

Ritter led the violas at the first Bayreuth Festival. When he tried to introduce the viola alta to orchestras throughout Europe the opposition he encountered paralleled that experienced by an earlier innovator Theobald Boehm (1795-1876), inventor of the key system for flutes. Just as Boehm had found the strongest hostility to the new flute came from within the orchestra, so did Ritter:

The viola players of the old type were greatly alarmed and hated the viola alta and its player. They ridiculed both, but with little effect. Anyone who has been for some time a member of one of these old-established orchestras, as we have them in almost every town in Germany, will know what kind of spirit exists among the players. It is pitiful how little they know outside the knowledge of their instrument. But the worst of them all are the viola players of the old type, with very few exceptions . . . It was too large and too loud.

Balling dealt expeditiously with these objections. Of particular interest perhaps are his recommendations as to how students should approach the viola alta:

The viola has a technique of its own, and this can be obtained from the viola alta, not with the same ease perhaps, as from the ordinary sized tenor, but this matters little. One who wishes to master the viola alta must study it in the same way as the violin—that is to say, from the beginning. And the beginning is to learn how to hold the instrument.

There follows a detailed technical description in which we learn that Balling began to play the instrument at the age of fourteen. He concludes his address with an explanation of the way the viola alta obtained its name in a general summary of string nomenclature.

Extracts from his lecture were printed in the *Musical Courier* in March 1897 and the complete text in the *Monthly Journal* in July 1897.¹⁷ Events after this are somewhat obscure. It appears however, that Balling joined Benson's theatre company as leader of the orchestra and wrote a supplementary chorus to Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which was much admired in its time. The performance began at the Shakespeare Festival in Stratford and continued throughout Britain. Balling seems to have returned to Germany in 1897:

At this time and in the following years of the festival he worked there as *solo-repetiteur*. It was strange that his return should coincide with the year in which *The Ring* which he was himself later to conduct at Bayreuth stood in the programme for the first time since 1876.¹⁸

It is in Cosima Wagner's letters that the most picturesque account of Balling's return is found:

But one of our most gifted outlaws Balling, a Würzburger and a Catholic, excommunicated because he conducted some Bach choruses in his Protestant church in Schwerin, who has made his way through India, New Zealand and Brazil, returning home penniless has also stayed for a long time in England.