

Chapter 1

Introduction

I

For Joachim, Ernst was ‘the greatest violinist I ever heard; he towered above the others ... [He] became my ideal of a performer, even surpassing in many respects the ideal I had imagined for myself’ [GV:519, 533]; for Berlioz, he was ‘one of the artists whom I love the most, and with whose talent I am most *sympathétique*’. [CGB:III:628] For Schumann, he was the only violinist able ‘to win over all parties whenever he pleases’ [SMM:162]; for Liszt, his playing was ‘admirable’ [LOFL: I:65–6]; for Heine, he was ‘perhaps the greatest violinist of our time.’ [HS:380] Several reviewers with recent memories of Paganini preferred Ernst to the great Italian, and in 1884, reviewing over thirty years of concert-going, the Reverend H.R. Haweis wrote: ‘[If], looking back and up to the present hour, I am asked to name off hand, the greatest players – the very greatest I ever heard – I say at once Ernst, Liszt, Rubinstein.’ [MML:34]

Besides being one of the most expressive and technically gifted of all nineteenth-century violinists, there are several other reasons for thinking Ernst important. He successfully advised Schumann to take up music professionally, and saved the career of the young Joachim. He performed with Mendelssohn, Chopin, Liszt, Wagner, Alkan and Clara Schumann, and gave five pioneering performances of *Harold in Italy* with Berlioz. He developed several new violin techniques – particularly in the areas of left-hand pizzicato and artificial harmonics. He was the first Jewish touring violin virtuoso of any importance; the form and pattern for countless others. He composed two of the nineteenth-century’s best loved pieces – the burlesque variations on the *Carnival of Venice*, and the *Elegy* – and two other pieces of more lasting consequence: a set of studies which leads directly into Ysaÿe’s *Sonates pour violon seul*; and a concerto that was a profound influence on Liszt’s B minor piano sonata, and still in the repertoires of Enescu, Szigeti, Heifetz, Milstein, Menuhin and Stern in the first half of the twentieth century. Finally, Ernst was the early nineteenth-century violinist who did most to make Beethoven’s late quartets widely known and appreciated. This was especially true in England where he led many performances at the Beethoven Quartet Society, the Musical Union and the Manchester Classical Chamber Concerts in the 1840s and ’50s.

This naturally raises the question: why have only violin specialists and the best informed musicologists heard of Ernst? The main reason is lack of evidence about his life and character. The problem is not of recent origin because even his closest colleagues seem to have known little about him. ‘At the moment of writing,’ wrote Ernst’s friend Chorley in the violinist’s obituary, ‘we are without any biographical data,’ [A: 21/10/1865:541] and the situation never improved: ‘Few precise documents

exist regarding this eminent violinist,' lamented Alberto Bachmann in his *Les grands violonistes du passé* in 1913. [GVP:82]

Perhaps the most telling symptom of this almost universal ignorance is the entry for Ernst in George Dubourg's *The Violin*. The book is well informed – it contains information about some players ignored by similar texts – and was first published in 1853 when Ernst was one of the most famous living violinists. But in his chapter, 'The German School,' when he reaches the moment for his entry on Ernst, Dubourg turns to poetry:

Vainly, oh Pen! expectant here thou turn'st
 To trace the doings of Teutonic ERNST –
 To show what praise he won, what hearts he moved,
 What realms he traversed, and what trials he proved.
 Wanting the *records* that should speak his fame,
 Prose fails – and Verse, alas! but gives *his name*.
 So, in life's common round, when just aware
 That one whom we have longed to *know* is near –
 To see him, hear him, *chat* with him, prepared,
 We find he's gone, and has but *left his card!* [DV:185]

There are many reasons for this lack of evidence. Ernst did not like writing, did not teach, and had no children; and apart from his student days and a few unhappy weeks in Hesse-Kassel and Hanover, he was never a member of an orchestra, ensemble or institution. In addition, being a rich, agreeable and independent man who liked to avoid disputes, he had only one protracted public row, and never made a court appearance of any kind. All these facts deprive us of immediate memories and documentation.

These problems are compounded by two further difficulties. First, the old Austrian Empire saw the birth of many famous musicians, and clearly these absorbed the interest of musicologists in the region. More minor figures, who might have been written about elsewhere, consequently languished. Second, by the time of his death, Ernst had gone severely out of fashion, not appeared on a public stage for eight years, and been playing below his best for at least three years before that. Accordingly, obituaries were few, and his entries in the first serious histories of the violin – written towards the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century – are scant and less than generous. [VIM:475–6]

It sometimes seems as if history itself were conspiring to keep Ernst's name out of view. The most obvious and terrible manifestation of this is the Nazi holocaust which slaughtered most of European Jewry, killed Ernst's surviving family, and scattered and destroyed their possessions. Until the Second World War, Ernst's name was kept alive by his family and other members of the Jewish community in Brno. After the war, there was no family and virtually no Jewish community to recall him.

There has also been a certain amount of quotidian bad luck. His English friends, J.W. Davison (music critic of *The Times*) and Edward Bulwer Lytton (the novelist), were famous men in their day, but their reputations have sunk with few traces, and only a handful of scholars are interested in their friends and associates. Some contemporaries, like Julius Benedict, died before they could discuss Ernst in their

memoirs; others, like Hallé, unaccountably omitted important events relating to him. All the documents from the early years of the Vienna Conservatoire have been lost, and in 1964 a serious fire consumed the archives of his English publisher, Chappell. His birthplace was destroyed during the Second World War, and when the war ended, the street in Nice named after him was renamed.

More than most, he has been subject to the erasures of political geography. Ernst was a cosmopolitan creature who felt deeply at home in borderlands, and as states wax and wane, institutions are changed and records thrown away. Brno, where he was born, was part of the Austrian Empire but became part of Czechoslovakia and then the Czech Republic. Nice, where he died, was once part of Piedmont-Sardinia but became part of France. Alsace, where his wife came from, was once part of France, then became part of Germany, and then became part of France again. Even the village of Narford in Norfolk, where he stayed for several months in the 1860s, has a peculiarly remitting existence. It is shown on some maps but not on others, and signposts to it run out in an altogether baffling way, so that even the most committed Ernst-researcher finds himself heading off into East Anglian vacancy.

II

Ernst's character, and the cultural background which formed it, must also be held partially responsible for his present invisibility, and they are worth looking at in their own rights.

He knew from childhood that he would eventually have to leave his birthplace permanently – because of the Moravian Familiant Law – and this knowledge prevented the formation of any patriotic feeling and, more importantly, any sense of home. Even when he was married and terribly ill, he never abandoned the nomadic form of life which he established in the late 1830s, moving from one hotel room or rented apartment to another every few months at most. This lifestyle undoubtedly helped undermine his health, and it also meant that he never stayed in one place long enough, either to compose a good deal himself, or collaborate with another composer on an important violin composition. For the biographer, it means that even his best friends were rarely in his company for long, and surviving documents are scattered throughout northern Europe.

But the cultural influence went deeper than this. In much of early nineteenth-century Europe, the Jews were harshly persecuted. Their lives were hedged around with legal restrictions, they were subject to punitive taxation, and they were frequently victims of abuse. Life had been like this – and worse – for centuries.

Given the severity of this anti-Semitism, it was foreseeable that more fortunate Jews would begin to develop a habit of elusiveness, enjoy the prosperous present, avoid documentation, cover their traces, and never give more information about themselves than was strictly necessary. These habits soon became second nature. A recent historian of the Rothschild family remarks that, although spectacularly rich, they were not deeply interested in their own past or future: 'They kept no muniment room. They were not interested in their own history. They were respectful towards their ancestors, as a matter of good form, and they prudently thought about

tomorrow. But they lived for the present and did not care deeply about past or future.’ [HJ:314]

Ernst assimilated the same outlook. He was impulsive and spontaneous, reacting with powerful emotion to the present moment, but he gave little thought to his own future (he never, for example, saved any money), and he seems to have cared little about posterity. Nor did he seem particularly interested in his own past. Friends were told very little about it, and his letters almost never mention an event which happened more than a few years before. Such details as he was prepared to give away, like those on his marriage certificate, become a little vaguer and more elevated. His father, who was a retired café-owner, becomes a ‘gentleman’; his own profession becomes ‘Artist’; and his wife, and probably he himself, revised their ages downwards. [MC]

Ernst had all the equipment necessary to survive in a hostile world. His livelihood depended on superior talent and education, and he ensured that his dependency on other musicians or administrators was minimal. He had virtually no physical property which could be taken from him, his obsessively peripatetic style of living ensured that prejudice could never effectively build against him, and he was ready to move on at a moment’s notice. He was therefore as invulnerable to anti-Semitism as it was possible to be. In addition, his wit, self-deprecating charm, generosity and kindness meant he was rarely likely to be the target of hatred or animosity, and allowed him to be friendly with an enormous number of people, many of whom hated one another. To a certain extent these virtues made him harder to know because the inner man was shrouded by a bright miasma of sympathetic and elusive charm.

People’s responses to Ernst were deeply personal: ‘While talking of Ernst, I have entirely lost sight of the editorial plural’, wrote a critic in the *Musical World* [MW:12/1/50:18], and the violinist had an extraordinary ability to turn attention away from himself and back onto the people with whom he was interacting. This is clear in his letters, which frequently say nothing about himself or his affairs, but are full of extravagant sympathy and interest in his correspondent. It is also striking how frequently reports speak less of Ernst than of his effects on others. This is even reflected in the titles of the few books and theses written about him: *Ernst in the Opinion of his Contemporaries*, ‘The Life and Works of Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst with Emphasis on his Reception as Violinist and Composer’. Somehow, Ernst blends into his reception.

This is all too evident when the people writing are recounting their own experiences of his playing. When critics describe the playing of Vieuxtemps, they talk about his imposing tone, his splendid staccato, the accuracy of his intonation; when they describe Ernst, they soon become wholly absorbed in their own fantasies. Berlioz’s account of the effect of Ernst’s music on his own experiential memory, with its invocation of E.T.A. Hoffmann, is a good case in point. (See p.155.) Heine takes off into world of fanciful Arthurian romance while listening to Ernst; and there is a most extraordinary passage in one of Haeuwei’s books that recounts the visions conjured up by the violinist’s playing. (See pp.125–26 and 206–7.) In all these cases, hard and interesting facts about him and his playing dissolve into whimsical and emotional day-dreaming. Dubourg’s poem is emblematic of the way Ernst is recalled: the shift to the more emotional medium of verse; the emphasis on the writer’s feelings of

great friendliness and warmth; Ernst's mannerly absence; the complete lack of facts. One sometimes has the impression of a man who politely abstained from history.¹

Some of Ernst's elusiveness must also be ascribed to his artistic nature. Contemporaries were agreed that Ernst was distinguished from most of his fellow violinists by being able to excel at both virtuoso and classical music. ('Classical music' for the mid-nineteenth century meant the works of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Hummel and Spohr, particularly their chamber music). The critic of the *Morning Post* put the matter naively and pithily: 'Ernst is the greatest living violinist, for he can do everything.' [MW:5/1/50:2]

Contemporaries were also surprised at the kind of differentiation which Ernst could make between one kind of chamber music and another. Davison wrote: 'It was a real treat to connoisseurs to hear Herr Ernst's fine and expressive reading of [Mendelssohn's quartet in E♭, op.12] and to remark the entire distinction which he made between it and the more primitive work of the genial and prolific Mozart. [Quartet in B♭, probably K.458]. Herr Ernst, in short, is a subtle actor; and the various quartets, etc, of the great masters to him are much the same as the different characters of Shakespeare to such a comedian [i.e. actor] as Macready.'² [MW:17/2/55:107]

The actor's ability to project himself sympathetically into any kind of work or personality is characteristic of a certain kind of artistic nature. The poet, observed Keats, is a man 'without identity' [KL:157-8], a man who is simply a 'throughfare for all thoughts'. [KL:326] Unlike the self-sufficient 'man of power', the artist does not impose his personality on others, but takes on another person's personality and imaginatively entertains their feelings and circumstances. The artist is without identity because there are an infinite number he can assume. Perhaps the reason why Ernst did not want to be an orchestral leader or a teacher was that these roles would force him to act like a man of power; both musical roles demand a fixed and definite identity which has to be asserted on and against other people. One suspects that, like Keats and Wordsworth, he found wise passiveness the key to self-understanding and to the understanding of others. [KL:53]

We can see the same disposition of mind in his sense of humour. Invariably, in the few examples that have come down to us, this involves Ernst projecting an imagined identity onto a person or set of circumstances, and then acting as if that identity were real. He treats the young and unqualified Reinecke as if he were a venerable *Kapellmeister*; he pretends to Schindler that another friend's house is a restaurant; he persuades Bulwer Lytton that the visiting piano virtuoso Sigismund Thalberg is a magician; he pretends that a curl of hair can be reattached to his head. This is also the core of his irony, since irony (unlike sarcasm) requires the creation

1 In some ways the case of Ernst resembles that of Alkan. Both were super-virtuosi preoccupied with writing exceedingly difficult music, and both have suffered a long period of neglect from musicologists. (I would say that Ernst Studies now is in about the same condition as Alkan Studies in 1960.) During their lifetimes, Alkan remained virtually invisible by living a life that was largely private; Ernst pulled off the more difficult trick of remaining invisible by living a life that was almost wholly public.

2 I overlook Davison's characteristically nineteenth-century assessment of Mozart.

of an entertained persona or circumstance which can then be discreetly signalled and lightly discarded.

It is also the core of his sympathy, since this too requires one to entertain the circumstances of another, experience the world as he does, and want to relieve his misfortunes. Ernst was a modest man who was famously sympathetic and generous to those he knew. He hugged and comforted Berlioz in St Petersburg when the latter was overcome by excitement and nerves; he gave up a large part of his fortune to his half-brother who had run into serious debt; he thought nothing of taking sixty people to a restaurant. [EUZ:56] He was also famously sympathetic to people he did not know, and his charitable work was frequently cause for comment in the press. He gave money to the victims of the Hamburg fire and other public disasters, and even at the end of his life, when he was severely impoverished himself, he still regularly gave money to the poor of Nice. As in the case of his artistic virtues, it is natural to speak of his moral virtues in terms of the self and denial of the self: we call a modest man 'self-effacing'; we call a charitable man 'selfless'. In all cases, an egotistic hardness of outline is avoided.

Although witty, sympathetic and intelligent, Ernst was not an intellectual. His life at one period, according to Hallé, was 'the same eating and drinking parties, the same chess and whist parties,' [LLCH:244] and it is reasonable to assume that it was like this most of the time. His letters rarely discuss music; the only book he ever mentions is a book on whist; and the only poetry he quotes is a passage from Schiller which was recited, in his presence, by his wife a short time before. Judaism as a religion seems to have meant nothing to him, and he showed no haste to convert to Christianity either. Only in the late 1850s or early '60s did he convert to Catholicism, but this was entirely under the influence of his deeply religious wife. Moral and political ambitions seem to have been equally lacking. He writes on one occasion to his half-brother: 'I don't offend anyone when I only benefit myself and do no harm. I desire no more than that.' [EOC:11]

With illness and age, wise passiveness turned into passivity. In a letter to Davison, written while on holiday in France, he remarks: 'It has always been my idea of supreme happiness not to earn my living with my intelligence, with my soul, or even with my fingers.' [BL] And the same passivity is described in several obituaries: 'He was rather passive than energetic, more subject to an impression than able to rule it,' says the *Neue Berliner Musik-Zeitung* [MW:4/11/65:690], and there is a hint of disapproval in the *Athenaeum's* description of the same trait: 'A certain languor of temperament, approaching to indolence, and in late years aggravated by illness, prevented him doing full justice to his powers, either as a creative musician or a member of society ...' [A:21/10/65:541]

In some ways, his life of travel ministered to this characteristic. Staying in one place looks like doing nothing and being passive, whereas travelling looks like doing something and being active. But this is misleading. In the first place, travelling in the mid-nineteenth century, was more or less the sedentary occupation it is today, and consisted largely of waiting, sitting, eating, and looking out of the window. In the second, if a performing musician stays in one place, he has constantly to change and develop his repertoire, otherwise his audience will grow bored and disappear. Furthermore, to prevent himself from becoming stale, he has constantly to look

within himself for change, and this often means developing joint projects with others. But if a musician is always travelling, then collaborative projects become more problematic, and he no longer has to look inside himself for variety. He can constantly play the same repertoire to different audiences, and boredom is kept at bay for him by frequently changing scenes and people. In other words, if Ernst had stayed in one place, he would have had to join something, develop something, change something – all things he was distinctly disinclined to do.

His intellectual passivity had an effect on his career. He certainly continued to play the same handful of pieces for far too long, but the problem was more deep-seated. In Paris in the 1830s and '40s, he showed no interest in either the nationalist or socialist ideas that meant so much to musicians like Chopin and Liszt. Without a sense of home or country, one can quite see why nationalism had little appeal, but it is less obvious why the socialist ideas meant nothing to him. Perhaps it was because his origins were Jewish and the socialisms of Saint-Simon and Lamennais were profoundly Christian in inspiration; perhaps it was because Ernst did not want to create problems with potential patrons, and was largely concerned to fit in with society as he found it. After 1850, when music became increasingly nationalistic, literary and historical in inspiration, and when the role of the virtuoso changed from that of dazzling entertainer to interpreter of the masters, Ernst in his solo repertoire was insufficiently responsive to these changes and his reputation suffered.

His irenic, complaisant nature meant he was rarely the *first* to do anything, but he was quick to assimilate and improve on the work of others. By the time he came to programme the Beethoven and Mendelssohn concertos others had played them before, but everyone agreed that he played them much better than his predecessors. He was not the first nineteenth-century violin virtuoso to compose an operatic fantasy, a set of studies, or a virtuoso concerto, but there are good grounds for saying that his works are amongst the very best of their kind. And the sheer technical ingenuity and difficulty of his compositions reveals a kind of genius, and outdistances all but a handful of pieces by his contemporaries.

The successes of his early years seem due in large measure to finding himself in the right place and at the right time. The musical education on offer at the Augustinian monastery in Brno was one of the best available in Europe; the Vienna of Beethoven, Schubert and Paganini could not have been more exciting; Paris in the 1830s and '40s was the centre of instrumental virtuosity. After the 1848 Revolution, however, he seems to have lost his way. While the fundamentals of composition were being explored in Leipzig and Weimar, he initially found himself receiving bouquets for evenings of music and recitation in the south of France, and then playing quartets in musically reactionary England. If those around him were not of the first quality, then Ernst does not seem to have been capable of seizing the initiative himself. Even the important role he played in making the late Beethoven quartets known in England was largely because Hallé in Manchester, and Ella, Alsager, and Rousset in London, had already set up the necessary institutions.

As a young man, Ernst was certainly determined and intensely ambitious. Nothing else can explain how, by the age of sixteen, he was in a position to place himself in direct competition with Paganini, or make a name for himself within a few years in the intensely competitive atmosphere of Paris in the 1830s. His early letters are

full of the heady delights of his own successes, and, on a couple of occasions when conflict was unavoidable, he displayed what Aristotle would call a sense of proper pride. He was also remarkably good at what we now think of as public relations, marketing, networking – even merchandizing. Two significant tussles with Paganini and Sivori were won because he knew that sincerely working for the good of others, and not thinking about himself, was the best way, ultimately, to promote his own cause. The genuine demonstrations of concern and sympathy in his letters make the recipients all the more receptive to news of his own plans and achievements, and all the more inclined to offer help and support.

Like many slightly unintellectual and indolent people, he readily acquired skills and could be galvanized by technical problems. His phenomenal violin technique and fluent piano-playing demonstrate this clearly enough. Another manifestation was the excellence of his written French, which Berlioz jokingly described as indecent, and his fondness for games and puzzles. Hiller recalled evenings of whist with Ferdinand David; Liszt described some hundred rubbers of the same game with Ernst in Weimar; the violinist's letters to Hallé (and Hallé's notebooks) are full of moves for their games of postal chess; Berlioz was exasperated by the way Ernst sat up all night at the chessboard with Louis Blanc, the exiled revolutionary.

The self-absorbed determination not to be beaten by any obstacle, and the desire to write pieces that challenged even his own transcendental technique, were seen by one London reviewer as an integral feature of his approach to composing and performing. 'The variations were original,' noted the *Morning Advertiser* in 1849, 'and yet, amid all their eccentricity, they were always distinguished by exquisitely sweet and expressive notes. In fact, he seemed to be revelling, so to speak, in instrumental "puzzles" – puzzles that would perplex and confound others, but were surmounted by him with facility, precision, and elegance.' [MW:1/12/49:739] Several of his best known compositions are also motivated by a desire to overcome an obstacle or solve a puzzle. His arrangement of the *Erlking* for solo violin seems to be prompted by the question: is it possible to transcribe the two hands of the pianist, and the four characters impersonated by the singer, for just four strings? And his arrangement of *The Last Rose of Summer* seems to be prompted by the equally perverse desire to use a slight, nostalgic Irish air as the basis for the most technically demanding set of variations ever written for the instrument. It is notable that these two pieces, currently his most widely played, are both arrangements. His creative impulses, as we might expect, tended to be ingenious rather than original.³

3 Many features of Ernst's personality – an extreme sensitivity to others, an ability to understand other people's ideas better than they understand them themselves, a certain lack of originality, an acceptance of the world as it is, a desire to conform and assimilate – were later generalized into characteristically Jewish personality-traits by a number of philosophers who were either Jewish themselves or of Jewish origin. [See WCV: 3e,4e,14e–19e, 23e, 42e; LIB:34–5, 184–5; JSE:18–42] All these ideas, of course, may be influenced by anti-Semitic propaganda; in particular, Wagner's widely influential 'Judaism in Music'. Although Ernst is not named in this article, he had many of the traits which Wagner labelled as characteristically Jewish, and Wagner may well have had him in mind as he wrote. In the early 1850s, Ernst was one of the most famous Jewish performers in Europe; he had been celebrated and successful in

He revelled in technical risk. The music of Vieuxtemps and Wieniawski usually sounds more difficult than it is; Ernst belongs to a select group of composers (it includes Henselt and Brahms) whose music is much more difficult than it sounds. As Ernst largely played his own music, some of his celebrated unevenness may be put down to the difficulty of his own compositions, especially when we consider that, in the early nineteenth century, virtuosi made a number of short appearances at concerts without any chance to warm up. John Ella, the English impresario, tells an instructive story:

[Deloffre the] late *chef d'orchestre* at the Opéra Comique, in Paris, was principal second violin, for several seasons, at the Musical Union. On quitting London for his present appointment, Ernst justly remarked that I had lost an excellent second, a most conscientious musician, and a thorough artist. To which I added, 'and a safe one, who never played a wrong note or made a mistake.' Ernst humorously replied, 'I should be sorry were you to pay *me* such a compliment.' The daring impulsive genius of Ernst occasionally led him to daring flight,

'Which, without passing thro' the judgment, gains
The heart, and all its end at once attains.' [MSAH:281]

Aside from a further recourse to poetry, it is significant that both Ella and the London critic, when speaking of Ernst's daring impulsiveness and interest in puzzles, also speak of his sweetness, expressiveness and power of speaking to the heart. In him, it would seem, ingenuity, risk and sweetness were not only naturally combined but mutually supportive.

III

Besides information, biography thrives on connections, influences, close relationships, institutional membership, ideas and development, and I will not deny that lack of all these things has made writing Ernst's biography problematic. However, I have only been able to write it at all thanks to a select group of writers and scholars who went before me.

In the nineteenth century, these include Ernst's friend Dr Leone, whose *H.W. Ernst: Eine Biographische Skizze* [*A Biographical Sketch*] of 1847 is one of the few sources of information about Ernst's childhood [HWE], although it can be usefully supplemented by the lengthy nineteenth-century pamphlets and encyclopaedia entries of Pohl, Deutsch and D'Elvert. [ADB. D. GMM] Amongst Ernst's fellow musicians, there are brief mentions of him in letters by Mendelssohn, Berlioz and Liszt, and good accounts in Berlioz's *Memoirs* and essay on Ernst, Hallé's *Life and Letters*, and Reinecke's 'A Half-Forgotten Prince of Violinists'. [BM. JD:27/1/52. LLCH. HFPV] Short articles from the turn of the century usually only summarize encyclopaedia entries, but an exception can be made for Authur M. Abell's 'Famous Violinists of the Past VIII: Heinrich Ernst and Charles De Beriot'. [FVP]

Paris when Wagner was not; and, although they met several times, there was no great warmth between them.

In the twentieth century, Amely Heller's *H.W. Ernst im urteile seiner Zeitgenossen* [*H.W. Ernst in the Opinion of his Contemporaries*], self-published in 1905, is also an essential but problematic work. [EUZ] I assume she did not attempt (or at least did not succeed) in publishing it commercially because almost the entire biographical part was copied out word for word from Leone's by then obscure pamphlet. The main value of the work is that she reproduces a number of letters which Ernst wrote to his half-brother Johann, a few miscellaneous poems and articles, and some slightly unreliable details about Ernst's family home and background.⁴ She obtained her unreliable details from Johann's daughter Josephine, who had a remarkably long life – from 9 May 1836 to 20 September 1930 – and her documentation from Josephine's two sons, a chemist also called Heinrich who owned Ernst's school violin, and a lawyer called Ludwig who looked after his surviving letters and documents.⁵ [NJC. EUZ:57]

The first person to show that Josephine's details were often incorrect was Jan Pěčka in his pioneering thesis 'Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst' of 1958, a work which has still not been translated from Czech, and is still unfortunately confined to its institution. [JP] Pěčka's major discovery was a file of legal documents deposited in the Brno archives, including *Sperre-relations* (Austrian Empire documents giving details of the estates of the dead), legal depositions, and Ernst's father's will. From these, Pěčka was able to see that Ernst's father had married twice, that Ernst's accepted birth date is incorrect, and that Josephine and Heller got the sexes and number of his siblings wrong. He also came close to deciphering Ernst's mother's Christian name (he read it as 'Charlota') although her surname still escaped him. Ten years after writing this thesis, the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia resulted in Pěčka's being forced to abandon his research and work as a caretaker for twenty years. I am pleased to say that he has now taken up his research again, and has recently published a short piece on Ernst and Brno. [MI:93]

In 1983, Boris Schwarz usefully expanded his two previous encyclopaedia entries on Ernst by devoting four and a half pages to him in *Great Masters of the Violin*. [G1&2. MGG1. GMV] Edward Sainati published two of Ernst's letters to the sculptor Dantan in the *Strad* in 1985; and in 1986, Samuel Wolf edited a version of Heller's book, translated by Roberta Franke, and published as a typescript by Swand Publications. [IC. EOC] Heller's material is reduced by at least a third, but the loss is compensated for by a very useful set of notes and annotations.

These publications were the immediate forerunners of the most recent and significant contribution to the Ernst literature, Fan Elun's unpublished Cornell PhD thesis, 'The Life and Works of Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst (1814–1865) with Emphasis on his Reception as Violinist and Composer', submitted in 1993. [E] This is a most careful, reliable and conscientious piece of work. By a systematic reading of the

4 According to Heller, Ernst's father lived from 1770 to 1830, and had one wife, Barbara Ernst, with whom he had six sons and two daughters, including Heinrich Ernst. [EOC:4] For the correct account of Ernst's family, see Chapter 2.

5 The mystery as to why Josephine retained the surname 'Ernst' after marriage is resolved when we discover she is buried next to Adolf Ernst (died 1 May 1898). He was almost certainly her husband, and possibly a cousin. [NJC]

music press and nineteenth-century reference books, Elun establishes for the first time a reliable chronology of Ernst's life, and shows that a number of stories about Ernst – for example that he played with Joachim in London in 1859 – are myths. It has been constantly at my elbow and has supplied a framework, and many detailed references, for this book. I could not have written it without him.

The most recent substantial contribution to the literature is Tobias Wilczkowski's 2006 thesis, 'Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst: En stor violinist i skuggan av Paganini' ['A Great Violinist in the Shadow of Paganini'], from Uppsala University. [TW] This contains no new biographical information (apart from some Scandinavian newspaper reviews) but it considers some cases where Ernst's technical innovations in violin technique go beyond Paganini's.

IV

This book was originally much longer, but the economics of publishing made me see it was necessary to delete 80,000 words. Consequently, most of the social and political background, descriptions of the places where Ernst lived and played, and portraits of his friends and colleagues, have been removed. I have not, however, deleted any information about Ernst, and wherever possible I have tried to keep my quotations from nineteenth-century sources. This is partly because there is so little primary material about Ernst which is readily available, but mainly because I want to preserve the tone of the originals. Tone is largely conveyed by style, and consequently, paraphrasing away the style of a letter or review destroys most of its interest. Many of Ernst's letters were written directly after concerts, and I want to retain his sense of excitement; many reviews were written with the glorious sound of Ernst's Stradivarius still singing in the critics' ears, and I want to preserve their sense of wonder and pleasure, as well as the distinctive flavour of the nineteenth-century sensibilities which experienced it.