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978-1-108-01172-3 - Louis Spohr's Autobiography: Translated from the German

Louis Spohr

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Louis Spohr's Autobiography

Louis Spohr (1784–1859) was one of the most popular musicians of the early Romantic period, but of his considerable output (including 10 symphonies, 15 violin concertos, nine operas and a large amount of chamber music), only the Octet op.32 and the Nonet op.31 are heard regularly today. Spohr established his name as a virtuoso violinist and completed his Violin method in 1831. As a conductor, he contributed to the increasing use of the baton to direct performances. He travelled widely in Europe, visiting London for the first time in 1820, when he directed a Philharmonic Society concert, and returning four times between 1843 and 1853. This autobiography, begun in 1847, gives a lively (but not necessarily always accurate) account of life as a professional musician. Spohr's own account ends at June 1838, and the book was completed by family members using materials provided by his wife.

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PREFACE.

IN publishing an English translation of the unadorned yet highly interesting Autobiography of the celebrated Violinist and great Composer *Louis Spohr*, we consider we are but satisfying a natural desire on the part of his many admirers in this country to become more intimately acquainted with both the public and private life of this great musical genius — this noble, manly character, in whom were combined in so high a degree the qualities of the true artist with those of the really great-minded and thoroughly good man.

Although nearly twelve years have elapsed since *Spohr's* last appearance in England, and during that time numberless foreign artists of distinction have visited us and gathered well-earned laurels and golden opinions in these islands; yet still above all *Spohr* shines out a star of the first magnitude, and there are no doubt thousands yet amongst us who were present at the performance of his oratorios, under his direction, at Norwich, or attended his concerts in London, and to whom this Autobiography will be of interest. We have little to say of it here — it speaks for itself. Simple and truthful throughout, it is a mirror of the mind of him who jotted down the details composing the same. Modest and unassuming at the commencement of his career, *Spohr* continued so till the end, notwithstanding the celebrity he achieved and the high position to which he attained. The praises showered upon him neither turned his brain nor puffed him up with pride; and he has left us an example of high morality, great amiability,

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II

and bright domestic virtues, too rare alas! among artists and men of genius.

Spohr was a man devoted to his art, and although far from wealthy, often sacrificed his time — which to him, as to most of us, was money — in giving gratuitous instruction to young men of ability too poor to pay for lessons; and not unfrequently has he unhesitatingly dismissed some rich, well-paying, but dull scholar to make way for a poor but talented pupil, in hopes of thereby benefitting his art — and this was his sole reward.

Another prominent trait in *Spohr's* character was his childlike simplicity, combined with never-failing good-nature and an inability to bear malice. Nor did the many unavoidable trials and vexations of a long life ever permanently disturb his good humour or sour his temper; and even gross injustice failed to do more than temporarily ruffle the calm serenity of his soul. Thus he passed through the world, an active and highly useful member of society, beloved and respected by all who knew him, till in process of time he went down to his grave full of years and honour.

As is explained in the text, the Autobiography comes to an end with the month of June 1838; but the description of the life and doings of the great master from that date till the time of his death was continued from reliable materials furnished by Mrs. *Spohr* and other members of the family; so that the whole forms a true account and lively picture of *Spohr's* earthly career from his cradle to his grave.

With these few remarks we submit the work to the perusal and kind consideration of the gentle reader.

London, October 1864.

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