CHAPTER 1

Overture
Dresden, Leipzig, Stuttgart (1830–1848)

Hamburg, Thursday 29 March 1894: a bright, cloudless spring morning. It is 10 a.m. and from the Kuppelturm of the Michaeliskirche, Hamburg's largest inner-city church – the 'Michel', as it is affectionately dubbed by the locals – the bell tolls for Hans Guido Freiherr von Bülow, who had died in Cairo just over a month before. The church is packed. A vast throng of friends and admirers have assembled to honour the memory of one who, international fame apart, has won a special place in Hamburg hearts; Hamburg, his adopted city, whose musical destiny he guided since taking up residence on the Alsterglacis in July 1887. As the *Hamburgischer Correspondent* put it, those present were there, 'to take leave of a veritable prince of musicians; a charismatic leader, one relentless and unremitting in his quest for Artistic Truth'.[1]

All eyes are focused on the coffin; it stands before the altar: upon it, alongside family wreaths, rests a half-wilted garland of red and white blossoms, placed there by the ex-patriot Czech community in far-away Egypt. The catafalque stands in flowery state – all the gardens of the land seem to have been plundered in Bülow's honour. Tokens of love and respect from every corner of Europe include tributes from Johannes Brahms, Eugen d'Albert, Teresa Carreño, composer-pedagogue Moritz Moszkowski, Cosima Wagner, as well as institutions such as the Berlin and Hamburg Philharmonic Orchestras, the Hamburg Cäcilien- und Tonkünstler-Verein, the Bach-Gesellschaft, the Allgemeine deutsche Musikverein and the St Petersburg Conservatoire. The widow is supported by Bülow's sister Isidora, Marie Ritter and his son-in-law, Henry Thode,[2] while a strong civic Hansestadt contingent, headed by the current mayor and Toni Petersen, daughter of the deceased ex-Bürgermeister, includes Siegfried Wagner from

[1] *HbC*, 29 March 1894, p. 3.
[2] Daniela Thode's presence is attested by Foerster, but denied by Sittard (*HbC*). Hilmar (p. 304) confirms Foerster's view.

Bayreuth. Opernkapellmeister Gustav Mahler and his composer friend Josef Foerster are also prominent amongst representatives of Hamburg's musical establishment. The sun's rays flooding through the great mullioned windows throw into glittering relief the white and gold furnishings of the church; they add warmth, splendour, richness and depth of colour to the floral tributes, totally eclipsing the fluttering light of the candles surrounding the bier.

It was shortly before ten o'clock that Bülow's widow, Marie, took her place to the left of the coffin. As the relatives gathered, organist Alfred Burjam played a chorale from the *St Matthew Passion*, the third verse of which ('When I this life depart, Lord, depart thou not from me') was sung *a capella* by the Bach-Gesellschaft under Alfred Mehrkens. After Pastor Georg Behrmann's opening sentences, the St Michaelis Boys' choir led the congregation in C. P. E. Bach's setting of the *Auferstehn* chorale,[3] the impact of which, as J. B. Foerster later pointed out, 'was not only due to Klopstock's moving text but also to the pure, clear, innocent voices of the children themselves. The *Auferstehn* hymn rang out', he remembered, 'and sonorous tones from the belfry (the great bell that had tolled for so many illustrious departed souls) broadcast news of Bülow obsequies across the city.'[4] Visiting Mahler later that same day, Foerster found him engrossed in the last movement of his second symphony; ironically enough, a writer's block that hindered composition had been resolved by the *Auferstehn* strains that had sounded in the Michaeliskirche a few hours before.

Ironic indeed, since although Bülow had deeply admired Mahler as a conductor he found his music unintelligible. In fact, at a Mahler playthrough of the symphony's embryonic first movement, he had stopped his ears in horror, condemning the piece out of hand as non-music. The bluntness, not to say tactlessness, that caused Mahler such distress was typically Bülowian. He was abrasive in manner, scornful of dilettantism and forthright in judgement. Second best was inevitably target for biting wit turned with élan and laced with disarming elegance. His infamous establishment-challenging post-concert speeches raised him to virtual iconic status amongst the denizens of the late nineteenth-century concert hall. Whether as 'the man we love', or 'the man we love to hate', there was a wave of popular regret at his passing. The congregation in the Michel not only mourned the loss of a great musician, a great educator, pianist, interpreter and conductor but also an abrasive and wickedly entertaining public personality. His fearsome reputation and formidable

[3] KWB, p. 42. [4] KMH, p. 78.

public presence, however, masked insecurities stemming from an emotionally troubled childhood. When in the late 1870s his friend Hans von Bronsart criticised his tactless behaviour in rehearsal, he simply burst into tears. 'What do you expect', he moaned, 'day by day I had to witness interminable parental battles, wars of words in which each sought to inflict deadly wounds upon the other. You can't imagine the effect that had on so sensitive a child.'[5] Indeed, his was a fractured personality: his life, a constant struggle against besetting illness that threatened fulfilment of his musical ideals. He was aware of his failings, acknowledged the psychological problems that beset him but was, naturally, powerless to overcome them.

The Bülow line was ancient. It has been traced back to the thirteenth century, to one Gottfried von Bülow who held land in Prussian Mecklenburg-Schwerin (Kreis Gadebusch) in north Germany. Gottfried's progeny held civic and military appointments right down to the eighteenth century, when Hans's great-grandfather Ernst and his great-uncle Carl enrolled in the Saxon army; currently – as a result of Napoleon's campaigns in Europe – under French command. Carl, who was to go down in the family annals as a military hero, fell at the battle of Großgörschen in 1813; Ernst, wounded at Smolensk in 1812, retired from active service with the cross of the Legion of Honour. His admiration of Bonaparte remained, undimmed; it was inherited by his grandson along with the family motto 'Alle Bülow'n ehrlich',[6] a maxim that Hans von Bülow took very much to heart. Of Ernst's three sons, two died in childhood, the eldest, Eduard, surviving to father three children, Hans Guido (8 January 1830) and two daughters, Isidora (15 June 1833) and the mentally handicapped Oda (10 November 1834), who died in 1876.

Hans's father was born in 1803 at Schloß Berg near Eilenburg, some 12 miles from Leipzig. When the manor, which belonged to his grandmother Dorothea, was sold, the family moved to Dresden, where Ernst died in 1842. After a few years in a banking house, and following an unsuccessful excursion into the book trade, Eduard enrolled, on Ludwig Tieck's advice, to study ancient languages at the university in Leipzig. It was here, at the home of banker Kammerrat Christian Gottlob Frege, a popular meeting-place for the city's culturally minded, that he met Franziska Elisabeth Stoll.[7] His senior by three years, Franziska was living with her elder sister Sophie Henriette, Christian Frege's wife, where she took in private

[5] MvBLB, p. 4. [6] 'Honour is the Bülow watchword.'
[7] Franziska Kastel by marriage (dissolution date unknown).

pupils and tutored their son, Woldemar junior. Her liveliness, intelligence and musical accomplishments impressed Eduard, while his literary qualifications and title were a sure-fire attraction to a not-ever-so-young divorcee of 28 with little to hope for in the marriage stakes. Nothing loth, she seized her opportunity; on completion of Eduard's university studies in 1828 the couple married and set up house in Dresden, where Eduard, who had acquired something of a literary reputation, undertook secretarial work for Ludwig Tieck (currently Dramaturg at the Dresden Court Theatre), and derived a precarious living from translation.

Hans grew up in a tense family atmosphere. Eduard and Franziska were totally unsuited: he, nervous, restless, a dreamer and writer, liberal in opinion, anti-church and full of idealistic schemes; she, strong-minded, vehement in argument and irritable by nature, stoutly conservative and with strong religious tendencies. She would appear to have been sorely tried by her easy-going husband, whose contribution to the family finances was sparse and irregular. While there must have been inherited money on both sides, the Bülows' financial status is unclear. In Eduard's case, his failed publishing business probably swallowed up most of his capital; Franziska, on the other hand, sister-in-law to a banker, undoubtedly kept her fortune, small though it was, well invested and largely intact. As Bülow later remarked to a friend, 'My father left me nothing other than the necessity of caring for my two step-brothers who live in Bonn with his widow. My mother's modest fortune, which has melted away in the last few years, just suffices to sustain herself and my sister.'[8] That Franziska managed to support her son in the early career-indeterminate years testifies to good management on her part and confirms her stabilising financial role in the family. Eduard's cavalier attitude to money, a prime cause of marital friction, undoubtedly contributed to the dissolution of the marriage in 1849.

Thus it was that young Hans's childhood memories were clouded by parental argument, bitterness and retribution: the lad was bewildered and his loyalties divided. While, naturally, drawn towards his easy-going father, something of whose mercurial nervous temperament he inherited, he yet maintained a close, if periodically fluctuating, relationship with his mother right up to her death in 1888. Clearly, the children had a far from idyllic upbringing. Individually Franziska and Eduard cared deeply for their offspring. They were, however, patently incapable of creating a harmonious domestic environment conducive to their physical, mental and emotional

[8] MvB, III, p. 426.

wellbeing. For all that, the children's home education was dutifully, if irregularly, attended to. Franziska instructed them in French from their earliest years, while Eduard made Hans learn long passages of narrative poetry by rote each week – burdensome for a small child, but an exercise in memory skill development that was to stand him in good stead in future years. At school he had no problems whatsoever; tasks that caused others difficulty he accomplished with ease, but it is probable that cramming, and a stressful home situation, contributed to a series of severe meningitis attacks that weakened a delicate constitution. Remedial treatment at neighbouring spa towns such as Bad Kissingen or Teplitz brought some relief, but his nervous system had suffered permanent damage – recurrent headaches and occipital pains were to plague him for the rest of his life.

The cultural ambience of the Bülow ménage, however, offered Hans an intellectual stimulus that transcended his formal studies. The Bülow home, due to Eduard's literary reputation and Franziska's social and musical skills, was a popular meeting point for the Dresden intelligentsia. Here, Hans witnessed all manner of political, artistic and philosophical debate. On such occasions, the latest dramatic and musical productions would be relived, Eduard would recite poetry, and there was music making aplenty. Franziska was much in demand as accompanist, while Henselt (the Bülows' cellist neighbour)[9] and Konzertmeister Karl Josef Lipinski, both of the Dresden orchestra, were frequent, even daily, visitors as were Tieck, Ida von Lüttichau (wife of the Dresden Court Theatre Intendant) and, significantly enough for Eduard's future, Franziska's close personal friend Louise Countess Bülow von Dennewitz.

Hans's musical talent emerged in his ninth year due, as he later believed, to sharpened sensibilities following a particularly devastating meningitis attack. It was a foregone conclusion, and well within the Bülow tradition, that such a gift should be properly nurtured. He was accordingly sent for keyboard tuition to Henselt, but quickly outstripping the latter's abilities, passed on in 1841 to Cäcilie Schmiedel, an experienced professional teacher. Hans was in his element. 'I work like a black',[10] he boasted. Quick and eager to learn, his progress was exceptional. Soon after accepting Hans as a pupil Cäcilie married composer Maximilian Carl Eberwein,[11] a Hummel disciple who for a brief time, though uninspiringly, guided Hans's theoretical studies. Cäcilie's instruction, however, young Bülow found congenial

[9] Not to be confused with pianist/composer Adolf Henselt.
[10] MvB, 1, p. 41: 'Je travaille comme un nègre.'
[11] Maximilian Carl, the son of Weimar Kapellmeister Carl Franz Eberwein.

and enormously beneficial. In later years he included her, together with Litolff and Friedrich Wieck, among those artists, 'to whom I owe the deepest thanks', freely acknowledging his 'great debt' to a 'gifted, untimely deceased,[12] teacher who', he admitted, 'laid the foundation for my pianistic career'.[13] That respect and admiration was mutual, for in 1846, when Hans left Cäcilie to continue his studies with Wieck in Leipzig, she paid the following glowing tribute:

> My dear young friend, I'm no poet to be able to express in verse my heartfelt wishes for your future. Accept them therefore in modest prose and allow me to assure you that it has given me the purest and deepest joy to be able to guide you on your musical path over these last four to five years. I promise you I shall never forget the pupil who with lively, untiring enthusiasm and diligence transformed the habitual grind of teaching into a task of pure pleasure.[14]

Under Cäcilie's instruction Hans made great forward strides at the keyboard, while the frequency and range of domestic music making (he was present when Franz Liszt attended a soirée at No. 19 Alten Kornmarkt in the 1840s), together with concert and opera visits, expanded his heard repertoire and widened his musical horizons. Indeed, great events were afoot in Dresden in the early 1840s. The city, although musically provincial in status compared to Leipzig, was currently responding to a new challenge. Semper's fine new opera house[15] had opened in 1841, and October 1842 saw the first performance of *Rienzi* under its composer's supervision. The premiere of *Der fliegende Holländer* took place in January 1843; a month later Wagner was appointed Royal Dresden Kapellmeister; *Tannhäuser,* followed in October 1845. The impact of such events attracted the movers and shakers of the musical world to the city; Richard Wagner had put Dresden back on the European cultural map. None other than Franz Liszt turned up for *Rienzi* on 29 February 1844; and that same year saw the beginning of Robert and Clara Schumann's six-year residency in the city. It was a world rich in formative experiences for a lad who sought solace from family tension in music.

Respite was also to be found in visits to aunt and uncle Frege. Whenever infections were abroad, or when illness struck the Bülow home, Hans was packed off to Leipzig where he could drink spa water at the Rakoczy rooms and savour the comfort and delights of the Frege ménage. Here, the problems and tensions of life in Dresden could be waived, if not forgotten,

[12] Cäcilie Eberwein, née Schmiedel, died in 1848.
[13] MvB, III, pp. 169–70.
[14] MvB, I, pp. 12–13.
[15] The theatre was destroyed in the 1849 Revolution, and rebuilt between 1871 and 1878.

in company with cousins of his own age, while entertainment ranged from circus and music hall to pantomime and opera. Nonetheless, the learning routine continued: French tuition under the eagle eye of his aunt, two and a half hours per day piano practice, and theoretical study with a local organist.

Hans had a standing obligation to keep his mother informed of his activities. Family letters, indeed, portray him as a normal fun-loving child rather than a budding prodigy. He describes outings to the country, family gatherings and theatre visits, always with a discerning eye, and always mindful of good things on offer per table. His interest in food was inexhaustible. Writing from Bad Kissingen in the summer of 1843 he gloated over a supper of 'soup, beef with gravy, sweet young peas with hot baked crusty bread, roast lamb and dessert, followed by stewed fruit and pastries'.[16] On another occasion he playfully regaled Isidora with details of 'A frightful dinner we had yesterday. There were only ten of us, but an enormous number of good things were trotted out – champagne, ices, and a great many cakes and pastries. I couldn't keep track of what I'd eaten – I even asked my stomach what dishes it had sampled – but since *it* couldn't tell me, it's no use *you* asking, either.'[17]

Apart from leisure activities such as riding and sightseeing, Hans reports on musical events in Leipzig with an insight astonishing in one so young. Early operatic experiences included Bellini's *I Capuletti e i Montecchi*, Mozart's *Don Juan* and Kreutzer's *Nachtlager in Granada* – 'Not to be compared with *Don Juan* although it has some wonderful moments'[18] – each of which, even at the tender age of 11 years, he evaluated with a discerning ear and eye. In 1844, he heard Lortzing conduct *Zar und Zimmermann* and added Donizetti's *Regimentstochter* to his operatic bag, following up a year later with Bellini's *Norma*, Weber's *Der Freischütz* and Flotow's *Alessandro Stradella*. The latter, he observed, was 'full of lively pretty tunes in the style of Auber',[19] but his highest praise was still reserved for *Don Juan*, 'It is the opera of all operas',[20] he declared. On the obverse side, up at Bad Kissingen for the *Kur* in July 1843, he reported with heavy sarcasm on the local *I Capuletti*, 'A "heavenly" performance! The chorus consisted of four persons who, fearful their wrong notes might be heard, sang very quietly; the prompter was more audible than the singers, a sheep's-head with spectacles conducted while the orchestra made loads of mistakes, kept losing its place and missing bars out.'[21] The Kissingen band, he complained, 'play

[16] MvB, 1, p. 22. [17] Ibid. p. 28. [18] Ibid. p. 18. [19] Ibid. p. 44.
[20] Ibid. p. 38. [21] Ibid. p. 24.

everything, and that "everything", badly . . . They've never heard of celli and timpani. Recently, they did the Overture to *Les Huguenots* (without fiddles), dithering around without rhyme or reason . . . Your "Hans Görgel- und -Amelia Polkas" are about their limit.'[22] Even as a teenager, Bülow was, it seems, developing a keen critical ear; such comments offer a foretaste of the biting satirical humour for which he later became renowned.

Latterly, during those Leipzig interludes, Hans's formal musical education was taken over by Moritz Hauptmann (theory and composition), and Louis Plaidy (pianoforte). He studied works by Adolf Henselt, Hummel's A minor concerto, fugues by Thalberg and Bach, as well as Beethoven's D minor (Op. 31/2) and C♯ minor (*Moonlight*) Sonatas. A progress report to his mother on 30 May 1845 offers useful insight into his technical development and practice procedure:

> You can set your mind at rest as far as my piano lessons are concerned. I can honestly say that I work my fingers to the bone. I spend the entire morning practising trills and diatonic and chromatic scales in every possible combination. Technical fodder includes studies by Moscheles and Steibelt, and a Bach two-part fugue, which I play in octaves. Then there are the Czerny Toccatas and Chopin Studies Herr Plaidy has given me. After all this I don't need to bother with Bertini, Cramer or Clementi, I have enough to do, as I'm sure you'll agree.[23]

The second most important Saxon city, Leipzig had a distinguished musical history. The Gewandhaus concerts, which begun under Hiller in 1785, were transformed when Mendelssohn (with Ferdinand David as leader from 1836 onwards) took over as conductor in 1835. Already, there was a new spirit abroad. Mendelssohn premiered the newly discovered Schubert 'Great' C major Symphony and restored Bach to the concert hall. He improved playing standards and modernised the orchestral repertoire, not least providing an outlet for Schumann's symphonic music. On his death in 1847, Julius Rietz took over the direction of the orchestra. As early as 1834 Schumann had launched the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*; and the Leipzig Conservatoire was to open its doors for the first time in 1843. Friedrich Wieck, of course, had long been a musical force in the city, while Robert and Clara Schumann, who had banking transactions with Christian Frege, were regular dinner guests 'Bei den alten Freges' in the early 1840s.[24] Clara, indeed, was a particular friend of the Freges' daughter-in-law Livia (née Gerhard), a talented soprano, and pupil of the celebrated Dresden opera singer Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient. After her début in 1833 she

[22] Ibid. [23] Ibid. p. 41. [24] RST (23 June 1843).

was snapped up by the Königstädtisches Theater in Berlin; her professional career, however, ended on her marriage to Woldemar Frege in 1836. Now, settled in Leipzig, she carried on the Frege soirée tradition in the intimacy of the Bahnhofstraße circle. A favoured interpreter of Mendelssohn (a frequenter of the Frege home), Livia regularly visited Clara Schumann who, acting as accompanist, enabled her to keep her voice in trim. Indeed, on 4 December 1843 Livia created the part of the Peri in *Das Paradies und die Peri*, in the Gewandhaus, under its composer's own direction.

These years, in which Livia and Woldemar were establishing themselves in Leipzig, were also those of young Hans von Bülow's summer convalescences. With his rapidly growing keyboard proficiency he was much in demand on the family music-making front. He often heard Clara Schumann, both informally at Frege 'at homes' and professionally in the concert hall. 'As far as music is concerned,' he informed his mother, 'it is important that I remain as long as possible in Leipzig because the opportunity of hearing Madame Schumann is of extraordinary value to me – above all, it's a tremendous incentive as far as my own efforts are concerned.'[25] As Clara noted in her diary, 'Young Herr von Bülow visited me today and played over Mendelssohn's D minor Variations. It was excellent, he has improved enormously; my only reservation is a certain "hardness" of touch which robs his performance of poetic quality.'[26] Eager to learn, Hans was quick to act upon advice from such privileged quarters. As he told his mother in June 1841, 'I practise all day and don't any longer have formal lessons because Mendelssohn and Livia think that's best for me.'[27]

Letters home are also indicative of the musical-social climate into which the young Bülow was plunged. As the Schumann diaries unfailingly mention, Livia's birthday fell on 13 June: Hans describes the 1841 festivities in some detail:

> At about nine o'clock in the evening it became clear that something was afoot. As it turned out, Woldemar had decked the reception room out as a gipsy encampment. There were kettles on the fire ignited with bundles of twigs; there were trees everywhere, and the room was lighted by cleverly made paper lanterns: 24 ladies and gentlemen dressed as fierce gipsies lounged around, suitably grouped by Herr Düringer. Dressed up as gipsy children in brightly coloured red and blue ribbons, we too were part of the show. After a chorus from *Preciosa* with horn accompaniment, Legationsrath Gerhard made a short speech, after which Mendelssohn's well-known *Waldlied* was sung. The audience consisted of Livia, a number of her lady friends and Mendelssohn himself (Pohlenz conducted).[28]

[25] MvB, I, p. 32. [26] LCSK, II, pp. 110 f. [27] MvB, I, p. 18. [28] Ibid. p. 19.

Without question, Hans revelled in such occasions – one can readily understand how reluctant he was to exchange so convivial an atmosphere for the stress and strain of home life in Dresden.

The year 1846 marks the end of the Dresden and of the first (intermittent) Leipzig phase of Hans's existence. Clearly youthful musical experiences at home, in the concert hall and at the opera had honed his ear to some purpose; but the awakening of so intense a passion for music at such an early age implies a watershed experience somewhere along the line. It came like a thunderbolt in the shape of that Dresden *Rienzi* of 20 October 1842. It is, however, unlikely that Hans was at the premiere – it was probably the open rehearsal (courtesy of Lipinski) he attended, for he later professed to having heard the work on 19 October. Neither, it seems, was he present when Wagner conducted the opera (as guest) on 25 November. He probably first heard *Rienzi* under its composer sixteen months later (29 February 1844):[29] Liszt, with Lola Montez in tow, was also present that evening and Hans apparently met them both after the performance.[30]

Rienzi was the turning point – from that moment Hans was a committed Wagnerian. He followed the progress of his idol keenly. 'I was ready to throw myself at his feet',[31] he confessed many years later. He revelled in the opportunities the new administration presented. Motivated by Wagner, the Dresden focus was now firmly on the German repertoire: Gluck, Weber, Mozart, Lortzing and Marschner at last came into their own. After *Rienzi*, however, it was Wagner's epoch-making performance of Beethoven's 'Choral' Symphony (5 April 1846) that made the greatest impression. Hans was hearing the work for the very first time; it was another milestone experience the memory of which remained with him for the rest of his life. Even post-Wagner its resonance was felt, not least in the self-confessed nostalgia of those double performances of the 1880s and 1890s; events of deep personal, perhaps of equal historic, significance.

The formative musical experiences of Bülow's early teens naturally brought personal friendships in their train. Peer relationships offered Hans emotional security lacking in the somewhat unstable home environment. His chief intimates were the Ritter brothers, Karl and Alexander, who had the enviable advantage of access to the Wagner circle. Alexander, by the late 1840s, was already courting Richard's niece Franziska, whose sister Johanna Wagner, along with Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient, was a leading light of the Dresden Opera. Karl, Alexander's elder brother, was also

[29] Wagner was appointed Royal Saxon Kapellmeister in February 1843.
[30] LMHvB, p. 11. [31] Ibid. p. 10.