

Quartets for Four Horns. Horn quartets from the Ballenstedt Court of 1850.

POSTSCRIPT

The issued horn quartets from the German "Folk Romanticism" will be enjoyed by the versed professional musician as well as the ambitious amateur. Voice leading and syntax are of high quality and reveal masterly craftsmanship, which allows the performing hornist to develop the rich sound potential of his instrument. The brisk and bellowing hunting piece is accompanied by the melancholic Adagio, the merry Polka is followed by the adaptation of a popular song. Particular attention should be paid to some concert pieces, presumably original compositions, which assign soloistic tasks to the first horn. The selection presented here is based on a handwritten collection of 105 quartets, which was compiled around 1850 for the hornists of the duke's orchestra at Ballenstedt.

The small town of Ballenstedt located beneath the Harz mountains was then a residence of the duchy of Anhalt-Bernburg, one of the small states of central Germany, fairly autonomous which existed till 1863. Its claim for representation and above all its desires for entertainment at the duke's court required quite a sizeable orchestra; already in the 1840s it employed - in addition to a considerable number of string, wind and percussion players - a complete set of four hornists.

The duke's musicians contributed to the embellishment of the evenings in the palace and to the entertainment at the duke's table; in addition it gave symphonies, to which "the educated public had free entry", as the painter Wilhelmine Bardua of Ballenstedt writes in the recollections of her youth in 1862. Besides, the musicians were entrusted with the opera service at the court theatre; works e.g. by Auber, Beethoven, Lortzing, Meyerbeer and Weber resounded in cooperation with non-local companies of actors and singers. Like soloists and string ensembles recruiting from the orchestra, the horn quartet also emerged outside its official band assignments with independent performances, for instance at the duke's sledge parties "under horn music" (W. von Kugelgen 1841), at summer soirées or in spiritual contexts.

The music for the Ballenstedt hornists is the work of composers whose names had a popular resonance in the middle of the 19th century at least in the Anhalt regions, but at times beyond, even into the German metropolises.

Franz Abt (1829-1885), in 1841 for some months music director at Bernburg, the real capital of the duchy, even gained some fame as a choirmaster, which even reached the New World to win him the acquaintance of Carl Schurz, the American Secretary of the Interior, a German immigrant. Abt, who held some friendly contact with Lortzing, Mendelssohn und Schumann during his studies in Leipzig, was the conductor at the Duke's court at Braunschweig from 1852 to 1882. His compositions for piano song and men's choir are hailed by "Meyers Konversationslexikon" (1889) for their abundance of melodies and pleasant harmony.

Karl Appel from Dessau (1812-1895), however, never left the artistic circles of his home town. Being a student of Friedrich Schneider, the conductor of the local court ensemble, he acquired a reputable position as the concertmaster of the Duke's orchestra, which he continued to hold under Schneider and his successor Eduard Thiele for almost thirty years. For the needs of his closer musical vicinity he composed "instructive violin bits" (Riemann 1929) as well as literature for singers, especially men's choirs but also smaller pieces for instrumental music such as the horn quartets printed here.

August Hänsel proved himself to be rather productive mainly in the field of educated light music, as confirmed by a list of his works in Pazdirek's "Universal Handbook of Music Literature of all Times and Peoples" (vol. 11, Vienna 1907). "Merriment in Serious Times" is the title of his concert waltz op 56, which may well be regarded as a motto for the larger part of his compositions. However, Hänsel, who worked chiefly during the 2nd third of the 19th century in the ambit of the court at Dresden (he also composed a funeral march on King Friedrich August II's death), also added a number of rather solemn works to his oeuvre.

among these a string quartet and a concertino for two French horns and piano. The horn quartets presented here are set on a fair requirement level.

Friedrich Wilhelm Kücken (1810-1882) advanced at a youthful age to become the music teacher of the princes at the Court of Mecklenburg in Schwerin. Later study visits took him to Vienna to Simon Sechter and to Paris to Jacques Halevy. From 1851 to 1861 he held the position of a theatre conductor at Stuttgart. As a composer Kücken emerged early with an opera ("The escape to Switzerland" 1839), but the immense popularity which he enjoyed with his contemporaries was based on his numerous men's choruses and songs, which "almost without exception prove fresh, melodious invention and excel in singableness and perfection in form."

Heinrich August Neithardt (1793-1861) got his musical education in Schleiz, his home town, where he worked as a musician at court already at a youthful age. In 1817 he joined a Prussian military band in Berlin as a rank hornist. At the same time he studied composition under C.F. Zelter. After he had left the military service he was entrusted with the general supervision of all the men's choirs of the elite regiments and with the direction of the cathedral choir. In addition, he enlarged the Berlin military bands to become sizeable wind orchestras and he also had a substantial share in establishing the popular garden concerts. His compositions are adjusted to these purposes and stand out for their solid craftsmanship and folksyness. His song "I am a Prussian, do you know my colours?" (1832) can be found in every Kommersbuch (i.e. songbook esp. for students).

The fame of Louis Spohr from Braunschweig (1784-1859) – in contrast to other composers represented in this collection - extends well into the sphere of sound poets renowned to the present day. "Not too mozart'sh any more, rather sometimes already schumann'sh" is the way in which Oskar Bie (1913) understands the sound of Spohr's operas, but his symphonies, violin concerts and chamber musics are also located in this world between, in which - next to Weber and Mendelssohn - a romantic realm of its own developed. Spohr, who was concertmaster in Gotha and conductor in Vienna and Kassel, was always particularly affectionate towards the horn, supplying soft melodies, but also virtuoso masterstrokes (Oktett op. 75).

Eduard Thiele (1812-1895) like Karl Appel was a student of the Dessau court conductor Friedrich Schneider. Thiele worked as a conductor for 49 years in all, first at the court theatre in Köthen from 1833 to 1855, then in Dessau until 1882; there many works by Richard Wagner were performed under his direction, which gained the town the reputation of a "Bayreuth of the North". Musicians from Dessau were assigned for the Bayreuth festival orchestra, among them the hornist Karl Demnitz, who blowed the very first "Siegfriedruf". As a composer, and particularly during his time in Köthen, Thiele wrote works for choir, orchestra, chamber music and songs.

Although the quartet collection from which the present examples are taken was assembled by one single scribe, there is neither homogeneity nor regularity as regards notations on articulation and dynamics. The editors strove to achieve a sensible assimilation of the four parts without curtailing musical diversity or diverting too much from the manuscript. As in the original, notations on articulation and dynamics are used very sparingly. Therefore the constant use of staccato marks in marches and polkas seemed out of place; the versed performer will of course choose a shorter articulation here. In the manuscripts the 4th horn is constantly noted in the treble clef. Only where this part is kept very low, a transfer into the bass clef appeared necessary and useful. The traditional German bass clef notation for the horn is used, meaning one octave lower than sounding.

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