

klangp

“...An Intensive Talent ...”

by Walter Weidringer

It had been the great musicological sensation of the 1990s when British Mahler researcher Paul Banks en passant compiled a catalogue of the musical estate of the former's fellow student Hans Rott and in doing so unearthed a capital Symphony in E major. This work which as to concept and in details anticipated Mahler gained considerable publicity since then, last but not least by several CD productions, but it also blocked a closer look at Hans Rott's other works for a long time. Some of these treasures will be published by Doblinger now.



1. Hans Rott (1883)

"This morning the patient called the wing warden Mr Hansum to his bed and said the following to him: 'Mr Hansum, I ask you to convey my best thanks to the attending physicians, whose visit I hardly will live to see, for the loving and friendly treatment and also to you and your wife my warmest thanks for the careful supply with food; I have had better dreams for my future, my works have been acknowledged by great masters, I had believed to achieve a modest existence in life; now I realize that [it] had been a hollow illusion and that I have to die in the lunatic asylum.' From this moment on the patient was completely confused again; his

condition worsened rapidly."¹ This says an entry in the medical history, journal no. 80 of the Provincial Lunatic Asylum of Lower Austria² of June 23, 1884 - the last documented "lucid moment"³ of a mortally ill man: The next day's entry just states: "From time to time slight shivering; otherwise somnolent, able to take liquid food only", and on June 25 we finally read the laconic entry: "† 7.30 in the morning."⁴ The name of the deceased is Hans Carl Maria Rott; his age: almost 26 years; occupation: conductor; last address: Rotenturmstraße 16/1/4; interned since October 1880; diagnosis: insanity, hallucinatory persecution mania.

Thus a great future ended before it had begun.

Who was Hans Rott?

It certainly had not been so-called "well-ordered circumstances" into which Hans was born on August 1, 1858: He was the illegitimate child of the not yet 18-year-old operetta singer Maria Rosalia Lutz (1841-1872); his father, the already 51-year-old singer and actor Carl Mathias Roth⁵ (1807-1976), also engaged at the Theater an der Wien, was still a married man at that time - his wife Christine was living with the children in Hungary. 1862, two years after the death of his wife, Hans's parents married and he was legitimated along with his meanwhile born half-brother Karl, the result of a liaison between Maria Rosalia and the Archduke Wilhelm. When Hans, at 16, two years after the early death of his beloved mother, had been introduced to these only too human entanglements,

the knowledge of his premarital birth and Maria Rosalia's other kinds of "misconduct" during her marriage had a shattering effect on him: From that moment on, on the one hand, Rott seemed to have felt a great affection for his parents, an almost cult-like veneration (his father died in 1876), on the other hand he seemed to have taken the decision for himself to enter "chaste" into marriage, thus "atoning" for his mother's "dishonour" etc. To consider this dilemma the germ of his later illness is a speculation that altogether makes sense.

At the Conservatoire

"Due to his musical nature my father recognized a talent for music in me; what else could he do than send me to the Conservatoire?"⁶ Rott wrote in retrospective to Hans Richter in 1880. Prior to that, however, his father had made him attend three classes of the Erste öffentliche höhere Handelslehranstalt Wien [First Public Secondary Commercial School of Vienna] after having attended the lower grades of the Akademische Gymnasium [Academic Secondary School] where he ranged among the "most excellent students."⁷ The call of music, however, was stronger: In autumn 1874 Hans Rott took up his studies at the Conservatoire and first studied harmony with Hermann Grädener, piano with Leopold Landskron, organ with Anton Bruckner and later on also counterpoint and composition with Franz Krenn. To the closer circle of fellow students belonged no lesser men than Gustav Mahler, Hugo Wolf, Rudolf Krzyzanowski and last but

not least Friedrich Löwi (also Löwy, later Löhr or Loehr) with whom he developed a special friendship. Rott's abilities which, at least in the first years of his studies, had explicitly been officially recognized and considered prize-worthy by the Conservatoire, quickly met with a positive response outside that inner circle, too: Guido Adler, for instance, a not so close acquaintance of Rott, observes in 1916 "the highly talented young musician" Rott was "the most gifted of all of us who in the 70s belonged to the circle of the Conservatoire"⁶ Neither could this sentence save Rott from sinking into oblivion for almost one hundred years nor Gustav Mahler's meanwhile famous words.

Roast Beef or Quargeln?

"It is completely impossible to estimate what music has lost in him. His genius soars to such heights even in his first symphony, written at the age of twenty, and which makes him - without exaggeration - the founder of the new symphony as I understand it. He, however, did not reach entirely what he wanted. It is as if someone swings back to throw as far as he can and, still clumsy, does not quite hit the goal. Yet I know what he is aiming at. Yes, he is so related to my very own that he and I seem to me like two fruits from the same tree, brought forth by the same soil, nourished by the same air. He could have been so infinitely much to me and perhaps the two of us together would have fairly exhausted the content of this new age which was dawning for music."⁹ Mahler's explicit hint to Hans Rott was, as Helmuth Kreysing¹⁰ states with laconic brevity, "simply overlooked for many years". In defiance of the exuberant judgement of later days, they had been anything but friends, they once even had a dispute in which Rott's pecuniary difficulties had certainly been a factor (following a stage accident his father had been permanently disabled, impoverished and had died soon afterwards; an inheritance left to him by his godfather in 1879 was soon spent). It was about the question whether a "composer needed roast beef and such things for a meal or whether he could also do with "Quargeln" [translator's note: Quargel, a small, round, strong-smelling cheese, at that time cheap]. Mahler, although in fact the far better off, although still the often completely "on the rocks" bohemian, with all the

violence of his nature took sides for the cheaper food, called his opponent a "roast beef composer" and appointed himself "quargel composer" - they were short of becoming real enemies over this dispute. Ten years later Mahler [...] had thoroughly changed his attitude in this respect."¹¹ - Rott, too, had changed his opinion, however on a different issue: He, who in 1876 as scholar of the Wiener Akademische Wagner-Verein [Viennese Academic Wagner Society] had attended the first Bayreuth Festival and the world premiere of the "Ring des Nibelungen" left the Society three years later: He had learned to hate the blind apologetic attitude of the institutionalized Wagnerians, his artistic development had found its own path long before.

The Frozen System

And it was a far cry from the traditional teaching at the Conservatoire: The first movement of his *Symphony in E major*, handed in for the composition competition of 1878, was rather met with frowns - despite Bruckner's explicit intercession. Rott finished his studies at the Conservatoire "with distinction", however without gaining the prize in composition he had hoped to win. "To indulge in windy rhetoric in a speculative way, not to follow the urge which as the highest need drives a man to introduce his fellow creatures to the

2. Hans Rott, *Prelude to Julius Caesar*

sphere of great and pure opinions by a key he alone had found: this is preached there, everywhere whenever it is believed that art could be created en masse. How many musicians are there, and how few artists! - That I found such behaviour disgusting and that I had to voice my disgust is due to my honest nature. [...] The fact that I failed everywhere drove me on; quite understandable, after all, for I was not capable of anything; but all the others were even less capable - they received "golden" medals, and I was proud of being isolated. Since I have left that "insurance company for a higher lack of talent" (to quote one of the most apt expressions of the great Wagner) I have been living for myself and am astonished about our "production capacity" - to me it seems as if our whole age was to be suffocated in notes - in music notes and in Jewish banknotes. That is how I go on living, a lonely man, I work and work, but why? Because I have to."¹² Had Rott appreciated without envy the success of his colleagues and calmly taken notice of his relative failure¹³, these lines written later on, however, convey a bitterness which cannot be denied. The financial bottlenecks he had to face again and again and from which friends rescued him many times, are to be seen in this context and took a toll on his health: In the winter of 1879/80, unpleasant states of excitement and an increased heart action shook the up to then gigantic man, a very picture of strength and health, for the first time. He had given up the strenuous occupation as organist at the Piaristen in the Josefstadt, several recommendations by Anton Bruckner¹⁴ for St. Florian had not been successful, the constant teaching of music wore him down. But there was something else to give him trouble.

Louise

Rott spent the summer of 1879 in Neustift am Walde, at that time still a rural suburb of Vienna¹⁵ from where he had written to Friedrich Löwy enthusiastic descriptions of nature already in April¹⁶. Amidst this idyll he also experienced his first deep love which went unfulfilled in the end: his love for the then 17-year-old Louise Löwy, the sister of his friend. It was a love story "of which nothing can be related [...] because nothing happened"¹⁷, as Maja Loehr (Friedrich Löwy's daughter) informs us with

movingly discreet tactfulness. Radiantly happy he wrote a poem, his "song of courtship", more than 300 verse, to be laid down at the feet of the girl he worshipped. But "when Hans Rott, in the spring of 1880, after months of hesitation, wanted to give [the poem] to the girl he secretly loved and who secretly loved him, asking her to show it to no one, the girl who had grown up in the loving and strict discipline of a orderly home did not dare to accept the paper under such a condition. What he had written down with an ardent heart in longing and hope remained unread until after his death."¹⁸ However ambivalent the whole relationship may have been to Rott, it did fan his creative power: At that time he created the bold *String Quartet in c minor* which anticipated future compositional strategies "the first movement of which follows up the introduction to Mozart's *Dissonances Quartet* and for some moments shows striking atonal binds: its beginning has become almost famous in the meantime. The other movements are not to be underestimated, in the scherzo, for instance, there is a varying harmonic-melodic ostinato which points towards Bartók", as Heinz-Klaus Metzger¹⁹ states. Without any aspect of a secured existence he could not even think of marriage - thus he had to find himself an occupation at last.

Into the Twilight

The prospect of a position as conductor of the choir "Concordia" of the "Association des Chanteurs Alsaciens" in the Alsatian town of Mulhouse which rapidly took shape, had, however, a strong psychic pressure upon Rott: Was he really to leave his circle of friends so important to him for an indefinite time and go abroad? Louise was shocked and implored him to stay. Quite understandable it was with an increasing energy that he tried to become established in Austria at last. To gain a state scholarship for musicians he handed in the *Symphony* and the *Pastoral Prelude* and sought audiences with Brahms, Goldmark and Hanslick, the core jury members. Soon quite a number of legends developed as to that meeting with Brahms which - considering Rott's affiliation with the "New Germans which was no secret - was certainly ill-fated: After all it was Bruckner himself who, standing at Rott's bier, is said to have accused Brahms to have been responsible for the tragic end

of the young composer by his unjust judgement²⁰. (Eckhardt van den Hoogen²¹ even goes so far as to hint to the kinky hypothesis that Brahms was to blame for the "insanity" of Schumann, Rott and Wolf.) What seems to be certain is that Brahms harshly rebuked above all the *Symphony*. To Rott this is a lost case now - but Hans Richter could perform the *Symphony* with the Wiener Philharmoniker, couldn't he? In detailed letters Rott explains his situation and asks for a meeting which is postponed several times due to Richter's engagements. And when it takes place at long last, Richter's recognition does not go beyond relatively noncommittal words of praise. The "miracle" Rott had hoped for till the very last moment, it did not happen, and the 1st of November, the day he had to take up his position in Mulhouse was drawing nearer and nearer. "For madness is truly just one step ahead of me"²², Rott wrote already on July 8 in his private notes. Warnings such as his hints that he felt being observed by delegates from Mulhouse and by Brahms the unsuspecting friends do not take seriously. The departure²³ which apparently ended an unmastered struggle caused by an outward restraint, produced the expected crisis: At a stopover in Linz he hears raps at the walls of his room, and when the journey continued, in a paranoid fit he threatens with his revolver a fellow traveller who is about to light a cigar: He thinks that Brahms has filled the compartment with dynamite. His journey comes to an end even before he has left the Austrian territory: ambulance men take him back to Vienna where first he is committed to the Psychiatric Clinic of the General Hospital from where he is finally committed to the Provincial Lunatic Asylum of Lower Austria. Although, at first, a successful treatment seems to be "not impossible"²⁴, we read a statement in the medical history - after almost one year of treatment - saying: "successful treatment no longer to be expected"²⁵.

"... An Intensive Talent..."

Two attempted suicides, profound sadness, stupor but also relatively lucid moments during which he wrote letters, also composed and even thought about an asylum for fellow sufferers - that's what Rott's life and sufferings in the asylum looked like with his friends and his brother sincerely sympathizing. What he had so ardently hoped for, he

now "almost indifferently"²⁶ took notice of: On February 20, 1881 Rott was granted an artist's resp. art scholarship amounting to 300 fl (today's value: approximately 2,700.00 Euro) - the jury members had been Hanslick, Brahms and Goldmark. Rott was number four in a list, "the four first-mentioned of which at least the jury wanted to receive a scholarship". The reason for this judgement reads: "The compositions presented by Rott belong by all means to the greater art forms [...] A not yet balanced but intensive talent which, considering the youth and the serious ambitions of this composer, promises outstanding results reveals itself in his works."²⁷ It was, however, too late.

Very similar to Grillparzer's famous obituary on Franz Schubert ("Music here buried a great treasure but still greater hopes."), despite all acknowledgement, these lines also convey how much the works in question went beyond their time. Meanwhile, however, Hans Rott's time has come, too: What we own by him shall no longer be buried.

Hans Rott at Doblinger:

PRELUDE TO JULIUS CAESAR in B major for Orchestra (1877)
Orchestration: 2, 2, 2, 2, double bassoon - 4, 3, 3, 1 - timpani - strings
Performance materials may be hired
Study score: Stp. 726

STRING QUARTET in c minor (1879/80)
DM 1358 - score / parts

THE COMPLETE LIEDER
DM 1369

Bibliography:

Harten, Uwe (ed.), Hans Rott (1858 - 1884). Biographie, Briefe, Aufzeichnungen und Dokumente aus dem Nachlaß von Maja Loehr (1888 - 1964) [Hans Rott (1858 - 1884). Biography, Letters, Notes and Documents from the Estate of Maja Loehr (1888 - 1964)], Vienna 2000

Metzger, Heinz-Klaus / Riehn, Rainer (ed.): Hans Rott. Der Begründer der neuen Symphonie mit Beiträgen von Helmuth Kreysing, Frank Litterscheid und Maja Loehr [Hans Rott. The Founder of the New Symphony with Contributions by Helmuth Kreysing, Frank Litterscheid and Maja Loehr],

München 1999 (= Musik-Konzepte 103/104)

Links:

<http://www.hansrott.de/>

<http://www.hans-rott.org/>

(Internationale Hans Rott Gesellschaft Wien)

The image shows a page of a musical score for the song 'Der Sänger' by Hans Rott. The score is written for voice and piano. It includes the title 'Der Sänger' and the composer's name 'Hans Rott'. The lyrics are in German. The score is divided into three systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment line. The lyrics are: 'Ich singe dir, mein Lieber, ein Lied, das ich dir geschrieben habe. Ich singe dir, mein Lieber, ein Lied, das ich dir geschrieben habe. Ich singe dir, mein Lieber, ein Lied, das ich dir geschrieben habe.' The score is in 2/4 time and the key signature has one flat (B-flat).

3. Hans Rott, *The Singer*

- ¹ Harten cit., p. 241.
- ² "Men's Ward 3rd class", Lazarettgasse 14 in the 9th district of Vienna (the asylum was called "of Lower Austria" because it was only in the First Republic that Vienna became a Bundesland of its own right.) Maja Loehr made excerpts of the medical history in the archives of the Psychiatric Clinic Steinhof on June 5, 1949; the original is lost (it probably had fallen victim to a water damage).
- ³ Loehr, Maja, Hans Rott (1858 - 1884), biography [1949]; Harten cit., p. 95.
- ⁴ Harten cit., p. 242.
- ⁵ The name used to be written "Rott" by the family's next generation.
- ⁶ Musik-Konzepte cit., p. 95.
- ⁷ Harten cit., p. 22.
- ⁸ In his book "Gustav Mahler", Vienna, 1916; Harten cit., p. 66.
- ⁹ Bauer-Lechner, Nathalie: Gustav Mahler in den Erinnerungen von Nathalie Bauer-Lechner. Nach Tagebuchaufzeichnungen herausgegeben von Herbert Kilian [Recollections of Gustav Mahler. Based upon her diary, edited by Herbert Kilian], Hamburg 1984, p. 117.
- ¹⁰ Preface to Musik-Konzepte, p. 5.
- ¹¹ Heinrich Krzyzanowski 1925 in a letter to Maja Loehr, Harten cit., p. 75.
- ¹² Hans Rott to Hans Richter [August 23, 1880]; Musik-Konzepte cit., p. 95.
- ¹³ See Maja Loehr's biography on Hans Rott; Harten, p. 64.

- ¹⁴ On June 14, 1877 and on March 12, 1880.
- ¹⁵ Today in the XIXth district.
- ¹⁶ On April 1, 1880, Harten, p. 124f.
- ¹⁷ Harten cit., p. 79.
- ¹⁸ Harten cit., p. 79f.
- ¹⁹ Musik-Konzepte cit., p. 5
- ²⁰ See Franz Marschner, Erinnerungen an Anton Bruckner [Remembering Anton Bruckner], in Österreichisch-Ungarische Revue [Austrian-Hungarian Revue], Bd. [vol.] 30, H. [issue] 1, 1906, p. 1-16 - Harten cit., p. 88.
- ²¹ "Hans Rott" in: CD-Beiheft zu [CD booklet for] Hans Rott, Symphony. Pastorales Vorspiel, Radio Symphonieorchester Wien, Dennis Russel [sic!] Davies, cpo 999 854-2, p. 7.
- ²² Harten cit., p. 93.
- ²³ Apparently by the night train on October 21 [see Harten, p. 93, note 158].
- ²⁴ Harten cit., p. 238.
- ²⁵ October 7, 1881, Harten cit., p. 240.
- ²⁶ Harten cit., p. 94.
- ²⁷ Harten cit., note 134, p. 88f.

Article (in German) published in

klang:punkte (Zeitschrift des Musikverlags Doblinger) Nr. 16, Frühjahr (Spring) 2003 (p. 3 – 5)

© **Hannelore Wirth, 2003 (Translation)**

With kind permission of

**Musikverlag Doblinger
Dorotheergasse 10
A-1010 Wien
Austria**