

Concert: London
Review in *The Athenæum*
July 3, 1852



Herr Joachim's Concert

Regent & Nott

MUSICOLOGY

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HERR JOACHIM'S CONCERT.— This was an entertainment on no account to be passed over briefly. Violin playing grander, more masterly, freer in style, than Herr Joachim's has seldom been heard in London. — His performance of Beethoven's violin *Concerto* with a new *cadenza* placed him with us by the side of Ernst: — what height that implies our readers have not to be told. Admirable, too, for vigour, contrast and humour was Herr Joachim's playing of Paganini's 'Caprice,' which he has prefaced with an introduction so sweet, natural and expressive as to show that when he pleases he can charm as a composer.

The heavy orchestration of the 'Caprice' itself, is a mistake: since the lightest accompaniment *alla chitarra* to support the *solo* is all that the variations will bear. As well might the familiar 'Carnaval' be loaded and hampered with thick and distracting accompaniments. In Herr Joachim's *fantasia on Hungarian Airs*, and in his 'Concert Stück' — both of which he played like a master — we felt that the composer was in a wrong path. In the first grand *solo*, colour and distinctness are wanting. The national airs are not so much presented as imbedded in a confused mass of sound of which they form a part. In his 'Concert Stück' the ideas are forced into every possible channel, save the natural one: and so swathed and swallowed up by orchestral accompaniments as to lose all outline and simplicity. It is not a *Concerto* exactly, nor yet a Symphony — both orchestra and *solo* are defrauded of their just place and share in attention by this indiscreet confusion of their occupations.

We are sorry, in short, to observe in Herr Joachim's newest compositions a leaning towards the delusions of "young Germany" — and fear that while he is aspiring upwards, there is danger of his being lost in those vapours at the mountain's foot among which *Jack o' Lantern* is the light and the betrayer. Concerning the danger of such aberrations, we must speak again and again. While we are only too eager to welcome everything of every school that enlarges our pleasures and adds another to our sympathies — the condition is, that the limits of Art must be respected and its materials employed. Inasmuch as we cannot accept the picture which tries to be a piece of architecture, or the poem that would serve the office of a state paper, or the drama which is as undramatic as a sermon, — we decline to accredit as art, sounds which, pretending to be a music deeper, more spiritual, more philosophical, than any that have hitherto charmed us, are still unmusical, in their violence to number which is rhythm, and to beauty which implies melody.

That the head quarters of this false gospel are at Weimar — that its high priest is the most intellectual and poetical of modern executants, one of the few men of genius living — make it all the more necessary for us to protest aloud, when we perceive a vigorous mind and a noble talent like Herr Joachim's succumbing to influences so

fascinating but so destructive of creative health. Genius should complete and enrich — not ravage or destroy; should bid us enjoy its new conquests of waste lands, — not accompany it in a rebellious *Jacquerie* against all constituted thrones and shrines. But it is not necessarily a wise critic or a calm counsellor. Those who obey its mistaken enthusiasms, its splendid paradoxes as so many oracles, may pity us for our “*Philisterei*” if they will — and with Herr Wagner may insist that all the old canons of Music are so many arbitrary things — and all the old models so many modes and monuments to be regarded as things obsolete, unworthy of study or regard; — for ourselves, we can conceive nothing poorer or less essentially liberal than the deification of what is formless and ugly, and we believe that in the inconsistent negations of their creed (let them be ever so sincerely entertained by generous visionaries) lies the seed of its destruction.

