Hommage à Berwald

Gunnar Jansson and Per Aspenberg

What is the relation between orthopedic research and the fine arts? Scientists sometimes like to compare themselves to artists as regards the creative components of designing a scientific study. On the other hand, there is a fundamental difference between our efforts to make more and more correct descriptions of nature and the artist’s work, which is not judged by its predictive value. Nevertheless, we orthopedists sometimes may feel (and even behave) as artists in the operating theater. A few creative minds may, however, achieve amazing progress in both fields simultaneously. One such person was Franz Berwald (1796-1868), the most famous of the Swedish composers, contemporary and comparable to both Brahms and Berlioz. Berwald’s style was closer to the latter, whom he had not heard; yet, Berwald’s compositions were similar to no one else’s. As a composer of symphonies, operas, and chamber music, he broke the musical paradigms of his time.

Berwald also founded an orthopedic institute in Berlin, where he lived between 1829 and 1841. For this institute, he constructed “machines” for physical treatment. The machines were mostly designed to enable active muscle training—a new concept at that time—in spite of various orthopedic disorders. Using modern terminology, the institute could be described as a “gym” for disabled children. Berwald was summarily accepted by the professional medical society owing to documented therapeutic success. He had no financial backing in the beginning, but soon was able to offer free treatment to indigent patients.

When the orthopedic department at Lund University arranged a meeting in Lund in 1987, it was only natural to add a concert to the scientific presentations. This music, entitled “Hommage à Berwald” was composed for the occasion by Gunnar Jansson and played by a string orchestra in Lund’s Cathedral. It is based on the introduction of Berwald’s E flat major string quartet. For those readers of Acta Orthopaedica Scandinavica who were unable to attend that concert, we now offer a new opportunity to partake of the music.

References


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