

A Beethoven Hoax?

Author(s): Ernest Newman

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sat with their Royal Highnesses. A pianoforte was in tempting readiness on the platform, but in vain was the net spread in the sight of such a knowing bird. Liszt was warmly urged by the audience (which consisted only of gentlemen) to play, but to the great amusement of the Royal party he merely stood by the pianoforte and bowed. On the way home he remarked that he did not care to play to all those men, but that on the following Sunday, when he was to dine at Marlborough House with the Prince and Princess of Wales, he would play to the Princess and the other ladies.

As already stated it was designed that Liszt's oratorio 'St. Elisabeth' should be performed during his visit. On an evening which happened to be one of the rehearsal nights of the Novello Choir, organized for the performance and conducted by Mr. (now Sir) Alexander Mackenzie, Liszt had been dining in town with his bosom friend, Mr. Walter Bache, and it was suggested that he should visit the rehearsal which was being held at Store Street Music Hall. This he agreed to do, and the choir and conductor were duly warned. A series of distance signals was arranged in order that when the composer arrived he should be greeted by the jubilant finale from his oratorio. He received a tremendous ovation, after which he said, 'What can I do? I cannot speak to them, I must play to them': and to the joy of all present he sat down at the pianoforte used for accompanying and for the first time since his arrival exhibited his marvellous powers.

When Liszt arrived at Dover on his way home, the Mayor and Corporation of that town presented him with an address. That this courtesy and mark of respect to a great man came spontaneously from the Municipal authorities of an English provincial town, is a lasting credit to their discernment. We regret we are not able to record the name of the enlightened Mayor who thus honoured himself and his town in honouring Liszt and musical art.

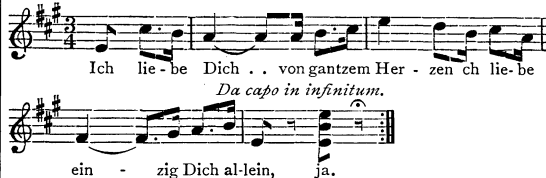
Liszt's last words, uttered in the train at Calais, were: 'If I live another "paar Jahren" I shall come back.' But, alas, this was not to be! When the news of Liszt's death at Bayreuth, on July 31, 1886, reached England, Mr. Alfred Littleton at once telegraphed to Queen Victoria and the Prince and Princess of Wales. Sympathetic replies were received, and later a message came from the Queen to ask Mr. Littleton to purchase a wreath and place it on Liszt's grave at Bayreuth on Her Majesty's behalf. This request, of course, was fulfilled.

A BEETHOVEN HOAX?

By ERNEST NEWMAN.

A few weeks ago *Die Musik* fluttered us all with an article by Herr Paul Bekker in which he announced the discovery of a hitherto unknown Beethoven letter. This was printed in full in the article, and a facsimile of it was given. It is dated simply '8 July, afternoon,' and signed 'Ludwig.' It begins, 'Dearest one—My letter has gone, I posted it yesterday'; and goes on to speak of his

anguish at being separated from his beloved, of the prejudice of her proud family against him, and so on. Then he writes 'Ah! could I tell you in tones how you are my all-in-all—it would be easier for me—Not a bad theme occurred to me: it begins thus *:



Now the famous 'Unsterbliche Geliebte' letters, on the problem of which I wrote at some length in the *Musical Times* for June of this year, are dated '6 July in the morning,' 'Monday evening, 6 July,' and 'Good morning on July 7.' In the second and third of the letters Beethoven speaks with some uncertainty and anxiety about the posts. Herr Bekker contends that the date of the new letter, '8 July, afternoon,' and the remark 'My letter has gone, I posted it yesterday,' make it practically certain that the new letter is the fourth of the same chain; this conclusion, he says, can only be upset by the discovery of *another* love-letter of the 7th July in some other year, for it is incredible that the contents of a letter of 8th July in one year should form so logical a sequel to those of a letter of 7th July in quite another year. The musical quotation is a theme from the finale of Beethoven's string Quintet, Op. 29, which work, according to the composer's own note in the autograph, was written in 1801. As the 6th July was a Monday in the year 1801, that seems a further confirmation of the old theory that the 'Unsterbliche Geliebte' episode belongs to that year, in which case, of course, the 'Geliebte' must have been the youthful Countess Giulietta Guicciardi. We know that her family were set against her marriage with Beethoven; and Herr Bekker points triumphantly to the reference in the new letter to the opposition of her 'proud relations.' Altogether the case, at first sight, looks so beautifully complete that it is no wonder a good many journalists accepted it almost unquestioningly, as did the *Manchester Guardian*, for example, in an amusingly precipitate article that finished up thus:

Music-lovers will still regard the 'Moonlight Sonata' as the worthiest and most convincing musical pledge of Beethoven's love for Giulietta Guicciardi. And assuming that the newly found letter is authentic, we may now from its evidence and from that of the score of the quintet—which gives, in Beethoven's handwriting, 1801 as the time of its composition—accept as true the popular tradition that she and none other was Beethoven's 'unsterbliche Geliebte.'

In the good people who write like this the wish is evidently father to the thought. The popular idea is that Beethoven, consumed with love for Giulietta, rushed home one evening and began to pour out his whole soul in the 'Moonlight Sonata.' With the moonlight streaming in through the windows he dashes off the first movement in a white heat. Reviving his tired tissues with a cup

* The dots are omitted in the facsimile.

of strong coffee, let us suppose, he finishes the second movement, the moonlight still streaming in. He is on the point of collapse in the third movement, but a wet towel round his fevered brow enables him to endure to the end. Then, as the moonlight is just vanishing before the oncoming dawn, he rushes off to Giulietta's house with the score. 'See, Giulietta, a Sonata! My Sonata! Thy Sonata! Our Sonata! Ewig dein! Ewig mein! Herzliebste! Mon ange! Mon trésor!' and so on and so on, with his usual polyglot incoherence. But alas for the lovers of sentimental romance, the plain facts offer no basis for this gigantic column of moonshine. Beethoven did *not* write the 'Moonlight Sonata' for Giulietta; the dedication to her was an afterthought and, indeed, a makeshift. He had originally inscribed to her the Rondo in G. When he found that Countess Lichnowsky was expecting a work to be dedicated to her, he begged the Rondo back from Giulietta and gave her the Sonata by way of compensation. Moreover, from a letter of November 10, 1819, addressed to Beethoven by Dr. G. L. Grosheim, it looks as if the Sonata had been, in part at least, inspired by Seumes's poem 'Die Beterin,' which describes a girl praying at the altar for the recovery of her dying father. The music of the first movement at any rate is much more congruous with this poetic idea than with that of a love-confession. Even before this letter of Grosheim's was given to the world, the opening Adagio had struck many people as a prayer for grace; it had even been arranged by Bierey as a 'Kyrie eleison' for voice and orchestra.

The *Manchester Guardian* article is a sample of the way in which the old sentiment about Giulietta Guicciardi still makes people too credulous towards any evidence that seems to support the theory that she was Beethoven's 'immortal Beloved.' Putting sentiment aside, what is the total evidential value of the new letter? Very little, I fear. In the first place, the way in which it has been given to the world is most unsatisfactory. We are not told where it has been all this time. We are not even told in whose hands it now is. Herr Bekker simply says that it was 'shown him' by Herr Bernhard Schuster, the editor of *Die Musik*.^{*} A first glance at the facsimile and at those of the genuine 'unsterbliche Geliebte' letters is enough to raise the suspicion that the new 'discovery' is a forgery. The character of the handwriting is so different in certain vital characteristics from that of the letter of July 7, that it seems to me highly improbable that Beethoven's script could change so radically in a single night. Of course it may be replied that this is a testimony in its favour, as a forger would presumably have taken more care to copy the writing of the genuine letters. But to admit this principle would lead us ultimately to the absurd

conclusion that the very clumsiness of a forgery is a partial proof of its authenticity. Until other facsimiles shall be published showing a similar fundamental transformation of Beethoven's script in two successive days, I prefer to believe that, whether the new letter be genuine or a forgery, it can hardly have been written twenty-four hours after the last of the letters we already knew.

But there are other considerations. Suppose the letter to be genuine, that it dates from 1801, and that it is addressed to Giulietta Guicciardi. Does that prove that the other letters were also addressed to her, and that they also belong to 1801? Not in the least. As I showed in my previous article, practically all the evidence points to their being written in 1812. In 1801 Beethoven would be only thirty-one. Why should he speak of needing a quiet, steady life 'at my age'? Would he not be far more likely to say that when he was forty-two? At virtually every point the contents of the letters confirm the theory that they date from 1812. The fact that Beethoven was in Teplitz on those very days, that K almost certainly stands for Karlsbad, the recent confirmation, from an old guide-book, of what he says as to the posts, the fact that the summer of 1812 was an exceptionally wet one,—all this is not lightly to be brushed aside. There are the further facts that the style of the script is that of Beethoven's middle period, and that one passage in them curiously duplicates a passage in a letter dated July 17, 1812.

On the other hand, where and what is the evidence for 1801? No one can show even that Beethoven visited a watering-place in July of that year. Most modern commentators would agree that the letter to Wegeler that was formerly assigned to June 29, 1800, was really written on June 29, 1801. It is plainly connected in the closest possible way with the letter to Wegeler of November 16, 1801. In the first, Beethoven gives an account of his bodily troubles and the treatment he is adopting. In the second he continues the same subject in response to further inquiries from Wegeler. The details of the two letters place it beyond all probability that seventeen months should have elapsed between them. But the assignment of the earlier letter to June 29, 1801, puts out of court the assumption that Beethoven was in a watering-place in the early days of July. Moreover, in neither of the letters does he speak either of going to a watering-place or of having come from one, though he gives most copious details of his malady and the treatment, which evidently includes medicated baths at home. Herr Bekker himself admits that Kalischer's ascription of the letter of November 16 to 1800, is an error, and that it belongs to 1801. But in this case how can we square the physical weariness of the 'unsterbliche Geliebte' letter of July 7,—as shown in such a remark as 'at my age I need a quiet, steady life,'—with the exultant sense of physical strength (in spite of all his stomach troubles) that breathes through the letter of November 16, 1801? 'My youth,' he writes, 'yes, I feel it, is only now beginning; have I not always been sickly? My strength, both of

^{*} In the September number of the 'Zeitschrift der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft' Herr Albert Leitzmann tells us that he wrote to Herr Schuster for information on these points. Herr Schuster could not or would not tell him anything as to the source of the letter; he merely said that 'it was in private hands in Berlin, and certified as genuine by a number of authorities,'—whose names, however, were not given to Herr Leitzmann.

body and mind, for some time has been on the increase. . . . Don't talk of rest! I know of no other than sleep, and sorry enough am I that I am compelled to give more time to it than formerly. . . . I will seize fate by the throat; it shall certainly never wholly overcome me. Oh! life is so beautiful; would I could have a thousand lives! I feel I am no longer fit to lead a quiet life.' If it be urged that this is not inconsistent with his being a little weary of life in the preceding July—his health, let us suppose, having improved in the meantime—the reply to that is that the letter of June 29 indicates that though he is miserable on account of his deafness and his stomach ailments, he is full enough of general vitality. So far from wanting to settle down 'at his age' into a quieter life, he proudly tells Wegeler of his success with the publishers, and the rate at which he is working for them. 'For every work I have six, seven publishers, and if I choose, even more. They do not bargain with me; I demand and they pay. . . . I only live in my music, and I have scarcely begun one thing when I start on another. As I am now working, I am often engaged on three or four things at the same time.' There is no suggestion of lassitude or failing vitality here.

On every line, then, the evidence points to 1812, not 1801, as the year of the 'unsterbliche Geliebte' letters. But Beethoven certainly *was* in love with Giulietta Guicciardi in 1801. Can we then not accept the new letter as referring to this episode—dissociating it wholly from the Therèse von Brunsvik affair of 1812? That would seem the most rational solution of the difficulty—but for one thing. Supposing a forger were anxious to establish the Giulietta theory of 1801, in face of all the evidence for Therèse von Brunsvik and 1812, what would he do?

If I were the forger, I should say to myself something of this kind: 'I must first of all make it clear that the letter is written to Giulietta; so, as the aristocratic Guicciardi family is known to have been against the marriage of Beethoven and the young Countess, I shall introduce a reference to 'proud relations.' As the genuine letters are dated 6th and 7th July, I must date mine the 8th, and introduce a line or two referring to the fact that a letter has been sent the previous day—'My letter has gone—I posted it yesterday'; or something of that sort. But above all I must establish 1801 as the date of the new letter, and consequently of the old ones. How can I best do this? By quoting a theme from one of Beethoven's works of about that period, and making him say it has just occurred to him. On second thoughts, however, it would be as well not to leave the smallest loophole for any more controversy. Hadn't I better find some work that has been dated by Beethoven himself, and quote from that? Ah, here is the very thing; the Op. 29 Quintet, the score of which states, in the composer's autograph, that it was written in 1801.' All these extremely convenient points occur in the new letter. Is it not a little remarkable that, after penning the three

letters of 6th and 7th July, the vaguenesses and omissions of which have given so much trouble to the commentators, Beethoven should have written on the very next day a letter that providentially clears up every one of the points of dispute? And is it not remarkable that this letter should have been lost to the world until now, when the theory that the 'unsterbliche Geliebte' was Giulietta Guicciardi is on its last legs,—and that the present possessor of the letter should be a man of so retiring a disposition that he will not even allow his name to be known, still less say where he got the letter from or submit it to public inspection? How strange it is that Beethoven and nature between them should have provided, in the letter of July 8 and the circumstances of its discovery, for everything that a forger or a hoaxer would have thought of! To me the fullness and the patness of the new letter for just what it is being used to prove are a trifle suspicious. I would not yet go so far as to say it is a forgery, but I shall require some irrefragable evidence before I accept it as genuine. Above all, the paper and the handwriting should be minutely examined by German experts. Herr Bekker airily waives all this aside; such an examination, he thinks, 'would not be uninteresting,' but he will not trouble about it himself. A critical study of the script of the new letter would not merely be 'not uninteresting'; it is the first thing that ought to be taken in hand.

I had got thus far when the post brought me the 'Zeitschrift der Internationalen Musik-Gesellschaft,' with the article of Herr Leitzmann to which I have already referred in a footnote. Herr Leitzmann has compared the facsimile of the letter with those of others of Beethoven, and is strongly of the opinion that it is a forgery. One of the best of his points is that the use of 'tz' in words like 'allerletzt'—which occurs on page 2, line 4, of the new letter—was not customary in Beethoven's day, and that in his genuine letters the composer always spells 'allerlezt,' 'jezt,' 'hinaussetzen,' 'gesetzt,' 'troz,' &c. The infinitive of 'to be' he elsewhere always spells 'seyn,' not 'sein' as in the letter (p. 2, line 16). A still closer examination would perhaps reveal other oddities; but meanwhile Herr Leitzmann is perfectly justified in asking whether it is credible that in *one* letter Beethoven should suddenly employ a number of singularities of script and of spelling that appear nowhere else in his genuine correspondence. Herr Leitzmann has also one or two acute remarks on the subject of the citation from the quintet. The fact that we possess no sketches of it indicates that it must have been conceived and sketched *earlier than the year 1801*, for Beethoven never threw off his works with one sweep of the hand. Further, 'Beethoven very seldom incorporated the themes of his sketches in the final work without altering them.' He writes the theme in the letter in the violin clef, which, apparently, is contrary to his practice in making sketches. Finally he adds a chord to the theme, which has a decided look of improbability. I am glad to see Herr Leitzmann refer to this point, for it had already struck me that the theme as it is quoted in the letter had every appearance

of being copied from the completed score of the quintet, instead of being the usual Beethovenian hint of a subject. Altogether the gravest suspicion rests upon the letter. If those who stand sponsors to it have any proof of its authenticity, they should give it us at once. Till then,—to put it as gently as possible,—we shall not take it seriously.

Occasional Notes.

We are asked to quote the following from the *Musical News* :

'The suggestion has been made that in this centenary year of the house of Novello it would be a graceful thing to offer a complimentary banquet to Mr. Alfred Littleton and his partners. What during its long career the notable firm has done for the art of music in England and the colonies, how Vincent Novello a century ago materially helped to cheapen music, to popularise choral music among the people, and to provide sacred vocal music for our churches, is a tale which has already inspired a small historical volume. And there is another reason why just at this time a public musical recognition may well be accorded to the present members of the old house. Not a little of the marked success which attended the recent gathering of the International Musical Congress in London is due to the valuable aid and hospitality shown at the headquarters of the firm at their new premises in Wardour Street. The Council Meetings and all the multifarious business were conducted there. Messrs. Littleton subscribed a large sum to the Guarantee Fund, and inaugurated the proceedings by a splendid Reception offered to our foreign guests and the English members of the Society.

'The idea of recognising these services has been heartily taken up by the leaders of the profession and several prominent amateurs. Among these are Sir Frederick Bridge, Sir Alexander Mackenzie, Sir Hubert Parry, Sir George Martin, Sir Walter Parratt, Sir Frederic Cowen, Dr. W. H. Cummings, Sir Edward Elgar, Dr. Harford Lloyd, Professor Joseph C. Bridge, Dr. W. G. Alcock, Dr. W. Carroll, Professor Granville Bantock, Dr. Davan Wetton, Dr. Eaton Faning, Lieut. Albert Williams, F. Corder, Dr. G. J. Bennett, Sir Homewood Crawford, J. F. R. Stainer, Sir Ernest Clarke, J. C. Collard, Dr. J. Varley Roberts, Dr. R. R. Terry, J. H. Maunder, C. Rube, Dr. Haydn Keeton, Dr. C. A. E. Harriss, Prof. F. Niecks, Dr. H. P. Allen, J. Barker, J. Percy Baker, and several others.

'It so happens that this year Mr. Alfred Littleton enjoys the distinction of being Master of the ancient City Guild the Worshipful Company of Musicians.

'Sir Frederick Bridge, by request, has called a Meeting to arrange what shall be done. This will be held at the Music Room, Westminster Abbey Cloisters, on Monday, October 30, at 4.30, when the attendance is requested of those desiring to support the proposition. In the meanwhile, Dr. J. E. Borland, 81, Bromley Road, Catford; Dr. E. Markham Lee, "Riffel," Glengall Road, Woodford Green; and Dr. T. Lea Southgate, 19, Manor Park, Lee, S.E. have consented to act as honorary secretaries. Names of those wishing to join the General Committee may be sent to these gentlemen in advance.'

We have been informed that since the above was printed a great many more names have been received, including the Rt. Hon. Sir T. Vezey Strong, Mr. Landon Ronald, Dr. Sinclair, Mr. Ivor Atkins, Dr. A. H. Brewer, Alderman E. E. Cooper, Mr. T. Tertius Noble,

Sir William Lancaster, Mr. Clifford B. Edgar, Mr. W. Barclay Squire, Colonel A. G. Balfour, Mr. Edward German, Mr. Herbert Sullivan, Mr. Ben Davies.

Mr. Ernst Denhof—to whom music-lovers in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds and Manchester are indebted and, there is good reason to think, grateful for their first experience of a stage performance of 'Der Ring des Nibelungen'—has formulated a similar scheme for provincial representations of 'Die Meistersinger,' 'Tristan and Isolde,' 'The Flying Dutchman,' 'Elektra,' and 'Orpheus.' He proposes to produce these works in Liverpool, Manchester, Hull, Leeds, Glasgow and Edinburgh in a season extending from February 26 to April 6, 1912. In each town the initiation of the scheme waits upon the establishment of an adequate fund and guarantee. Mr. Denhof's circular proposes that supporters should range themselves under three heads :

Subscribers would have no other obligation than to take up their seats on a given date not later than one month before the first performance in each city.

Guarantors would be called upon only in the event of any loss occurring out of the enterprise, the obligation then being *pro rata*.

Shareholders would have to provide the necessary capital or part thereof for the preliminary expenses, amounting to about £800 in each city, and would participate in the profit up to 5 per cent. on the capital subscribed. There would 80 shares at £10 each, or optional, 160 at £5 each; one-third of which amount to be paid in before 1st December, and the other two-thirds not later than 1st February, and the full amount would be repaid at the end of the season unless there be a loss, which would be *pro rata*. Under no circumstances, however, will shareholders be called upon to pay anything beyond the amount of their shares.

These three modes of support are quite independent of each other, the public being free to choose the one most convenient to them. Each town supports only its own scheme, not those of others, the subscribed money remaining in the control of Messrs. Forsyth Brothers, Ltd., 126, Deansgate, Manchester.

We earnestly hope that a ready response will be forthcoming to Mr. Denhof's offer, for it is well-known that the artistic side of his scheme is on the highest level that circumstances permit.

Mr. Francesco Berger has resigned the post of honorary secretary to the Philharmonic Society. Few living musicians can claim so long a connection with this historic body. Mr. Berger became an associate in 1859, a member in 1871, a director in 1880, and honorary secretary in 1884. Although he will now be relieved of the onerous duties of the secretaryship, it may be hoped that his interest in the Society will be unabated, and that his great experience will continue to be of service.

César Franck's oratorios, now very great favourites in Paris, are specially cultivated by the 'Association des Concerts Spirituels de la Sorbonne.' Last winter they performed his 'Rebecca,' 'Grand Mass,' and 'Rédemption.' Of the present season, five concerts will be devoted entirely to his works, including the above-named, and also 'Ruth' and the 'Beatitudes.' Consequently less attention will be given to established works, of which, only 'Messiah,' Bach's 'Easter' oratorio, a cantata of Bach's, Beethoven's Mass in C and 'Mount of Olives,' and Wagner's Graal-scene from 'Parsifal' are announced. Last season, in addition to the same classics, the Society gave also Bach's 'Christmas Oratorio' and 'Passion' according to St. John, and Mendelssohn's 'Elijah,' besides works