CARL LOEWE
A Recital of Songs

(Johann) Carl (Gottfried) Loewe was born, the last of 12 children, in 1796 at Löbejün near Halle. His father, a poorly paid schoolmaster and cantor, began his musical education, but died young. The family was all but without means, however Loewe was bright and had talent, so that his education continued by virtue of grants and scholarships. He sang so well that in 1807 he was invited to join the choir of the court chapel in Cöthen. After two years he left to enter the Gymnasium of Halle's Franke Institut. Türk, the director of the Institut, also conducted Halle's choral society with its season of twelve concerts. The choristers were expected to sing for distinguished visitors. This led to Loewe being awarded an annuity of 300 Thalers by King Jérôme of Westphalia which enabled him to study music. He had already taught himself sufficiently to play Bach's *Wohltemperierte Klavier* and he was now taught daily by Türk. In addition he studied French and Italian.

However, in 1813 Türk died and there was a state of war which led to the end of French domination of Germany. The king fled, leaving Loewe without his annuity. Fortunately, the head of the Gymnasium, Niemeyer, was able to have him admitted to the University of Halle to read theology. Türk was succeeded by Naue who founded a Singakademie modelled on that of Berlin. Loewe became a member and there he met Julie von Jakob whom, in 1821, he married.

His earliest ballads, written in 1818, included "Edward" and "Erlkönig". (Schubert's version though written three years earlier, was not published until three years later.)

On journeys to Dresden, Jena and Weimar in 1819 and 1820 he met Goethe, Hummel and Weber. In the latter year also he became cantor and organist of Stettin and in the following year he became the district's director of music and organist of the Church of St. Jacobus.

Loewe became famous throughout Germany as a composer, a conductor and a singer, and for the Viennese he was the "North-German Schubert". He had a good baritone voice and he sang almost exclusively his own songs. He was elected a member of the Academy of Berlin in 1837. He was a court favourite of Friedrich Wilhelm III and of his successor, Friedrich Wilhelm IV who was much enamoured of his ballads.

Loewe travelled extensively. In 1844 he was in Vienna and in 1847 in London where he was very well received a court, Prince Albert turning the pages for him as he played and sang. He heard Jenny Lind for the first time on this visit. Unlike Mendelssohn, whose influence on music in England was profound, Loewe came and went unremembered.

In 1864 he suffered a stroke and lay unconscious for six weeks. Two years later, perhaps in view of his illnesses and absences on his extensive travels, he was made to resign. He went to Kiel where in 1869, following another stroke, he died.

He was unfortunate in personal matters also; he was three times married and three times after a short while a widower.

Loewe composed five operas of which only *Die Zerstörung Jerusalems* and *Die Drei Wünsche* (under Spontini) were performed with success. There were also about sixteen oratorios on subjects ecclesiastic and secular, and works of almost every other genre. There was little stylistic difference between the operas and the oratorios and the Germans described them as süß-Biedermeierlich. His solo songs, about two-hundred in number, were published after his death in seventeen volumes. The best of them, and the best, perhaps two or three dozen in extent, are truly fine, continue to be sung in Germany. Indeed, Helen Henschel, daughter of Sir George Henschel, remarked that her father generally sang Loewe's "Erlkönig" in preference to Schubert's as Loewe's setting fitted the text better. Loewe's particular talent was an ability to delineate character by means relatively simple rhythms and melodies.

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