

Friedrich Theodor Fröhlich is recognised today as the most important Swiss composer of the early Romantic period. Born on 20 February 1803 in Brugg, he showed a talent for music at an early age, writing his first compositions as a child. Nonetheless, he received little support for a musical education. After attending high school in Zurich, he began studying law in Basel in 1822 and in Berlin in 1823, but this did not appeal to him. In Berlin he made contact to the music teachers Carl Friedrich Zelter, Bernhard Klein and Ludwig Berger. These encounters confirmed his desire to devote himself entirely to music. After returning home due to illness and spending two years in Brugg, he resumed his studies of composition in Berlin in 1826, this time with a scholarship from the Aargau cantonal government. A rich creative period followed. Numerous songs and choral compositions, three string quartets, as well as an overture and a symphony were written there. Some of his song collections were printed by German publishers. Nevertheless, he did not quite succeed in establishing an independent existence as a musician in Berlin. Full of hope for a fertile ground for his compositional and music educational work, he consequently returned to Switzerland in 1830. In Aarau he was offered a part-time position as a music teacher at the Cantonal School. He conducted choirs and an orchestra of enthusiasts while also giving private lessons. In addition to his tiring bread-winning profession, he devoted his sparse free time to composing, creating masterpieces that were acclaimed by critics. However, artistic isolation and the lack of attention from publishers and the public nourished an increasing despondency and hopelessness in him. Additional financial worries and private problems finally led to his suicide in the Aare river on 16 October 1836. He left behind a large number of musical manuscripts that rapidly fell into oblivion, but have been preserved. Today his works are being rediscovered and made accessible to the listener.

One of these important works, the *Christmas Cantata*, was composed in Aarau in November 1830, shortly after Fröhlich's return from Berlin. Without compromising on musical demands, the cantata gives the impression of a demonstration of the various possibilities of choral art, in which the composer also demonstrates his mastery of counterpoint to the Swiss public. Thus the eight parts of the cantata are in different instrumentations, from a simple piano song to a solo quartet and an eight-part mixed choir a cappella. Parts accompanied by the piano alternate with parts performed a cappella. Again and again songlike sections lead into fugal intensifications. The end is often a fugue, once a four-part canon. The frequently dramatic nature of

the music, which is probably most impressive in the solo parts 3 (aria) and 7 (recitative), is contrasted by charming cantilenas. The last part of the work brings as its climax the old church hymn *O segensvolle Weihnachtszeit* interwoven into the final fugue, sung in the original text by the soprano after a melody that goes back to the older setting of *Puer natus in Bethlehem*.

The text of the cantata was written by the composer's oldest brother, the poet and theologian Abraham Emanuel Fröhlich (1796–1865), who later became known as the co-creator of the first Argovian hymnal. In his romantic and devout nineteenth-century language, he sketches eight pictures of Christmas.

Two autographs of the cantata have survived, written shortly after each other. In the earlier autograph the individual parts of the cantata are dated. This manuscript was probably the basis for the first performance, which took place on 24 December 1830 in Aarau. The second autograph is a fair copy, which the composer presented to his brother that same year. It bears the inscription *To my dear poet, friend and brother. Christmas 1830*. The present edition is based mainly on this second manuscript, where there are significant differences between the two. Both autographs are kept in the Manuscript Department of the Basel University Library under the shelf mark kr XI 7. Ernst Langmeier kindly made his transcription available to us.

The musical notation of the manuscripts is not always precise and its meaning must then be surmised from its usage. The following remarks reflect the opinion of the editor, which need not necessarily be correct. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between a slur and a tie, where both are possible. It may therefore occasionally be correct to play a note that appears to be tied again. In the vocal parts, the ties were replaced by the melisma slurs that are common today. In addition to staccato dots, the composer also uses vertical strokes above the notes, which here are represented by wedges. The wedges are not to be understood as a particularly short staccato, but rather as an increased emphasis on the slightly shortened note. The sign <> means the (gentle) emphasis of a note or a musical passage. The indication "pf" was interpreted in various ways already during the composer's lifetime. Here the rendition as "poco forte" is probably the correct one in most places. Fröhlich distinguishes between long and short grace notes. He sometimes notates turns with a combination of grace notes and normal notes. Needless to say, the pedal markings are intended for the piano of Fröhlich's time.

Johannes Vigfusson

#### COVER

Wendelin Moosbrugger (1760–1849): Friedrich Theodor Fröhlich with family, summer 1836, private property

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