the third and fourth movements.

Above all, it cannot be emphasised enough that Spohr’s marking for the movement is *Larghetto* – exactly the same as he used for the slow movement of the Third Symphony (and used on occasions by Mozart, as witness the slow movements of Piano Concerti K491, K537 and K595).

Thus Walter’s slower and more romantic timing of 9m.17s. (as against Rickenbacher’s 6m.29s.) is very probably correct and justified. And it may even be the case, as I suggested when considering Albrecht’s expansive treatment of the Third’s *Larghetto*, that in due course some other interpreter will prove the case for a tempo even slower. In reviewing Klemperer’s 1967 recording of Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, one critic coined the memorable phrase, in relation to Klemperer’s performance of the final *Adagio*, “singing through the silences” – the implication no doubt being that Klemperer achieved a raptness and intensity, as though time and thought verily stood still, combined with an overarching continuum of onward progression. The adoption of just such an approach – if it could be achieved – in these Spohr slow movements might also be found to pay rich dividends.

In the third movement, the ‘Beethoven period, 1810’, it is Walter not Rickenbacher all the way, on the evidence of these recordings. But in truth not even Walter achieves anything like what is possible here; both he and Rickenbacher – to an even greater degree! – lack strength of characterisation and emphasis.

First, though, a word about ‘Beethoven’ and ‘Spohr’ in the movement. On the basis of what we have seen in the *Larghetto*, we should expect a core of Beethoven elements treated in such a way that what

emerges is nonetheless a movement by Spohr, not a mere reflection or pastiche of Beethoven. And the reality of such a 'Spohr' movement can be substantiated in this case in very tangible form. The Trio is not an independent entity, as is invariably the case with Beethoven, but (after Spohr's fashion) an integrated part of the movement, using the themes and rhythms of the Scherzo in modified or varied form, and running straight on from the Scherzo without pause. Does Rickenbacher even properly realise what Spohr is doing here? Both the sleeve-note and record-label of his recording give the movement simply as 'Scherzo'.

Rickenbacher's speeds for the three parts of the movement are so brisk (2m.2s., 2m.6s., 1m.42s., making a total of 5m.50s. altogether) that much is lost, or so skated over that purposeful definition is blurred. The drum-beats which open the Scherzo and which recur at its reprise are too delicate and too mincing, as Rickenbacher interprets them. These drum-beats and also the interval-leaps of this movement are Spohr's attempt to portray the force of Beethoven's personality, and should in no sense be underplayed. Adrian Leaper, in a 2001 broadcast with the Ulster Orchestra, represented these drum-beats correctly, and much more forcefully than Rickenbacher and Walter.

The movement – properly interpreted – has a momentum and physical force turning it in fact into a *tour de force* itself. Walter's somewhat slower speeds (2m.19s., 2m.9s., 1m.57s., making a total of 6m.25s.) bring us a bit nearer the desired goal in terms of articulation and emphasis, but – as mentioned earlier – nowhere near enough. What is needed is the sort of overwhelming punch and verve that Beecham brought to some of Elgar's *Enigma Variations* or Pablo Casals to Brahms' *St Antony Variations*.

In the last movement of the Sixth, in the style of the 'Very Latest period, 1840', there are two entirely separate problems to be overcome, which may be classified as 'comprehension' and – on the available evidence – 'performance'. Let me take 'comprehension' first, as it is a fundamental issue.

Robert Schumann's observation referred to earlier, of finding "Spohr ... Spohr" everywhere in this work, remains most important. It means that, just as the second movement is in the end Spohr not Mozart, and the third Spohr not Beethoven, so too the fourth movement is more than a mere parody of Grand Opera style in 1840, which Spohr rejected. Nearer the truth – if Schumann is correct – would be to say that Spohr assimilates to himself elements of a style with which he may not initially or primarily be associated, and shows what he, Spohr, can do with such material.

I do not think it is compatible with Spohr's integrity as a person that he should have produced a movement of pure parody. The movement, rather, displays a supreme self-confidence by Spohr the composer – something that is everywhere abundant in the *Selbstbiographie*. Spohr in effect announces: "Others may produce empty music in modern style, but this is what I, Louis Spohr, make of modern style, which, in my hands, can be turned to successful use". The last movement of the Sixth is therefore completely serious music by Spohr, a movement in which he sets himself the task of succeeding in a field where others deem, or have shown, success impossible.

An analogy of sorts can be drawn with Vaughan Williams' Fourth Symphony, which also inhabits an apparently new and unwelcome world. In 1974 Burnett James (in the sleeve-note to the CBS reissue of Mitropoulos' 1956 recording of Vaughan Williams' Fourth) summed up the position with great precision and insight.

He wrote: "Vaughan Williams always denied that his Fourth Symphony was an outcome of or directly related to the international scene of the 1930s. Certainly, its harsh, grinding tone and uncompromising manner of speech caused surprise and disquiet to many who thought that the composer had opted more or less permanently for the English rural or pastoral mood ... The question of the symphony's relationship to its time and period is not ... easily disposed of ... Vaughan Williams, as I say, rejected any idea that his music depicted external events: on the other hand, the artist's mind and imagination work at deeper and more complex levels. Obviously, no true artist would say to himself: this is a violent and harsh age and looks like becoming worse; therefore I must write a violent and harsh symphony. Yet the artist is inhabitant of his own time and place, and so his unconscious responds in subtle ways to the world in which he lives".

Something like this must also have been true of Spohr in composing the last movement of the Sixth. Burnett James' observation that "the artist[']s ... unconscious responds in subtle ways to the world in which he lives" vindicates the movement as 'essentially Spohr', not 'essentially parody', and, moreover, harmonises completely with Schumann's analysis.

Where 'performance' is concerned, there is not very much to choose between Rickenbacher (6m.22s.) and Walter (6m.30s.). If anything, Walter's articulation of passage-work, particularly in the woodwinds, is preferable, and here and there Rickenbacher's interpretation veers in the direction of the slight and the superficial. The observations which I made about the last movement of the Second Symphony are also true here. The last movement of the Sixth should be a 'stunning knock-out blow', not an exercise in vapidness, and a slightly slower performance than either Rickenbacher or Walter give us would pay rich dividends. Something of the verve and acuteness in phrase-pointing of Sir Thomas Beecham is needed to bring out the qualities of Spohr's writing in this movement; under a Beecham the movement would dance and sparkle in an enchanting way.

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

CD recording by Alfred Walter with the Czecho-Slovak State Philharmonic Orchestra (1991, Marco Polo 8.223432)

WE REACH, IN THIS SYMPHONY, and in No.10, since there is currently only one commercial recording of each, by far the hardest part in this *Conspectus*; for the sort of 'platform of consciousness' which I have described in my *Introduction* as being desirable is, in these circumstances, exceptionally difficult to define and arrive at with any certainty.

I propose therefore, in this one case, to look at Walter's recording with particular reference to Spohr's metronome markings, as being the only kind of 'double-check' currently available – unfortunately, in the case of Symphony No.10, metronome markings have not survived.

In the first movement ('The World of Childhood') Spohr's markings are: *Adagio*, quaver = 108 – *Allegretto*, quaver = 138. Walter's speeds are slightly slower (104-132), but such slower speeds are characteristic of his interpretations of some other movements, and are within tolerable range of Spohr's indications.

Keith Warsop has suggested to me [communication of 28th May 2009] that "In the Seventh, the musical expression [i.e. the symphony's unconventional form] is the desire to repeat that of the Fifth, but in order not to repeat that work, a new form was required. Thus the 'world of warmth' appears in the Seventh in 'The World of Childhood' movement". There is a certain amount of truth in this, but there are also differences between the Fifth and the Seventh Symphonies.

In looking at the Fourth Symphony, I suggested that its abstract, philosophical nature made it a harder work to understand than, say, Beethoven's 'Pastoral' or Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*. And in rather the same way the Seventh Symphony is a more abstract work than the Fifth. The Fifth Symphony is in many ways an autobiographical work – I suggested earlier the parallels of Beethoven's Fifth and Elgar's 'Enigma' Variations – on the theme 'the artist against the world'. That is a relatively easy concept for the listener to relate to, and to follow. What makes the Seventh Symphony more difficult is that, while the concept and direction is the same as in the Fifth – Keith Warsop is right –, the development of the argument takes place in an abstract, not a personal or autobiographical, setting. The parallel, therefore, that I drew in the case of the Fourth Symphony with the compositions of Wilhelm Furtwängler is again apt in the case of the Seventh. And we should not be in any doubt of the real application needed by the student or listener if the Seventh is to be comprehended in its totality. It is certainly a most challenging work.

In the second and third movements, Walter's tempi are again slightly slower than Spohr's markings. The latter are:

Larghetto, quaver = 96 – *Allegro moderato*, crotchet = 120.

Presto, dotted crotchet = 96 – *Adagio*, quaver = 132.

It is difficult to give absolute metronome readings for Walter here, because his conducting style is built upon very subtle gradations of speed, with constant variations, rather than absolute rigidity. But for Spohr's 96-120 in the second movement Walter's mean is 84-114, and in the third movement 94-123 for Spohr's 96-132. However, Keith Warsop has brought to my attention an important point relating to tempo in the third movement. The 'dotted crotchet = 96' marking for the opening *Presto* is the indication given in the original printed score; and Joshua Berrett has suggested in his 1980 Garland edition reprint of this that it should properly be 'dotted minim = 96'. If Berrett is correct in his evaluation – and the musical relationship between this *Presto* and the following *Adagio* suggests that he is –, then Walter, rather than being marginally slower than Spohr's (presumed) marking, is actually considerably too fast here.

Where this leaves us in relation to an ideal rendering of the Seventh Symphony is indeed difficult to say, partly for reasons already given. But there is a further reason, which I now go on to describe.

Moves away from the standard four-movement symphony after 1800 took various forms. Some composers included five movements, such as Beethoven in the 'Pastoral' (1808) and Berlioz in the *Symphonie fantastique* (1831) – and, later, Schumann in his 'Rhenish' Symphony (1850), Raff in his First Symphony (1863), and Tchaikovsky in his 'Polish' (1875). Beethoven and Berlioz also produced somewhat abnormal two-movement or three-movement works, Beethoven the 'Battle Symphony' or *Wellingtons Sieg* (1813) in two movements, Berlioz the *Symphonie funèbre et triomphale* (1840) in three. Liszt's Symphony to Dante's *Divine Comedy* (1847-55) was also in two, extended movements.

But most 19th-century three-movement symphonies tended to be much more conventional than Berlioz's work. These include: Schumann's Overture, Scherzo & Finale (1841) [which the sleeve-writer to Schuricht's recording describes as "a miniature symphony without a slow movement"], Berwald's Symphonies nos. 2 (1842) and 3 (1845), Bruckner's Symphony in F minor (1863), revised version [this has not yet been generally realised; but the manuscript evidence points strongly to the fact that Bruckner revised the four-movement first draft, omitting the Scherzo and substituting the *minore* section as an interlude within the *Andante*], Bruch's Symphony No.2 (1870), César Franck's Symphony (1888), Chausson's Symphony in B flat (1889-90), and, in 1904-07, Sibelius' Symphony No.3. Liszt's more unconventional three-movement *Faust* Symphony was composed in 1854.

All these three-movement works, except the last-named Liszt work, comply with fairly standard symphonic norms, and Spohr's Seventh is not overtly populist such as Beethoven's 'Battle Symphony' or Berlioz's *Symphonie funèbre et triomphale*. Spohr's work therefore comes into a very recondite, indeed unique, category; and this fact makes the achieving of a 'platform of consciousness' in relation to it more than usually difficult. It is undoubtedly the most singular of all Spohr's symphonies; and only regular and repeated performance of it by a variety of conductors – something that, along with the Fourth Symphony, it well deserves – might eventually help towards that goal.

Symphony No.8 in G, Op.137

CD recording by Alfred Walter with the Czecho-Slovak State Philharmonic Orchestra (1991, Marco Polo 8.223432)

CD recording by Howard Griffiths with the NDR Radiophilharmonie (2006-07, cpo 777 178-2)

THE FIRST MOVEMENT of the Eighth Symphony produces rather different performances from Walter and Griffiths, the former slower (*Adagio* 1m.10s. + *Allegro* 11m.15s. = 12m.25s. in all), the latter faster by a considerable margin (1m.3s. + 9m.21s. = 10m.24s.). It has to be said unequivocally that Griffiths is too fast: too much of the music becomes a scramble, and architectural continuity is thereby repeatedly blurred and even lost. That is a great pity, because this is a fine, even overwhelming, movement if properly paced and planned.

Walter, by default therefore, comes nearer to Spohr's intentions. But that is not to say that Walter is in every sense ideal; his reading lacks the momentum and depth that he brings to the first movement of the Second (for example); a more imaginative rhythmic sense and pointing would achieve more pronounced results. Too often Walter lets the music 'drift' and lose focus.

Willem Mengelberg, in explaining his rehearsal technique and conducting style, is said to have remarked on one occasion that, since a degree of precision and accuracy (in carrying out the composer's instructions and notation) was inevitably lost in the execution, it was necessary in rehearsal and performance marginally to over-emphasise each element of the composer's wishes. What resulted would then – after the inevitable proportionate loss – be exactly what the composer intended. If Mengelberg's approach could be applied to the first movement of the Eighth, the spectacular ebb and flow and continuum of movement would emerge clearly from its two elements, which Keith Warsop has described as "a broad, relaxed melody" on the one hand and "emotional ambiguity" and "disquiet" on the other. The movement is cosmic in its aspiration, and in its achievement, a 'total world' complete in itself.

In respect of the movement's slow introduction, a credible model – music that Spohr would have known – is provided by Mendelssohn's 'Scotch' Symphony (1829-42), first performed in Leipzig and Berlin in March 1842, and in London in June that year. Sir Hubert Parry, writing in *Grove's Dictionary* of Mendelssohn's use of the orchestra (as reprinted in the 1940 edition, Vol.5, pp.224-225), observed: "In

orchestral effects the ... 'Scotch' [symphony] ... is ... remarkable ... [These] effects are almost invariably obtained either by using close harmonies low in the scale of the respective instruments, or by extensively doubling tunes and figures in a similar manner". This is a lesson Spohr has certainly learned and absorbed well in his slow introduction.

And in the *Allegro* that follows – a sort of *perpetuum mobile* – the buoyancy of spirits achieved and articulated by Spohr belongs to the same sort of world, on a somewhat extended scale, as so often expressed by Mendelssohn in his first movements. That Spohr knew the Mendelssohn family well, as from about 1825 – and hence their works –, is attested by Sir George Grove (as reprinted in the 1940 edition of his *Dictionary*, Vol.3, p.378): "[Spohr] was often at the [Mendelssohns'] house [in Berlin], and on very intimate terms, though he does not mention the fact in his Autobiography".

The slow movement (*Poco Adagio*) of the Eighth Symphony is described by Keith Warsop (in his notes to Walter's recording) as a "tragic lament – perhaps a threnody for the now gone 'good times' of the old days ... this *Adagio* offers hardly a ray of hope". Certainly something very deep is involved here; this is the only one of Spohr's symphonic movements to bear the marking *Adagio* – albeit in the modified form *Poco Adagio*.

Neither of the recordings does the movement real justice. The performing times of both Walter (5m.29s.) and Griffiths (5m.48s.) are too fast by a considerable margin. But a slower speed would only emphasise even more acutely the aspect of "tragic lament" and "hardly a ray of hope".

If the evidence were forthcoming, I could easily believe that the movement was a tribute to the spirit and achievement of Mendelssohn – the influence of Mendelssohn's 'Scotch' Symphony is clear in some of the orchestral timbre of the Eighth, particularly in the first and second movements. Spohr composed the symphony, by all accounts, between August and November 1847, with the bulk of the work being done in the second half of this period, after his return to Kassel from England. According to a letter Spohr sent to Moritz Hauptmann on 9th November 1847, "the eighth symphony ... has just been finished". Mendelssohn died on 4th November 1847, but had been in consistently low health and spirits for the last six months of his life, after the death of his sister Fanny on 14th May. It seems to me even possible that Spohr's movement may have been a tribute to Fanny herself (Mendelssohn's String Quartet in F minor of 1847, Op.80, was just such). Interestingly, Spohr's next symphony, the Ninth, with its emphasis on 'The Seasons', mirrors a piano work by Fanny, 'Das Jahr' ('The Year'), composed in 1841. In Fanny's work, there is one short piece for each month of the year, and four of the twelve movements – including a tantalising *Larghetto* for July – were recorded in Karlsruhe in 1985 by Sontraud Speidel [on Sound Star Ton LP SST0179].

But whether such an interpretation of the *Poco Adagio* of the Eighth can in the end be justified, we may at least say two things of it as a certainty. It is a threnody for someone or something that meant a very great deal to Spohr; and an ideal performance – lasting perhaps seven to seven-and-a-half minutes – is still to come.

Ralph Hill, in Chapter 1 of his 1949 book *The Symphony*, in discussing various musical forms which developed side by side with the symphony, mentions two kinds of serenade: "In his [*Night-time Serenade*] Mozart employs two orchestras, of which one consists of two violins, violas, and double bass, while the other has two violins, viola, 'cello, and drums ... The Serenade seems to have had no fixed number of movements, but one of them often took the form of a miniature concerto for one solo instrument".

It seems clear, therefore, that Spohr, in adopting the latter kind of serenade movement as the third movement of the Eighth Symphony, was continuing an experiment with the 'the serenade in the symphony' which had started in the Seventh Symphony with the first of the two serenade types described by Hill, the serenade for "two orchestras". If this is the case, it is wide of the mark to see the Eighth as a 'conventional' symphony, alongside the Second, Third and Fifth, as distinct from the 'experimental' or 'programme' symphonies, nos. 4, 6, 7 and 9. It would be truer to say that Spohr was exploring new avenues all the time, and that these 'new avenues' took varied forms. After the first two far-reaching movements of the Eighth, there are two significant 'developments' in the second half of the work, the serenade-type third movement and the quiet 'Italian' ending of the final movement, as found (for example) in many of the Boccherini symphonies. [A good instance is Boccherini's Symphony in E flat, recorded in 1964 by the Mayence Chamber Orchestra conducted by Walter Siegl; Opus TW 834.] Equally – in the

light of what I said about Spohr as symphonist in the case of the Sixth Symphony – I think we make a mistake if we assume that these unaccustomed elements in the last two movements of the Eighth imply a different kind of symphony; Robert Schumann was right to observe that under the changed externals there subsists the same Spohr.

Spohr's third-movement 'Serenade' is made up of two interlocking parts, in three ever-diminishing 'sets': one might characterise the movement as having an ABABAB formation, with the third 'B' section constituting the very short coda. (But I am grateful to Keith Warsop for pointing out [communication of 30th April 2009] that "Spohr actually marks the coda as starting at your second 'B' point"). Walter ('W') is somewhat more expansive overall than Griffiths, as the following timings show:

1st 'A':	1m.9s. (W); 57s. (G)
1st 'B':	3m.22s. (W); 3m.10s. (G)
2nd 'A':	35s. (W); 29s. (G)
2nd 'B':	1m.28s. (W); 1m.15s. (G)
3rd 'A':	25s. (W); 20s. (G)
3rd 'B':	6s. (W); 5s. (G)
Total time:	7m.5s. (W); 6m.16s. (G)

The 'A' sections are purely orchestral, while the 'B' parts are what Ralph Hill characterised as the "miniature concerto", with the violin soloist having the final word in the flourish of the short coda. Whether the inclusion of the solo violin parts represents Spohr nostalgically looking back to his youth I have my doubts. It seems to me perhaps more likely that Spohr the famous violinist decides in the present to bring to the symphony a contribution illustrating his own specialist interest. If I am correct to detect here and there in the 'B' parts echoes or hints of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto in E minor (1844), then the third movement has a link with the first and second; there is also a degree of one-upmanship on Spohr's part, with Spohr the violinist showing what can be done with elements of the Mendelssohnian world.

All in all, Walter's somewhat slower and more idiomatic performance of the movement seems to me preferable to Griffiths' more headlong interpretation, and Walter's violinist Peter Sklenka is in every way finer than Griffiths' soloist – unfortunately not named. Sklenka fittingly turns the 'B' parts into a miniature *tour de force*.

Again there is no contest between Walter (9m.51s.) and Griffiths (8m.6s.) in the last movement of the Eighth. Walter puts in one of his very best performances, on a par and of the same breadth and depth, and with the same splendour of orchestral playing, as in the first movement of the Second; and Griffiths is simply too rushed, missing the proper architectural perspective.

This is by no means an insubstantial movement, but a broad summing-up and affirmation of everything that the symphony has stood for in the previous three movements – a very great deal. As with (for example) the Second and Ninth Symphonies, the Eighth has the overall structural shape ABBA, with the long final movement balancing (approximately) the first, and two shorter movements in the middle.

Some explanation is needed of the movement's quiet 'Italian' ending. Perhaps it is symbol of Spohr's maturity and reflectiveness: he does not need to shout to be heard, but reaches his goal with a quiet confidence that he has done enough already to state his case convincingly. Thus Paul David (in his article on Spohr in *Grove's Dictionary*, 1940 edition, Vol.5, p.102) notes "a certain reserve in his character and a decided aversion [on occasion] to talking"; this is precisely the facet of Spohr that manifests itself in the Eighth's 'Italian' ending.

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

LP/CD recording by Karl Anton Rickenbacher with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra (1983, Orfeo S 094 841A/C 094 841A)

CD recording by Alfred Walter with the Slovak State Philharmonic Orchestra (1992, Marco Polo 8.223454)

THE FIRST MOVEMENT of the Ninth Symphony ('Winter', *Allegro maestoso*) is, arguably, the finest symphonic movement Spohr wrote. In the case of the equivalent movement of the Second Symphony, I commented that Spohr was on a path which led, ultimately, to Bruckner's 'Romantic'; now, in his Ninth, thirty years after the Second, Spohr is nearer still to that world; Bruckner's very first symphony, the F minor (1863), lies only thirteen years in the future. Keith Warsop (in his notes to Walter's recording) has

observed that, in this movement, “Spohr’s orchestration is spare and plain, giving a bleak feel to things”. There is also something mighty and majestic in what is involved, as *maestoso* implies; and, significantly, this marking was also in due course used by Bruckner in the first movement of his Sixth Symphony.

But the forces of winter, in all their relentless power, are only the ostensible germ out of which Spohr creates this movement; there is also something personal – what Keith Warsop describes as a journey “from death to rebirth or from darkness to light” – in the ambit which Spohr lays out for himself. And it is perhaps the sheer comprehensiveness and totality of the challenge involved, in the combat to overcome the initial bleak force of ‘Winter’ or ‘darkness’ or ‘death’, which makes this movement – and indeed the Ninth Symphony as a whole – such a significant achievement. In his own way, and according entirely to his own lights, Spohr here traverses similar ground to that of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony and *Fidelio*, a move through oppression and conflict to eventual resolution and triumph. There are thus distinct similarities between Spohr’s Fifth and Ninth Symphonies.

Time-wise, there is little to choose in this movement between Rickenbacher (9m.9s.) and Walter (8m.44s.). In some respects Rickenbacher’s marginally broader tempi are preferable, but, as the movement progresses, Walter conjures from his Slovak players – as he does in the Second – a depth and range of orchestral colour which eludes Rickenbacher and the Bavarian orchestra, which in places, surprisingly, sounds light and almost superficial. There is perhaps scope in the future for a recording which combines Walter’s tonal achievement with a truly *maestoso* approach of slowness and grandeur. For Spohr’s blocks of woodwind balanced against spare brass rhythms constitute in this movement something – as later so evident in Bruckner – deserving of, and benefiting from, an unhurried approach.

The second movement (‘Spring’, *Moderato – Presto*) is one of Spohr’s most delightful movements. Hartmut Becker (in his notes to Rickenbacher’s recording) makes no attempt to describe it, limiting himself to generally unfavourable remarks about Spohr’s later symphonies; that is unfortunate, and indeed unwarranted, in terms of any real attempt to describe and then foster and promote what Spohr was trying to achieve in these works. Keith Warsop (in his notes accompanying Walter’s CD) is surely correct to see this movement as “spring ... enthroned to a slow ländler ... accompanied by birdsongs and contrasted with a central quick country dance”. The movement is thus in the expected ABA form, and since Spohr was writing the symphony in the spring of 1850, the practical expression of the season chimes in this instance with Spohr’s naturally optimistic disposition.

At every stage of the movement Rickenbacher (‘R’) is marginally more relaxed and idiomatic than Walter (‘W’):

Prelude:	52s. (R); 44s. (W)
1st ‘A’:	2m.30s. (R); 2m.15s. (W)
‘B’:	1m.27s. (R); 1m.24s. (W)
2nd ‘A’:	2m.12s. (R); 1m.57s. (W)
Total time:	7m.1s. (R); 6m.20s. (W)

Rickenbacher’s performance here is clearly to be preferred.

The third movement (‘Summer’, *Largo*) is cast in the ABA form beloved of Spohr, and we can once more see Spohr the miniaturist in evidence here, as in the analogous slow movement of the Second Symphony. Rickenbacher’s slower tempi in this instance are clearly preferable to Walter:

Rickenbacher	6m.24s. (1m.48s.; 1m.62s.; 2m.44s.)
Walter	4m.58s. (1m.23s.; 1m.31s.; 2m.4s.)

Walter’s relative failure of perception is to a degree surprising in view of his insight into the depths of the opening movement of the Second Symphony. Indeed, it seems doubtful whether Walter’s surprisingly fast and superficial speed and treatment at all adequately represent the marking *Largo*, which must involve a speed close or very close to Rickenbacher’s.

I suggested in looking at the *Larghetto* of the Second Symphony that, in that movement’s ‘B’ section, very deep emotional currents ran not far below the surface. And a similar contrast between ‘A’ and ‘B’ sections is evident in the Ninth. In his sleeve-note to Rickenbacher’s LP, Hartmut Becker is silent about the meaning of this movement. But Keith Warsop, in his notes accompanying Walter’s CD, is rather more forthcoming. Of the ‘A’ sections he writes: “*Summer* stands at the boundary of the high romantic era as divided strings hint at Bruckner and Elgar to give the impression of a sultry summer day”; and the ‘B’

section he characterises as “distant sounds of thunder” – which interrupt summer briefly before the return of the “sultry ... day”.

It is possible, I think, to go rather further than this. If, as I believe, the Ninth Symphony (like the Fifth) is in large measure autobiographical, the ‘Summer’ movement represents the peak of Spohr’s artistic creativity in his middle years; and the work then ends with ‘Autumn’ as fourth movement because Spohr, at the age of 66, stands on the threshold of his twilight years. There are thus (apparently) autobiographical reasons for Spohr’s choice of the order Winter-Spring-Summer-Autumn; whereas, as Keith Warsop has pointed out to me [communication of 29th April 2009], “All other composers I know (Vivaldi, Glazunov, Raff, Milhaud, D. Scarlatti, etc.) start with Spring”. However, as I mentioned in trying to explain the slow movement of the Eighth Symphony, Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel wrote in 1841 *12 Charakterstücke für das Pianoforte*, entitled ‘Das Jahr’, which start in January and run through to December, followed by a short *Nachspiel*. Was this work perhaps an influence on Spohr?

But why is ‘Summer’ interrupted by the disturbing intrusion of what happens in the ‘B’ section? I hazard the guess that the answer is to be found in the heavy fall on ice and consequent serious head injury that Spohr suffered on 22nd January 1850. He was ill for several weeks thereafter and then turned to composition of the Ninth Symphony, completing it in April. I understand the ‘A’ section of the slow movement of the Ninth as a moving testimony on Spohr’s part to the rich serenity and peace of mind achieved by him during the ‘golden’ period of his middle years. The unpleasant consequences and shock-effect of the fall intrude on this fulfilled and peaceful state; but fortunately they are short-lived. Spohr recovers and – for the time being – the happy summer mood is resumed.

By any normal reckoning, Spohr’s depiction of ‘Autumn’ (*Allegro vivace*) in the last movement of his Ninth Symphony is remarkable. Autumn for Spohr, on this evidence, is a season happy and triumphant, a long way, for example, from the bleakness of the second movement of Mahler’s *Song of the Earth* (‘The Lonely One in Autumn’). I repeat, therefore, something which I said in relation to the Sixth Symphony. We must be careful not to over-emphasise the headings attached to the various movements; while they may help, and be valid, to a degree, Spohr the symphonist in the abstract – what he stands for and his personal aspirations – are at least as important to our understanding of the work as any programme built up solely out of the movement headings.

Keith Warsop, in his notes accompanying Walter’s recording, has made a convincing case for understanding the Ninth Symphony in terms of Spohr’s ethical and political beliefs, an expression of a move “from death to rebirth or from darkness to light”. I think it is also probably true, as I have noted earlier, that there is a large measure of autobiography in the symphony. A.C. Benson, in one of his essays, describes an old man who, never moving much from his armchair by the fire, nonetheless radiates to those who come into contact with him a happiness and contentment with life. Spohr’s character is rather similar, and the last movement’s richness and triumph perhaps reflects completely honestly this facet of Spohr; ‘The Lonely One in Autumn’ is indeed as far away as could be.

Overall, there is little to choose between the recordings of Rickenbacher (6m.39s.) and Walter (6m.43s.). Rickenbacher is clearly preferable in the ‘Prelude to Autumn’, taking 36 seconds as against Walter’s 30. Walter’s relative failure here, as in the ‘Summer’ movement, is somewhat surprising. Walter’s marginally slower tempi in the rest of the movement are some compensation, but the position in this movement overall is rather similar to what I described in the last movements of the Second and Sixth. I suggested that the first movement of the Second was an early instance of a musical approach and focus which culminated in Bruckner’s ‘Romantic’; and, in the Ninth, thirty years after the Second, Spohr has come closer to that haunting Brucknerian world: Spohr’s ‘Prelude to Autumn’ could almost be early Bruckner.

As with the last movements of Spohr’s Second and Sixth Symphonies, a more finely pointed and emphatic interpretation of the last movement of the Ninth (than either Rickenbacher or Walter give here) would put a more definite seal on a work which, in many ways, taken all together, is Spohr’s greatest symphonic achievement.

In relation to this last movement, Keith Warsop has observed to me [communication of 29th April 2009] that “neither conductor brings out the large number of trills and grace notes in the horns, so until that is done the movement does not sound as the composer intended”. Future conductors, please note!

Symphony No.10 in E flat, WoO.8

CD recording by Howard Griffiths with the NDR Radiophilharmonie (2006, cpo 777 177-2)

GRIFFITHS FAILS by some distance to have the measure of the remarkable first movement of this symphony: his time of 6m.53s. is simply too fast [non-commercial recordings mentioned in the last part of this *Conspectus* are more than a minute slower], with the result that, time after time, felicities of phrasing and scoring are rushed or passed over. And, as Keith Warsop has noted [communication to me of 15th April 2009] "in the first movement Spohr marks both halves to be repeated but Griffiths takes only the one for the exposition".

Spohr's use of horns, and the brass instruments generally, and the woodwinds, is noteworthy in (for example) the outer movements of the Second Symphony, the third movement of the Fifth, and the third movement of the Ninth. In the Tenth Symphony, for the first time, Spohr used tuba, valve horns and valve trumpets, and the result is spectacular, not just in terms of breadth and depth of the scoring, but in particular because of Spohr's writing for the tuba.

And yet Spohr was not satisfied with the symphony, and decided to lay it aside – with the result that it was performed publicly for the first time only in 1998 and published only in 2006. Clive Brown, in his 1984 biography of Spohr, describes the circumstances of the composer's discounting of this work, and other works, towards the end of his life: "In the years 1856 to 1858 he made several further attempts to compose substantial works, none of which satisfied him sufficiently to be considered worthy of publication. The first of these was a string quartet in G minor, probably written during the autumn of 1856 ... despite giving it the opus number 155 he laid it aside. The Tenth Symphony in E flat Op.156, composed in the spring of 1857, met a similar fate, for after trying it out with his orchestra Spohr reluctantly decided that it was not worthy to rank with his published symphonies and suppressed it. He came to the same conclusion about a final string quartet in G minor, Op.157 – which was his last substantial work to be completed – and withheld it too from publication. Spohr's increasing inability during the 1850s to compose anything which satisfied him seems to have been more closely bound up with a crisis of confidence than with the failure of his mental powers" (pp.335-336).

Why should this have been, and are we then justified in resurrecting the Tenth Symphony against the composer's wishes? I think Spohr must have realised that the Tenth was in a sense a transitional symphony. By that I mean that if, hypothetically, he had lived another ten years, and written a further two or three symphonies [Havergal Brian wrote twenty of his 32 symphonies between the ages of 78 and 92], the Tenth would have been seen as an introduction to those later symphonies, rather than being an end in itself.

In the case of the second movement of the Fifth Symphony (1837) I remarked on Spohr's prefiguring of the Wagner of *Die Meistersinger*. And I also suggested that ten years later, in 1847, at the time of his Eighth Symphony, Spohr concentrated particularly, at the beginning of that work's first movement, on the lower timbres of wind instruments – something inherited possibly from Mendelssohn's 'Scotch' Symphony. The writing for brass and woodwinds in the first movement of the Tenth is, in 1857, a direct development of what Spohr had achieved in the earlier works ten and twenty years before' and again – though we still lie, in 1857, several years before *Die Meistersinger* – there are striking prefigurations by Spohr of Wagner's writing for brass in that work.

But in Spohr's case this bold and striking orchestral palette is encapsulated within a structural mould still governed very largely by the outline principles of the Haydn-Mozart symphony. Perhaps Spohr did not wish to branch off in too many directions at once. But, had he lived longer, he would no doubt in due course, in view of his interest in 'new developments' exemplified in Symphonies Nos. 4, 6, 7, 8 and 9, have produced a symphony or symphonies in which his ever-deepening abilities in writing for brass and woodwind were allied to a form more adventurous than the Haydn-Mozart model of Symphony No.10.

In sum, it was perhaps Spohr's awareness of the transitional nature of Symphony No.10 which caused him to decide to suppress the work after playing it through with his orchestra in 1857. But the work provides most important evidence of Spohr's still-developing treatment of brass and woodwinds, and for this reason alone – so long as we remember that the Tenth is in a sense transitional – we are I think justified in performing it. There is some kind of parallel here with Elgar's Third Symphony, the sketches of which the dying composer wished to be destroyed, but which have subsequently been turned by

Anthony Payne into a revelatory full score. [I considered this matter further in an article “Edward Elgar’s final, tragic masterpiece” in the *Westmeath Examiner*, 6th May 2000, p.11.] Composers themselves are not necessarily the best judges of the situation in these circumstances. Keith Warsop also usefully adds in this context [communication to me of 3rd June 2009] “Perhaps there is a parallel here with Sibelius’ Eighth. Maybe he suppressed that work for the same reasons as Spohr with No.10 and if the Eighth had survived we might also find it was of a transitional nature”.

The slow movement (*Larghetto*) of the Tenth Symphony may appear to be backward-looking, its elderly composer – Spohr was now 73 – increasingly obsessed with the ideals of Mozart who had meant so much to him in his youth. But this is only part of the picture.

Karl Hasse, writing of Max Reger (in *Grove’s Dictionary*, 1940, Vol.4, p.347), observed that (translation by Cecil Lewis): “He [Reger] continually strove to attain greater ‘transparency’. His ideal for orchestral music became in an ever-increasing degree the perfect clearness of Mozart”. This “ideal” is above all evident in Reger’s orchestral Variations on a theme of Mozart, Op.132, composed in the early summer of 1914. Reger’s *oeuvre* also contained compositions based on ideas relating to Bach (Op.46 and Op.81) and themes of Beethoven (Op.86) and Telemann (Op.134).

A generation after Reger, in the 1940s, Richard Strauss composed his Symphony for Wind Instruments, Op. Posth., dedicating it “to the spirit of the immortal Mozart at the end of a life full of thankfulness”. And Alexandra Carr comments on this work [in the notes accompanying the 2003 recording of it by Royal Academy of Music Symphonic Winds, second disc of the set RAM 020]: “while it is not an imitation in any way of Mozart’s style it has subtle insinuations ... The second movement shows some reference to Mozartian turn of phrase, but the way the subject is explored is pure Strauss invention”. This observation parallels closely the opinion of Robert Schumann, quoted earlier, about the all-pervasive ‘footprint’ of Spohr in the apparently ‘Historical’ Symphony.

Spohr therefore not only looks back, but can be seen to be setting a trend which remained valid into the future. And three elements of the slow movement of the Tenth deserve special mention in this regard.

Firstly, Spohr’s use of tuba and horns, in their lower registers, goes sonically far beyond anything in Mozart. Secondly, Spohr’s harmonic and chromatic progressions tend to look forward, towards impressionism. Thirdly, Spohr no longer writes a slow movement in ABA form, as in the Ninth and previous symphonies: the *Larghetto* of the Tenth is one continuous thread of musical development.

Griffiths’ performing time of 7m.3s. leaves substantial question-marks over his vision and approach. As I mention in the final part of this *Conspectus*, non-commercial recordings suggest that a slower time for the movement pays rich dividends, allowing clearer articulation and phrasing at a tempo more in line with what Spohr must have had in mind. Griffiths is simply too rushed here; and, as Keith Warsop has observed to me [communication of 15th April 2009], “Griffiths ... includes the exposition repeat but ... a private recording of the 1998 première ... takes [longer] **WITHOUT THE REPEAT!**”

The third movement (Scherzo: *Allegretto*) shows Spohr building on previous practice – both that of others and his own. He is now no longer content with a simple ABA structure. Important precedents and models in this context are Beethoven’s Seventh and Ninth Symphonies and Spohr’s own Eighth. In the third movement of his Seventh Symphony Beethoven, having apparently composed a conventional ABA scherzo and trio, adds on an unexpected coda built up out of the germ of the trio, thus in effect creating an ABAB movement. Beethoven’s Eighth has a more conventional ABA movement, but in the Ninth Beethoven returns to the ABAB of the Seventh, with a coda again formed out of the germ of the Trio. Spohr’s Eighth Symphony modifies this Beethoven practice: in my discussion of the third movement of the Eighth, I described it as having an ABABAB structure, with each succeeding ‘A’ and ‘B’ part being shorter than the preceding one; and in fact Spohr marks the coda as consisting of the final BAB parts of the whole.

As with Beethoven in his Eighth Symphony, Spohr for the Scherzo of his Ninth reverts to simple ABA form. But experimentation is again in evidence in the Scherzo of the Tenth: and Keith Warsop has thus described the situation [communication to me of 30th April 2009]: in the Tenth Symphony “the Scherzo and Trio have the usual repeats, then they are both marked *da capo* but repeatless, followed by the coda.

The structure, therefore, is on this occasion ABABA, with – as in the case of the Eighth Symphony – the second ‘A’ and ‘B’ parts being shorter than the first, and the third ‘A’ (the coda) being shorter again

than the second. Howard Griffiths' times for the five sections of the movement illustrate what I have described:

1st 'A':	1m.31s.
1st 'B':	2m.12s.
2nd 'A':	45s.
2nd 'B':	1m.7s.
3rd 'A':	22s.
Total time:	5m.57s.

This ABABA third-movement form adopted by Spohr in his Tenth Symphony in some degree anticipates the ABABA Scherzo and Trio of a work such as Bruckner's Fifth Symphony. But Spohr, in spite of this elaboration of plan, is still the miniaturist, eschewing the massive proportions of the third movement of Bruckner's Fifth. Spohr, unlike Bruckner (who was actively trying to increase the length of his Scherzo, so that it equated more to that of the other movements), accentuated his continuing miniaturism by the lack of repeats for the Scherzo and Trio the second time round.

This movement is in some respects a Haydnesque creation – Haydn brought up to date! –, and Spohr's use of tuba, valve horns and valve trumpets should emphasise the rhythmic 'bounce' of the opening bars, and coda, of the movement. In fact the movement should emerge as a *tour de force*, as for example does the corresponding movement in Furtwängler's famous Berlin recording of Haydn's 88th Symphony. For all its clear articulation, Griffiths' performance of the movement fails in the end by a clear margin to achieve the desired level of conviction. In this the situation rather parallels what I said about the available recordings of the third movement of the Sixth Symphony.

In the finale (*Allegro*) very similar issues present themselves to those we have seen in the other movements of this symphony: Griffiths, at 5m.11s., is simply too fast to give a proper account of Spohr's 'knock-about' humour here. [The same non-commercial recordings as mentioned in the case of the first movement are a full minute and more slower than Griffiths.] The rumbustious 'give and take' nature of Spohr's writing for brass and woodwind needs sensitive pointing and split-second pauses and timing to make its proper effect. Like the third movement, the finale is a *tour de force* if properly presented, but emphatically not in Griffiths' hands.

Overtures

THERE FOLLOW HERE very brief comments on those overtures used as fillers for the recordings of the symphonies.

The overture to *Jessonda* is present on both Albrecht's recording of the Third (1983) and Walter's CD of the Fourth (1987). Albrecht is considerably faster at 6m.47s. (*Moderato* 3m.15s. + *Vivace* 3m.32s.), as against Walter's 7m.34s. (3m.22s. + 4m.12s.). As Spohr's metronome markings are *Moderato* crotchet = 88; *Vivace* minim = 132, and Walter's speeds are 76-118 against Albrecht's 82-126, it is clear that even Albrecht is on the slow side in terms of what Spohr had in mind. Both sections of the overture rather fall apart under Walter, and Albrecht offers a more cohesive and persuasive flow.

The Concert Overture in F was recorded both in 2006 (with Howard Shelley's performances of the First and Second Symphonies) and again in 2007 (on Howard Griffiths' disc of the Third and Tenth). Spohr left no metronome markings in this case, but although both readings take very similar times overall (Shelley 6m.26s., Griffiths 6m.25s.), Spohr's distinction for the two parts of the overture of *Adagio molto* and *Allegro vivace* seems better served by Griffiths (1m.34s. + 4m.51s.) than by Shelley (1m.12s. + 5m.14s.). Spohr complained on occasion of those who took his fast movements too slowly and his slow movements too fast; and Shelley comes precisely into that category here.

Three further overtures have been recorded, once each, as symphonic fillers: *Faust* in 1987 on Walter's disc of the Fourth, *Im ernsten Styl* in 2006 by Griffiths (on the same disc as Symphonies Nos. 2 and 8), and *Das befreite Deutschland* (with Symphonies Nos. 4 and 5) by Shelley in 2007.

In *Faust* Spohr's marking for the initial *Allegro vivace* is crotchet = 132, and Walter's speed – though he is always variable to a degree – is initially exactly 132. Spohr gives no marking for the subsequent *Andante maestoso* at the entry of the trombones, but Walter's speed seems unquestionably right, and this is a rather more convincing and more closely-knit performance than his *Jessonda* overture on the same disc.

For *Das befreite Deutschland* Spohr left no metronome markings; and in the absence of any competition to Shelley, it is indeed difficult to reach at this point any definitive conclusions. But it has to be said that Shelley's opening *Adagio* is somewhat faster than the *Adagio* marking on the metronome; and I suspect that Shelley's following *Allegro moderato* is also on the fast side. Perhaps in the future – as with so many of the Spohr movements I have discussed in this *Conspectus* – some other conductor will prove in this overture the merits of slower speeds which give the music more time to 'breathe'.

A rather different question arises with Griffiths' recording of *Im ernsten Styl*. This work should prove and impress itself as a masterpiece of contrapuntal logic, rather along the lines of Brahms' *Haydn Variations* or the finale of the same composer's Fourth Symphony. In the event, Griffiths' exuberant and extrovert interpretative style misses what is required by a huge margin. This is an overture that I should have liked to hear Otto Klemperer conduct – not that there is any evidence from the two volumes of Peter Heyworth's *Otto Klemperer: His Life and Times* (1983 and 1996) that Klemperer ever conducted any Spohr at all – sadly!

Some Non-Commercial Performances

The Spohr Society of Great Britain has in its archive a number of private recordings of broadcast or concert performances of some of the symphonies. Where these can throw important light on the search for a 'platform of consciousness' they are considered below.

Symphony No.1; Vienna Symphony Orchestra, Václav Neumann; Austrian Radio broadcast, 1990. THIS PERFORMANCE promises so much, but in the end is disappointing. Neumann had first-class credentials as a conductor of the Romantic symphonic repertoire (his unparalleled Bruckner First for Decca, his Mahler series for Eterna, and the first-ever recording, with Miloš Sádlo, for Supraphon, of Dvořák's youthful Cello Concerto in A major); and the Vienna Symphony Orchestra are here right at the top of their form.

But, upsettingly, Neumann omits the repeats in first and last movements, and makes additional cuts in the third and fourth movements. His slow movement, at 5m.24s., is too fast – faster than both Walter and Shelley –, and his fourth movement, at 4m.59s., is disfigured by the omissions and in any case too strait-laced compared with Walter's marvellous abandon.

The best parts of the performance are Neumann's first movement (11m.30s. without repeat compared with Shelley's 12m.35s. with it), and particularly his slow introduction (2m.53s. compared with Shelley's 1m.39s.), and his uncut Scherzo, the first time round (3m.8s. as against Shelley's 3m.1s.). What Neumann does here vindicates the case for a slower, grander conception of these parts than what Walter and Shelley have given us in their commercial recordings.

In a way it is surprising that Neumann, having produced such an outstanding performance of the first movement, should fall so far short in his comprehension of the last. It is as though he is unaware of, or disregards, the extent of Spohr's development beyond Mozart. And he is not alone in this: Clive Brown, somewhat surprisingly (*Biography*, 1984, p.140), referred to the finale as "a ... lightweight movement". That, as Walter's spectacular performance has shown, is exactly what it is not.

Symphony No.2; Northern Sinfonia, Manoug Parikian; BBC broadcast, 13th October 1982.

PAKIAN'S FIRST MOVEMENT is fine and spacious, if a bit stodgy. At 9m.13s. (without repeat) he is slower than Walter, whose mesmeric performance is already slightly slower than Spohr's metronome marking. Parikian lacks Walter's incomparable mercurial incandescence, and his rendering cannot displace Walter's.

But under Parikian the slow movement is most beautifully and affectingly played. Again, this is a slow performance, 6m.50s. against my postulated ideal of 6m.22s. and Shelley's time of 6m.11s. But Parikian achieves marvels in terms of intensity and rapt concentration, and this movement is a winner under his direction.

Parikian's third and fourth movements are again outstanding, barring one small blemish. He is in no sense a 'flashy' conductor, but his slow speeds are extremely effective, and in these instances are without the solid and stodgy elements which, to a degree, mar his first movement.

In the third movement his time of 5m.10s. (2m.7s.; 58s.; 2m.5s.) is slower than the other performances on record. And his time of 5m.53s. for the fourth movement is also – since, regrettably, he omits the repeat – slower than everyone else, and more in line with what I earlier postulated as desirable. Walter takes

1m.59s. for the passage to be repeated, but Parikian is slower than Walter, which suggests a time of rather over 8 minutes for the movement with repeat, at Parikian's tempo – compared with Walter's 7m.4s. and Shelley's 7m.20s.

We are thus in the happy position, for the Second Symphony, of having a near-perfect 'template' for performance: Walter's first movement and Parikian's second, third and fourth (with repeat included in the fourth).

Symphony No.7; BBC Northern Orchestra, Raymond Leppard; BBC broadcast 6th June 1979.

IN THE MAIN REVIEW of Walter's recording I wrote, in relation to the first movement, that "as far as can be judged, Walter's speed is slower than the composer's metronome marking (time. 12m.1s., or estimated 8m.44s. without repeat); and Raymond Leppard's somewhat faster speed (time, 7m.53s. without repeat) brings the movement more vividly to life, justifying – as Walter's performance in the end does not – Robert Schumann's remarkable tribute to Spohr's achievement in this symphony: "Let us follow him in art, in life, in all his striving. The industry, which is apparent in every line of the score, is truly moving. May he stand with our greatest Germans as a shining example".

Leppard's omission of the exposition repeat unfortunately unbalances Spohr's intended equality between the movements, since the first is consequently shorter time-wise than the other two. Otherwise, Leppard's conception of the movement – and indeed of the whole work – is of a very high level, with consistently alert and full-bodied playing from his orchestra. It is difficult not to recommend this performance too highly.

In the middle movement there is hardly any time-difference between Walter (12m.11s.) and Leppard (12s.7s.). But a vast gulf of perception and comprehension again separates the two. This is one of the least successful movements of Walter's entire cycle: he seems to be feeling his way, not very securely, and the movement simply does not 'come off'. By contrast, Leppard is assured and incisive, and continues to secure first-rate playing from his orchestra.

And the same happens in the third movement. Although Walter is himself marginally slower than Spohr's metronome marking (in the original edition of the score), at 9m.31s. (6m.16s.; 3m.15s.), Leppard is slower still, at 11m.20s. (7m.20s.; 4m.), and manages to 'bring off' the movement at this speed by a superb tonal and virtuosic display from his orchestra. Earlier in this Conspectus, in reviewing the Walter recording of the Seventh, I mentioned that Joshua Berrett, in his 1980 Garland reprint of the symphony's first edition, had suggested that 'dotted crotchet = 96' in the last movement should properly be 'dotted minim = 96'. It supports the view that Berrett is here correct that Leppard's slower speed at this point – slower, that is, than Walter – seems so absolutely right in performance.

There is in fact a degree of self-assured exhibitionism in Spohr's use of the various instruments in this symphony, particularly as it is performed by Leppard. One of the reasons why Václav Neumann's recording of Bruckner's Symphony No.1 [Decca SXL20087], and Gennady Rojdestvensky's of Bruckner's Symphony in F minor [Melodiya/Le Chant du Monde LDX78852] are such outstanding successes is that the two conductors are not shy of pinpointing Bruckner's often spectacular orchestral effects. And exactly the same is true here of Raymond Leppard.

Thus played, the last movement radiates a noble intensity which makes it, certainly, the natural summit of the work. And it also stakes a claim to be among the finest symphonic movements that Spohr composed. It would surely be in the interests of wider recognition of Symphony No.7 if Leppard's marvellous realisation of it (with the repeat 'dubbed in' in the first movement) could somehow be made commercially available.

Symphony No.8; BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Norman del Mar; BBC broadcast, 1st April 1984.

THERE IS ONE outstanding feature of Norman del Mar's performance, and that is the slow movement. Walter's recording takes 5m.29s., but this is too fast, and indeed somewhat faster than Spohr's metronome marking. Del Mar, at 6m.40s., paces the movement perfectly, combining gravitas with pathos, which is surely what the composer intended.

Del Mar's third movement is more than a minute faster than Walter (5m.55s. as against 7m.5s.), and rushed where Walter is nuanced; and his violin soloist is no real match for Peter Sklenka on the Walter disc. Del Mar's outer movements are good in many ways, though the Scottish orchestra do not reach the inspired heights of Walter's Czecho-Slovak players. But del Mar makes the critical mistake of not

including first and last movement repeats. If the repeat were included in the first movement, del Mar's time for the movement (estimated) would be 12m.43s. compared with Walter's 12m.25s.

Walter's 12m.25s. already represents a performance time marginally slower than Spohr's indicated metronome markings, and del Mar's even slower time allows tension and onward momentum to sag perceptibly at key moments.

Walter's CD, therefore, remains for the time being the recommended version of this symphony, except for del Mar's exceptional slow movement. But, as I suggested in the main review of Symphony No.8, there is still room for a truly outstanding performance of the first movement.

Symphony No.10; Bergen Youth Orchestra (N.J.), Eugene Minor, at the Carnegie Hall, New York, 22nd March 1998 (world première performance).

Symphony No.10; Bergen Youth Orchestra (N.J.), Eugene Minor, at a public concert in Teaneck, New Jersey, 6th June 1998.

IT IS INCREDIBLE – but true! – that the 22nd March 1998 performance at the Carnegie Hall was the first time that this work had ever been performed publicly, the symphony having been withdrawn by the composer in the wake of his private run-through with his orchestra in Kassel in 1857.

Bergen is the most north-easterly of the 20 counties of New Jersey, lying just across the River Hudson from New York. Thus both these performances, two-and-a-half months apart, took place in the orchestra's hinterland. And, though not of full professional standard, the young players acquit themselves very creditably on the whole, with only occasional ensemble fluffs and faulty intonation betraying their amateur status. More important than this, though, is Eugene Minor's vision of the work, which has not only matured by the time of the second performance but, interpretively, manages to put Howard Griffiths' commercial recording in the shade.

In my review of the Griffiths disc, I wrote that "his time of 6m.53s. [for the first movement] is simply too fast ... time after time, felicities of phrasing and scoring are rushed or passed over". Griffiths includes the exposition repeat in his time of 6m.53s., but Minor – who also included it in both his performances – took 8m.7s. on 22nd March and 8m.20s. on 6th June. This is a case where Minor's conception is visibly growing and developing before our eyes, and his longer performing time the second time round carries even greater conviction. It may be, therefore – something I have suggested repeatedly throughout these reviews –, that in due course a performing time of even slightly longer than 8m.20s. will prove to be justified. Certainly anything very much faster than that is simply too fast to do the music justice.

The same issue, but in more dramatic form, resurfaces in the *Larghetto*. Minor – who, in this case, regrettably, omits the repeat in both his performances – nonetheless is slower on both occasions (7m.48s., 22nd March; 7m.18s., 6th June) than Griffiths, whose 7m.3s. includes the repeat. Clearly, Minor's first performance is too relaxed and drawn out – rather along the lines of del Mar in the first movement of the Eighth; and the tauter performance the second time round is certainly preferable.

In the third and fourth movements similar considerations again apply, with Minor being slower, and more effective, in both his performances, than Griffiths. I do not wish to keep over-emphasising the same point, so I observe simply that the position in the fourth movement is a mirror image of that in the first; Griffiths, 5m.11s.; Minor (22nd March), 6m.33s.; Minor (6th June), 6m.43s. Again, Minor's conception grows between the performances, and – small orchestral blemishes apart, one unfortunately just near the end – the later one is on the whole to be preferred.

Griffiths, sad to say, is shown up badly throughout this work by what Minor manages to achieve with his Bergen orchestra, particularly on the second occasion. The moral perhaps is that future professional performers should try to listen to Minor's performances, and absorb the implications, before embarking on their own performances and/or recordings.

Metronome markings

Spohr's metronome markings survive for Symphonies Nos. 2 to 9 inclusive, but not for Nos. 1 and 10. Speed markings noted (below and elsewhere) for individual conductors should be treated with a certain leeway and caution; above all they serve only as a rough guide.

Around a basic speed there may be momentary slowings-up or quickenings; therefore speeds given are no more than a general indication, and should not be treated as true absolutely or constantly. Spohr's

markings in Symphonies 2 to 9 are shown below plus those adopted by the conductors who have recorded the works:

Symphony No.2

Allegro, dotted minim = 76; *Larghetto*, quaver = 68; *Scherzo: Presto*, dotted minim = 88; *Finale: Vivace*, minim = 120.

	Choo Hoey	Walter	Shelley	Griffiths
1	79	72	84	88
2	68	70	66	78
3	90	86	92	96
4	118	120	126	126

Symphony No.3

Andante Grave, crotchet = 56 – *Allegro*, dotted crotchet = 112; *Larghetto*, crotchet = 50; *Scherzo*, dotted minim = 92; *Finale: Allegro*, minim = 132.

	Sulyok	Albrecht	Hager	Walter	Griffiths
1	47-108	60-130	63-123	43-112	52-116
2	126	63	88	70	92
3	88	104	80	88	96
4	127	132	128	126	138

Symphony No.4

Largo, quaver = 63 – *Allegro*, crotchet = 100; *Andantino*, semi-quaver = 152 – *Allegro*, quaver = 152; *Tempo di Marcia*, crotchet = 126 – *Andante maestoso*, crotchet = 60; *Larghetto*, crotchet = 50 – *Allegretto*, crotchet = 100.

	Walter	Shelley
1	72-104	84-112
2	144-138	144-152
3	126-70	130-94
4	63-96	75-110

Symphony No.5

Andante, crotchet = 84 – *Allegro*, dotted crotchet = 144; *Larghetto*, quaver = 100; *Scherzo*, dotted minim = 96; *Presto*, minim = 152.

	Walter	Shelley
1	72-132	92-129
2	86 (variable)	96
3	92	94
4	152	144

Symphony No.6

Largo grave, quaver = 69 – *Allegro moderato*, crotchet = 69 – *Pastorale*, quaver = 100; *Larghetto*, quaver = 84; *Scherzo*, minim = 76; *Allegro vivace*, minim = 92.

	Rickenbacher	Walter
1	76-84-100	65-64-96
2	100	84
3	84	72
4	94	92

Symphony No.7

Introduzione: Adagio, quaver = 108 – *Allegretto*, quaver = 138; *Larghetto*, quaver = 96 – *Allegro moderato*, crotchet = 120; *Presto*, dotted minim = 96 – *Adagio*, quaver = 132.

Details of Walter's metronome markings are given in the review of his CD in the main body of this *Conspectus*.

Symphony No.8

Adagio, crotchet = 63 – *Allegro*, dotted minim = 69; *Poco Adagio*, crotchet = 58; *Scherzo: Allegretto*, crotchet = 100 – *Trio: Un poco meno Allegro*, crotchet = 92; *Finale: Allegro*, dotted crotchet = 100.

	Walter	Griffiths
1	60-66	66-72
2	69	67
3	95-83	108-96
4	85	103

Symphony No.9

Allegro maestoso, crotchet = 126; *Moderato*, crotchet = 108 – *Presto*, crotchet = 108; *Largo*, quaver = 52; *Allegro vivace* 6/4, dotted minim = 88 – *L'istesso tempo C*, minim = 88.

[I am grateful to Keith Warsop for suggesting to me that the '108' for the Presto of the second movement "must be a misprint". In fact the metronome is in beat at '208' in Rickenbacher's recording and '209' in Walter's; so it looks as though '108' is a misprint for '208'.]

	Rickenbacher	Walter
1	126	130
2	112-208	116-209
3	56	72
4	88-88	100-80

Supplement to this Conspectus

When the Griffiths and Shelley symphony-cycles have been completed, I hope to produce a short Supplement to this *Conspectus* consisting of reviews of the latest issues in those cycles. Any other individual new recordings will also be considered then; and I hope also at that stage to be able to include the Schlemm recording of the Third Symphony. If any reader knows of non-commercial recordings or broadcasts which seem particularly significant, please send me (at: The Walnuts, Enniscoffey, Mullingar, Ireland) a copy/copies for brief mention also.

Acknowledgment

I am indebted to Keith Warsop and Chris Tutt for help of many kinds in the preparation of this Conspectus. I need hardly add that, in spite of that help, the views here expressed are my own, and KW and CT should not be held responsible for them. I have tried to 'push the boat out' as far as possible in the attempt to understand and interpret Spohr's Symphonies, and I hope readers will not feel that I have gone too far. If any reader can pinpoint areas where I have made errors of fact, I shall be pleased in due course to acknowledge and correct same in any supplementary piece.

I should say a word about the timings given in this Conspectus. I have used the same watch – a Russian watch – for all timings given, and thus they are all relative to each other at least. But they may not be perfectly accurate in the absolute, scientific sense.