

Preface

The fact that (Louis) Théodore Gouvy was born in Goffontaine in 1819 was a coincidence, of course. But the little village which belonged to Prussia at that time and nowadays is known as Saarbrücken-Schafbrücke is located in a transitional area between Germany and France and definitely influenced the life and work of the composer. Its geographical “ambivalence” even disconcerted his contemporaries. In his *Musikalisches Conversations-Lexikon* Hermann Mendel had the presumption to evaluate: “The French roots of G[ouvy] are only recognizable in the predominantly rhythmic element of these works. His artistic disposition is thoroughly German – even more so as G. speaks German so perfectly that nobody would think he’s a foreigner.”¹

In 1836 Gouvy started to study law in Paris, but as of 1839 dedicated himself exclusively to music: he took private piano and music theory lessons and later on engaged himself in conducting and composing as well. Educational journeys to Berlin and Italy completed his training. As early as 1846 the first symphony of the “young and talented composer”² was premiered in Paris. In the following years Gouvy unsteadily lived in Paris and different German cities, of which he preferred Leipzig, but frequently retreated to Goffontaine for composing. He increasingly gained recognition in both countries, in Germany particularly through his symphonic works, in France mainly through his chamber music. In 1889 he traveled to Paris for the last time, before he died in Leipzig one year later. Gouvy bequeathed a rich musical heritage which covered many different genres: he wrote symphonies and chamber music, an opera (*Le Cid*), airs, choral music and compositions for choir and orchestra.

In 1875 the *Sérénade vénitienne* for viola and piano was published in print in Mainz. The composition is dedicated to the Belgian violin, viola and viola d’amore player Louis van Waefelghem who he had met in Paris. It is a nice, amusing piece of the kind the young Gouvy had become acquainted with in the parlors of Parisian artists and art lovers. The edition on hand adheres closely to the first print (Schott, publisher code 21575). Occasional phrasing and articulation departures within the respective voice and between piano and viola parts have been carefully harmonized. The atmospheric and romantic piece certainly is a valuable contribution to the viola repertoire.

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¹ Article Gouvy in: *Musikalisches Conversations-Lexikon*, edited and published by Hermann Mendel, 4th volume, Berlin 1874, p. 317.

² *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* 49, (Leipzig) 1847, col. 358.