

Chapter I

The Year 1803—Cherubini's Operas in Vienna—Beethoven's Engagement at the Theater-an-der-Wien—"Christus am Ölberg" again—Bridgetower and the "Kreutzer" Sonata—Negotiations with Thomson—New Friends—Mähler's Portrait of Beethoven.

KOTZEBUE, after a year of activity in Vienna as Alxinger's successor in the direction, under the banker Baron von Braun, of the Court Theatre, then a year of exile in Siberia (1800), whence he was recalled by that semi-maniac Paul, who was moved thereto by the delight which the little drama "Der Leibkutscher Peters III." had given him—then a short time in Jena, where his antagonism to Goethe broke out into an open quarrel, established himself in Berlin. There he began, with Garlieb Merkel (1802), the publication of a polemical literary journal called the "Freymüthige," Goethe, the Schlegels and their party being the objects of their polemics. Spazier's "Zeitung für die Elegante Welt" (Leipsic) was its leading opponent, until the establishment of a new literary journal at Jena.

At the beginning of 1803, Kotzebue was again in Vienna on his way to Italy. Some citations from the "Freymüthige" of this time have an especial value, as coming, beyond a doubt, from his pen. His position in society, his knowledge from experience of theatrical affairs in Vienna, his personal acquaintance with Beethoven and the other persons mentioned, all combine to enable him to speak with authority. An article in No. 58 (April 12) on the "Amusements of the Viennese after Carnival," gives a peep into the salon-life of the capital, and introduces to us divers matters of so much interest, as to excuse the want of novelty in certain parts.

. . . . Amateur concerts at which unconstrained pleasure prevails are frequent. The beginning is usually made with a quartet by Haydn or Mozart; then follows, let us say, an air by Salieri or Paër, then a pianoforte piece with or without another instrument *obbligato*, and the

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concert closes as a rule with a chorus or something of the kind from a favorite opera. The most excellent pianoforte pieces that won admiration during the last carnival were a new quintet¹ by Beethoven, clever, serious, full of deep significance and character, but occasionally a little too glaring, here and there *Odensprünge* in the manner of this master; then a quartet by Anton Eberl, dedicated to the Empress, lighter in character, full of fine yet profound invention, originality, fire and strength, brilliant and imposing. Of all the musical compositions which have appeared of late these are certainly two of the best. Beethoven has for a short time past been engaged, at a considerable salary, by the Theater-an-der-Wien, and will soon produce at that playhouse an oratorio of his composition entitled "Christus am Ölberg." Amongst the artists on the violin the most notable are Clement, Schuppanzigh (who gives the concerts in the Augarten in the summer) and Luigi Tomasini. Clement (Director of the orchestra an-der-Wien) is an admirable concert player; Schuppanzigh performs quartets very agreeably. Good dilettanti are Eppinger, Molitor and others. Great artists on the pianoforte are Beethoven [*sic*], Hummel, Madame Auernhammer and others. The famous Abbé Vogler is also here at present, and plays fugues in particular with great precision, although his rather heavy touch betrays the organist. Among the amateurs Baroness Ertmann plays with amazing precision, clearness and delicacy, and Fräulein Kurzbeck touches the keys with high intelligence and deep feeling. Mesdames von Frank and Natorp, formerly Gerardi and Sessi, are excellent singers.

A few words may be added to this picture from other sources. Salieri's duties being now confined to the sacred music of the Imperial Chapel, Süßmayr being far gone in the consumption of which he died on Sept. 16 (of this year—1803), Conti retaining but the name of orchestral director (he too died the next year), Liechtenstein and Weigl were now the conductors of the Imperial Opera; Henneberg and Seyfried held the same position under Schikaneder, as in the old house, so now in the new.

Schuppanzigh's summer concerts in the Augarten, and Salieri's Widows and Orphans concerts at Christmas and in Holy Week, were still the only regular public ones. Vogler had come from Prague in December, and Paër, who had removed to Dresden at Easter, 1802, was again in Vienna to produce his cantata "Das Heilige Grab," at the Widows and Orphans Concert. It was a period of dearth at Vienna in operatic composition. At the Court Theatre Liechtenstein had failed disastrously; Weigl had not been able to follow up the success of his "Corsär," and several years more elapsed before he obtained a permanent name in musical annals by his "Schweizerfamilie." Salieri's style had become too familiar to all Vienna

¹Probably the Quintet for Pianoforte and Wind-Instruments, Op. 16, published in March, 1801.

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longer to possess the charms of freshness and novelty. In the Theater-an-der-Wien, Teyber, Henneberg, Seyfried and others composed to order and executed their work satisfactorily enough—indeed, sometimes with decided, though fleeting, success. But no new work, for some time past, composed to the order of either of these theatres, had possessed such qualities as to secure a brilliant and prolonged existence. From another source, however, a new, fresh and powerful musical sensation had been experienced during the past year at both: and in this wise:

Schikaneder produced, on the 23rd of March, a new opera which had been very favorably received at Paris, called "Lodoiska," the music composed "by a certain Cherubini." The applause gained by this opera induced the Court Theatre to send for the score of another opera by the same composer, and prepare it for production on the 14th of August, under the title "Die Tage der Gefahr." Schikaneder, with his usual shrewdness, meantime was secretly rehearsing the same work, of which Seyfried in the beginning of July had made the then long journey to Munich to obtain a copy, and on the 13th—one day in advance of the rival stage—the musical public was surprised and amused to see "announced on the bill-board of the Wiener Theater the new opera 'Graf Armand, oder Die zwei unvergessliche Tage.'" In the adaptation and performance of the work, each house had its points of superiority and of inferiority; on the whole, there was little to choose between them; the result in both was splendid. The rivalry between the two stages became very spirited. The Court Theatre selected from the new composer's other works the "Medea," and brought it out November 6. Schikaneder followed, December 18, with "Der Bernardsberg" ("Elise"), "sadly mutilated." Twenty years later Beethoven attested the ineffaceable impression which Cherubini's music had made upon him. While the music of the new master was thus attracting and delighting crowded audiences at both theatres, the wealthy and enterprising Baron Braun went to Paris and entered into negotiations with Cherubini, which resulted in his engagement to compose one or more operas for the Vienna stage. Besides this "a large number of new theatrical representations from Paris" were expected (in August, 1802) upon the Court stage. "Baron Braun, who is expected to return from Paris, is bringing the most excellent ballets and operas with him, all of which will be performed here most carefully according to the taste of the French." Thus the "Allg. Mus. Zeitung."

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These facts bring us to the most valuable and interesting notice contained in the article from the “Frey müthige”—the earliest record of Beethoven’s engagement as composer for the Theater-an-der-Wien.

Zitterbarth, the merchant with whose money the new edifice had been built and put in successful operation, “who had no knowledge of theatrical matters outside of the spoken drama,” left the stage direction entirely in the hands of Schikaneder. In the department of opera that director had a most valuable assistant in Sebastian Meier—the second husband of Mozart’s sister-in-law, Mme. Hofer, the original *Queen of Night*—a man described by Castelli as a moderately gifted bass singer, but a very good actor, and of the noblest and most refined taste in vocal music, opera as well as oratorio; to whom the praise is due of having induced Schikaneder to bring out so many of the finest new French works, those of Cherubini included. It is probable, therefore, that, just now, when Baron von Braun was reported to have secured Cherubini for his theatre, and it became necessary to discover some new means of keeping up a successful competition, Meier’s advice may have had no small weight with Schikaneder. Defeat was certain unless the operas, attractive mainly from their scenery and grotesque humor, founded upon the “Thousand and One Nights” and their thousand and one imitations, and set to trivial and commonplace tunes, should give place to others of a higher order, quickened by music more serious, dignified and significant.

Whether Abbé Georg Joseph Vogler was really a great and profound musician, as C. M. von Weber, Gänsbacher and Meyerbeer held him to be, or a charlatan, was a matter much disputed in those days, as the same question in relation to certain living composers is in ours. Whatever the truth was, by his polemical writings, his extraordinary self-laudation, his high tone at the courts whither he had been called, his monster concerts, and his almost unperformable works, he had made himself an object of profound curiosity, to say the least. Moreover, his music for the drama “Hermann von Staufen, oder das Vehmgericht,” performed October 3, 1801, at the Theater-an-der-Wien (if the same as in “Hermann von Unna,” as it doubtless was), was well fitted to awaken confidence in his talents. His appearance in Vienna just now was, therefore, a piece of good fortune for Schikaneder, who immediately engaged him for his theatre.

Whether Beethoven had talents for operatic composition, no one could yet know; but his works had already spread to

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Paris, London, Edinburgh, and had gained him the fame of being the greatest living instrumental composer—Father Haydn of course excepted—and this much might be accepted as certain: viz., that his name alone, like Vogler's, would secure the theatre from pecuniary loss in the production of *one* work; and, perhaps—who could foretell?—he might develop powers in this new field which would raise him to the level of even Cherubini! He was personally known to Schikaneder, having played in the old theatre, and his “Prometheus” music was a success at the Court Theatre. So he, too, was engaged. The correspondent of the “Zeitung für die Elegante Welt” positively states, under date of June 29th: “Beethoven is composing an opera by Schikaneder.” There is nothing very improbable in this, though circumstances intervened which prevented the execution of such a project. Still the fact remains, that Schikaneder—that strange compound of wit and absurdity; of poetic instinct and grotesque humor; of shrewd and profitable enterprise and lavish prodigality; who lived like a prince and died like a pauper—has connected his name honorably with both Mozart and Beethoven.

These plain and obvious facts have been so misrepresented as to make it appear that this engagement of Beethoven was a grand stroke of policy conceived and executed by Baron von Braun, who, at the Theater-an-der-Wien (“newly built and to be opened in 1804”), had suddenly become aware of a genius and talent, to which, notwithstanding the “Prometheus” music, at the Imperial Opera, he had been oblivious during the preceding ten years! The date of the transaction is a sufficient confutation of this; as also of the notion that the success of the “Christus am Ölberg” led to his engagement. On the contrary, it was his engagement that enabled Beethoven to obtain the use of the Theater-an-der-Wien to produce that work in a concert to which we now come.

The “Wiener Zeitung” of Saturday, March 26 and Wednesday, March 30, 1803, contained the following

NOTICE

On the 5th (not the 4th) of April, Herr Ludwig van Beethoven will produce a new oratorio set to music by him, “Christus am Ölberg,” in the R. I. privil. Theater-an-der-Wien. The other pieces also to be performed will be announced on the large bill-board.

Beethoven must have felt no small confidence in the power of his name to awaken the curiosity and interest of the musical public, for he “doubled the prices of the first chairs, tripled those

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of the reserved and demanded 12 ducats (instead of 4 florins) for each box. But it was his first public appearance as a dramatic vocal composer, and on his posters he had several days before announced with much pomp that all the works would be of his composition. The result, however, answered his expectations, "for the concert yielded him 1800 florins."

The works actually performed were the first and second Symphonies, the Pianoforte Concerto in C minor and "Christus am Ölberg"; some others, according to Ries, were intended, but, owing to the length of the concert, which began at the early hour of six, were omitted in the performance. As no copy of the printed programme has been discovered, there is no means of deciding what these pieces were; but the "Adelaide," the *Scena et Aria* "Ah, perfido!" and the trio "Tremate, empj, tremate," suggest themselves, as vocal pieces well fitted to break the monotony of such a mass of orchestral music. It seems strange—knowing as we do Beethoven's vast talent for improvisation—that no extempore performance is reported.

"The symphonies and concertos," says Seyfried, "which Beethoven produced for the first time (1803 and 1808) for his benefit at the Theater-an-der-Wien, the oratorio, and the opera, I rehearsed according to his instructions with the singers, conducted all the orchestral rehearsals and personally conducted the performance."¹

The final general rehearsal was held in the theatre on the day of performance, Tuesday, April 5. On that morning, as was often the case when Beethoven needed assistance in his labors, young Ries was called to him early—about 5 o'clock. "I found him in bed," says Ries, "writing on separate sheets of paper. To my question what it was he answered, 'Trombones.' At the concert the trombone parts were played from these sheets. Had the copyist forgotten to copy these parts? Were they an afterthought? I was too young at the time to observe the artistic interest of the incident; but probably the trombones were an afterthought, as Beethoven might as easily have had the *uncopied parts as the copied.*" The correspondent of the "Zeitung für die Elegante Welt" renders a probable solution of Ries's doubt easy. He found the music to the "Christus" to be "on the whole good, and there are a few admirable passages, an air of the *Seraph* with trombone accompaniment in particular being of admirable effect." Beethoven had probably found the aria "Erzittre, Erde" to fail of its intended effect,

¹"Cäcilia," IX, p. 219.

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and added the trombone on the morning of the final rehearsal, to be retained or not as should prove advisable upon trial.¹ Ries continues:

The rehearsal began at 8 o'clock in the morning. It was a terrible rehearsal, and at half after 2 everybody was exhausted and more or less dissatisfied. Prince Karl Lichnowsky, who attended the rehearsal from the beginning, had sent for bread and butter, cold meat and wine in large baskets. He pleasantly asked all to help themselves and this was done with both hands, the result being that good nature was restored again. Then the Prince requested that the oratorio be rehearsed once more from the beginning, so that it might go well in the evening and Beethoven's first work in this genre be worthily presented. And so the rehearsal began again.

Seyfried in the article above quoted gives a reminiscence of this concert:

At the performance of the Concerto he asked me to turn the pages for him; but—heaven help me!—that was easier said than done. I saw almost nothing but empty leaves; at the most on one page or the other a few Egyptian hieroglyphs wholly unintelligible to me scribbled down to serve as clues for him; for he played nearly all of the solo part from memory, since, as was so often the case, he had not had time to put it all on paper.² He gave me a secret glance whenever he was at the end of one of the invisible passages and my scarcely concealable anxiety not to miss the decisive moment amused him greatly and he laughed heartily at the jovial supper which we ate afterwards.

The impression made on reading the few contemporary notices of this concert is that the new works produced were, on the whole, coldly received. The short report (by Kotzebue?) in the "Freymüthige" said:

Even our doughty Beethoven, whose oratorio "Christus am Ölberg" was performed for the first time at suburban Theater-an-der-Wien, was not altogether fortunate, and despite the efforts of his many admirers was unable to achieve really marked approbation. True, the two symphonies and single passages in the oratorio were voted very beautiful, but the work in its entirety was too long, too artificial in structure and lacking expressiveness, especially in the vocal parts. The text, by F. X. Huber, seemed to have been as superficially written as the music. But the concert brought 1800 florins to Beethoven and he, as well as Abbé Vogler, has been engaged for the theatre. He is to write one opera, Vogler three; for this they are to receive 10 per cent. of the receipts at the first ten performances, besides free lodgings.

¹The English editor of this biography found trombone parts written out by Beethoven among Mr. Thayer's posthumous papers; they belonged to the Trio in the Scherzo of the Ninth Symphony, and Beethoven's instructions to the copyist where to introduce them in the score plainly showed that they were an afterthought.

²It was not the case this time, for the manuscript of this Concerto bears in the composer's hand the date "1800."

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The writer in the "Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung" alone speaks of the "Christus" as having been received with "extraordinary approval." Three months afterwards another correspondent flatly contradicts this: "In the interest of truth," he writes, "I am obliged to contradict a report in the 'Musikalische Zeitung'; Beethoven's cantata did not please." To this Schindler remarks: "Even the composer agreed with this to this extent—that in later years he unhesitatingly declared that it had been a mistake to treat the part of *Christ* in the modern vocal style. The abandonment of the work after the first performance, as well as its tardy appearance in print (about 1810), permit us to conclude that the author was not particularly satisfied with the manner in which he had solved the problem, and that he probably made material changes in the music." The "Wiener Zeitung" of July 30, 1803, gives all the comment necessary on the "abandonment" and probable changes in the work, by announcing that "the favorable reception" of the oratorio had induced the Society of Amateur Concerts to resolve to repeat it on August 4. Moreover, Sebastian Meier's concert of March 27, 1804, opened with the second Symphony of Beethoven and closed with "Christus am Ölberg," being its fourth performance in one year.¹

A few days after this public appearance we have a sight of Beethoven again in private life. Dr. Joh. Th. Helm, the famous physician and professor in Prague, then a young man just of the composer's age (he was born December 11, 1770), accompanied Count Prichnowsky on a visit to Vienna. On the morning of the 16th of April these two gentlemen met Beethoven in the street, who, knowing the Count, invited them to Schuppanzigh's, "where some of his pianoforte sonatas which Kleinhalz had transcribed as string quartets were to be rehearsed. We met," writes Helm, in his manuscript autobiography (the citations were communicated to this work by Dr. Edmund Schebek of Prague)

a number of the best musicians gathered together, such as the violinists Krumbholz, Möser (of Berlin), the mulatto Bridgethauer, who in London had been in the service of the then Prince of Wales, also a Herr Schreiber and the 12 years' old² Kraft who played second. Even then Beethoven's muse transported me to higher regions, and the desire of all of these artists to have our musical director Wenzel

¹In a Conversation Book from the year 1825, Holz writes that till then "Christus am Ölberg" had always drawn full houses, but that the court official in charge of musical affairs (*Hofmusikgraf*) had not allowed further performances to be given.

²Anton Kraft was 14½ years old at the time.

BRIDGETOWER AND THE “KREUTZER SONATA” 9

Praupner in Vienna confirmed me in my opinion of the excellence of his conducting. Since then I have often met Beethoven at concerts. His piquant conceits modified the gloominess, I might say the lugubriousness, of his countenance. His criticisms were very keen, as I learned most clearly at concerts of the harpist Nadermann of Saxony and Mara, who was already getting along in years.

The “Bridgethauer,” mentioned by Held—whose incorrect writing of the name conveys to the German its correct pronunciation—was the “American ship captain who associated much with Beethoven” mentioned by Schindler and his copyists.

George Augustus Polgreen Bridgetower—a bright mulatto then 24 years old, son of an African father and German or Polish mother, an applauded public violinist in London at the age of ten years, and long in the service, as musician, of the Prince of Wales, afterwards George IV—was never in America and knew as much probably of a ship and the science of navigation as ordinary shipmasters do of the violin and the mysteries of musical counterpoint. In 1802 he obtained leave of absence to visit his mother in Dresden and to use the waters of Teplitz and Carlsbad, which leave was prolonged that he might spend a few months in Vienna. His playing in public and private at Dresden had secured him such favorable letters of introduction as gained him a most brilliant reception in the highest musical circles of the Austrian capital, where he arrived a few days before Held met him at Schuppanzigh’s. Beethoven, to whom he was introduced by Prince Lichnowsky, readily gave him aid in a public concert. The date of the concert has not been determined precisely; it was probably on May 24th. It has an interest on account of Beethoven’s connection with it; for the day of the concert was the date of the completion and performance of the “Kreutzer” Sonata.

The famous Sonata in A minor, Op. 47, with concertante violin, dedicated to Rudolph Kreutzer in Paris [says Ries on page 82 of the “Notizen”], was originally composed by Beethoven for Bridgetower, an English artist. Here things did not go much better (Ries is referring to the tardiness of the composition of the horn sonata which Beethoven wrote for Punto), although a large part of the first Allegro was ready at an early date. Bridgetower pressed him greatly because the date of his concert had been set and he wanted to study his part. One morning Beethoven summoned me at half after 4 o’clock and said: “Copy the violin part of the first Allegro quickly.” (His ordinary copyist was otherwise engaged.) The pianoforte part was noted down only here and there in parts. Bridgetower had to play the marvellously beautiful theme and variations in F from Beethoven’s manuscript at the concert in the Augarten at 8 o’clock in the morning because there was no time to copy it. The final Allegro, however, was beau-

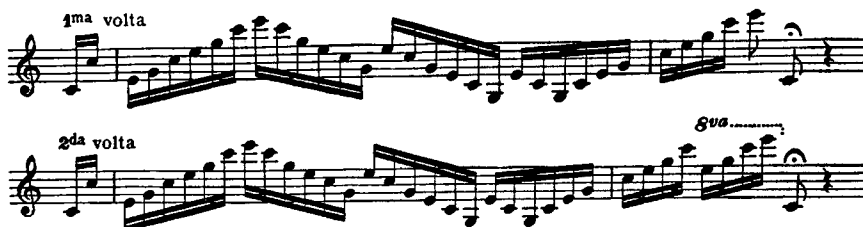
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tifully written, since it originally belonged to the Sonata in A major (Op. 30), which is dedicated to Czar Alexander. In its place Beethoven, thinking it too brilliant for the A major Sonata, put the variations which now form the finale.¹

Bridgetower was thoughtful enough to leave in his copy of the Sonata a note upon that first performance of it, as follows:

Relative to Beethoven's Op. 47.

When I accompanied him in this Sonata-Concertante at Wien, at the repetition of the first part of the Presto, I imitated the flight, at the 18th bar, of the pianoforte of this movement thus:



He jumped up, embraced me, saying: "Noch einmal, mein lieber Bursch!" ("Once again, my dear boy!") Then he held the open pedal during this flight, the chord of C as at the ninth bar.

Beethoven's expression in the Andante was so chaste, which always characterized the performance of all his *slow movements*, that it was unanimously hailed to be repeated twice.

George Polgreen Bridgetower.

Bridgetower was mentioned in a letter from Beethoven to Baron von Wetzlar, in this language, under date May 18:

Although we have never addressed each other I do not hesitate to recommend to you the bearer, Mr. Brishdower, a very capable virtuoso who has a complete command of his instrument.

Besides his concertos he plays quartets admirably, I greatly wish that you make him known to others. He has commended himself favorably to Lobkowitz and Fries and all other eminent lovers (of music).

I think it would be not at all a bad idea if you were to take him for an evening to Therese Schönfeld, where I know many friends assemble and at your house. I know that you will thank me for having made you acquainted with him.

¹The following observation on the sonata by Czerny is also interesting: "In the Sonata written for Bridgetower and dedicated to Kreutzer, Op. 47 (of which the first movement was composed in four days and the other two [?] added from a sonata already completed), the concluding passage



is said to be borrowed from a piece of Kreutzer's already in print. I had this assurance immediately after the publication of the Beethoven Sonata from a French musician (1805). It would be worth while to investigate the matter. Perhaps therein lies the reason of its dedication." And further: "Bridgetower was a mulatto and played very extravagantly; when he played the sonata with Beethoven it was laughed at."