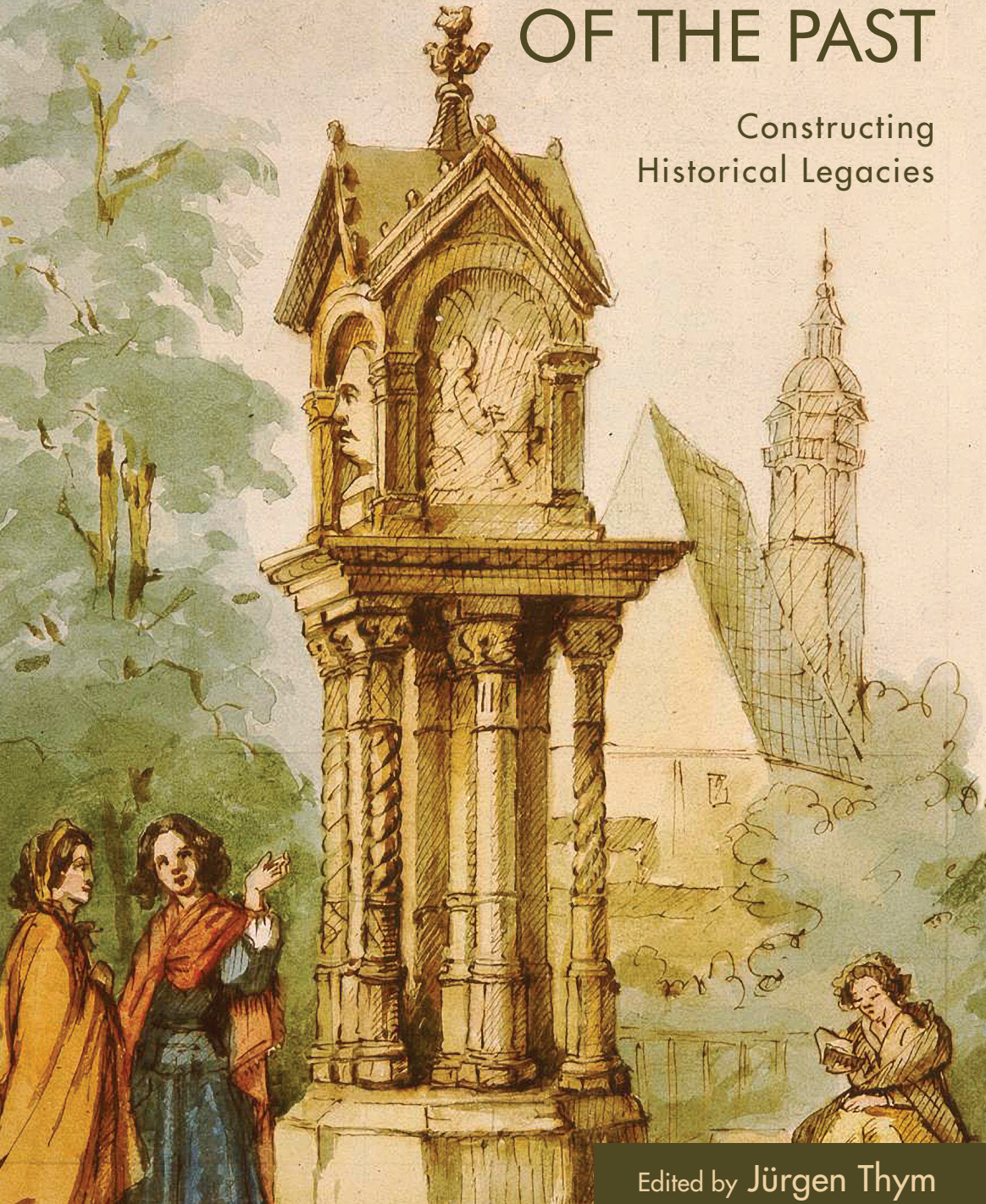


# MENDELSSOHN, THE ORGAN, AND THE MUSIC OF THE PAST

Constructing  
Historical Legacies



Edited by Jürgen Thym

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Mendelssohn, the Organ,  
and the Music of the Past

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Constructing Historical Legacies

Edited by Jürgen Thym



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In memory of Russell Saunders (1921–92)  
and David Craighead (1924–2012)



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Jürgen Thym  
May 2014

# Introduction

## Of Statues and Monuments

Jürgen Thym

Felix Mendelssohn grew up in an era and in a region of Europe—namely the German-speaking lands—that liked statues and monuments, not so much for their own sake as because they reflected a deep awareness of history. In fact, he contributed to such monuments—aural, semistaged, and in stone—throughout his life, calling attention to, indeed constructing, historical legacies through his activities. He even confessed his fondness for such monuments in England, when he proposed, perhaps in jest, that Dr. Henry John Gauntlett, an influential figure in British organ reform in the nineteenth century, “ought to have a statue.”<sup>1</sup>

Profuse numbers of statues and monuments were installed in the German states of Europe following the Wars of Liberation 1813–15, and, more prominently, after the foundation of the German Empire in 1871. Celebrating victories in wars and casting them as triumphs in stone had, of course, been a practice since ancient times. (One only needs to walk among Rome’s archaeological sites to encounter triumphal arches and columns that reformulated military successes as icons of heroism and greatness for current and future generations.) Just a few years after Mendelssohn was born, the German-speaking people shook off the yoke of Napoleonic empire building and expressed their military victories—albeit accomplished with considerable foreign help, especially from the British and from tsarist Russia—in monuments throughout much of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century. Beethoven had participated in such celebrations early on with ephemeral works such as *Wellingtons Sieg, oder die Schlacht bei Vittoria*, op. 91 (Wellington’s victory, or The Battle of Vitoria) and the cantata *Der glorreiche Augenblick*, op. 136 (The glorious moment), both performed at the Congress of Vienna in 1814–15.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps to atone for his reluctant participation in Napoleon’s wars against Prussia and Russia when he was a crown prince, Ludwig I of Bavaria, once he ascended to



the throne, would not be outdone in manifesting his Teutonic credentials in marble and granite. The Befreiungshalle (Hall of Liberation) in Kelheim near Regensburg celebrated the military success of the German people in the Wars of Liberation against Napoleon. Conceived in the 1830s, it was inaugurated on the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Leipzig in 1863. Not to be outdone by the Bavarians, the Germans—now united under Prussian hegemony—commemorated the same victory in the Völkerschlachtdenkmal or Battle of the Nations monument near Leipzig at the centennial of the event, just a few months before another international war put an end to the “long” nineteenth century, to the European world order, and to civilization as it had been known. There were other victories to be celebrated and cast in stone: The Siegestsäule (Triumph column) in Berlin’s Tiergarten proudly announced Prussian military successes in several wars leading up to the unification of the German states. And when current military events did not suffice, there were battles in the past—even in the very distant past—that could be remembered in monument-worthy projects invoking the “common” history of the German people: The Hermannsdenkmal near Detmold, begun in 1841 and completed in 1875, celebrated Arminius the Cheruscan, a Germanic tribal chieftain, whose cunning military genius trapped several Roman legions in the swamps near the Teutoburger Wald in 9 CE, dealing a severe blow to the Roman Empire and—one might also argue—delaying the process of civilization that Roman occupation and influence would have meant for the lands east of the Rhine.

The liberation wars against Napoleon made German-speaking people realize that, in addition to language, they had a common history and culture. They imagined that they were a community in the sense that Benedict Anderson and other recent cultural theorists have used the term.<sup>3</sup> The fractured state of the situation around 1815—the Habsburg Empire and Prussia, both conceived or evolved as multinational and multiethnic entities, as well as an agglomeration of medium-size and smaller states, all of them ethnically more homogeneous than the two major players—and the equally problematic religious divide between Catholics and Protestants among Germans made a political solution to the “German question” nearly impossible. But in the *Vormärz* period—the era before the 1848 revolution that defines Mendelssohn’s lifetime as an adult—other icons of nationhood, furthering the imagined community (and, by and large, of a less belligerent nature), stood ready to be found. And were. Mendelssohn was indeed a key player in their “discovery.”

We can begin to traverse Mendelssohn’s accomplishments in celebrating national icons in 1840, because that year made the Germans again collide with the French: the so-called *Rheinkrise* (Rhine crisis)—manufactured by the French government to distract attention from the miscalculations of its foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean—pitted French and German political and national aspirations against each other, with the rhetoric on both sides reaching fever pitch. Mendelssohn’s civic nationalism should be distinguished from

the more jingoistic and shrill expressions of nationhood that were characteristic on both sides of the Rhine.<sup>4</sup>

In June of that year the citizens of Leipzig celebrated the four-hundredth anniversary of the invention of the printing press with a three-day festival. Even though Johannes Gutenberg, its inventor, was born and lived most of his life in Mainz, Leipzig—being the center of printing and publishing in German-speaking lands—considered that it had a civic duty to commemorate a man whose technological advances had enriched the community and contributed immeasurably to the spread of literacy, enlightenment, and Luther's Reformation to distant shores. The highpoint of the festival was the premiere of Mendelssohn's Symphony no. 2 ("Lobgesang" [MWV A18, op. 52]), with Mendelssohn conducting the Gewandhaus Orchestra, on June 25. This "Große Musik für Leipzig,"<sup>5</sup> a symphony cantata mixing purely instrumental and choral movements and thereby harking back to Beethoven's Ninth, gathered the various strands of the festival into a celebration of the triumph of light over darkness, of enlightenment over ignorance, and thereby confirming the Beethovenian symphonic narrative "per aspera ad astra" (literally: "through hardship to the stars," a pattern often seen by commentators as embodied in Beethoven's Fifth Symphony). The "Lobgesang" was to become one of his most popular compositions during his lifetime, though it quickly lost favor soon after his death and is rarely performed today. (For a Kierkegaardian interpretation of the symphony-cantata, see chapter 11.)

A somewhat more nationalistic subtext, it should be admitted, was not absent during these days of civic celebration. A day before the "Lobgesang" premiere, a statue of Gutenberg was unveiled (probably a replica of the one in Mainz) at the market place in Leipzig, with Raimund Härtel, co-owner of the music publishing company Breitkopf und Härtel, comparing Johannes Gutenberg (yes, it was St. John's Day or *Johannistag*) with St. John the Baptist, who, like Gutenberg, had prepared the way for someone greater coming after him—Gutenberg's printing press indeed had led to Luther's translation of the Bible, which had allowed the German people to read the Word of the Lord in their native language and in turn fostered Luther's Reformation. A *Festgesang* (MWV D4) for male chorus and brass composed by Mendelssohn sounded at the unveiling: "Vaterland, in deinen Gauen / Brach der gold'ne Tag einst an" (Fatherland, the golden day burst forth long ago in your regions). A year later, in 1841, it served to accompany another, rather different unveiling: that of the aforementioned Hermannsdenkmal near Detmold.<sup>6</sup> The English-speaking world, though, is familiar with this tune in an even more sharply different context: after it was discovered that the melody perfectly matched a preexisting Christmas text by Charles Wesley, the melody was disseminated through hymnals as the carol "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing"—quite devoid of any politico-national implications.

A little more than a month after the Gutenberg celebration, the citizens of Leipzig were invited to a concert given for the benefit of another civic purpose.

Mendelssohn had decided that Johann Sebastian Bach, the most illustrious musician who had ever resided in Leipzig, deserved to be commemorated with a monument near St. Thomas Church. The composer added to his already strenuous schedule by setting time aside to practice the organ (his pedal technique, especially, needed considerable improvement) in preparation for a full-length organ recital at St. Thomas, a fundraiser, featuring works of Bach and framed by two improvisations at the beginning and at the end. The latter would feature a fugue with the pitches B♭, A, C, and B♮ (spelling the name of BACH) interwoven in a variety of textures. The concert on August 6 was favorably reviewed by Robert Schumann in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, the event brought in enough money to proceed with the project. In 1841 Mendelssohn asked his friend, the painter Eduard Bendemann in Dresden, to provide him with a sketch of what the monument might look like;<sup>8</sup> Hermann Knauer in Leipzig and Friedrich Moritz Hiller in turn were asked to finish it: a column in the neo-Gothic style (vaguely reminiscent of cemetery art) that included some relief sculptures, including a bust of J. S. Bach. The commemorative column was inaugurated, in the presence of Bach's last surviving grandson, in Leipzig on April 23, 1843.<sup>9</sup> Today a different and more ostentatious monument of Bach—presenting him as if he were a Fifth Evangelist and model Lutheran—greet the visitor at the south entrance to St. Thomas Church; it was designed by Carl Scheffner and erected in 1908. Mendelssohn's Bach monument can still be found, but now hidden in a park nearby. A comparison of the iconography of these two Bach monuments for Leipzig might prove instructive.

Mendelssohn's connections with J. S. Bach were manifold and, in a way, preceded the younger composer's birth (see chapter 8). A veritable Bach cult can be discerned in the family of his maternal grandparents, the Itzigs—a reverence nurtured by keyboard lessons and music-theory instruction provided by none other than Bach's student Johann Philipp Kirnberger. Felix's paternal grandfather, Moses Mendelssohn, the famous philosopher of the German Enlightenment, also took music lessons with Kirnberger. The composer's parents were members of the Berlin Sing-Akademie, where Bach's choral works were rehearsed; his father Abraham donated a substantial collection of music materials—by and large, works of Bach—to its library, and so did his great-aunt Sara Levy in later years. In addition to family links, there was a pedagogical lineage that linked Mendelssohn directly to Bach's teaching and the contrapuntal tradition (see chapter 1): Mendelssohn's teacher Carl Friedrich Zelter had been taught by two Bach students, Kirnberger and Johann Friedrich Fasch. (The latter was the founder of the Berlin Sing-Akademie in 1791, whom Zelter succeeded as conductor in 1800.) In other words, ancestry and teachers imbued Mendelssohn's outlook with a definite Bachian orientation that, rather than being a burden, spurred him on to preserve the legacy of the distant master in his own compositions as well as performances and acts of civic commemoration.

The Bach commemorations in Leipzig in 1840 and 1843 seem like faint reverberations of an earlier event that Mendelssohn spearheaded as a twenty-year-old conductor (and that put him forever on the map of musical historicism): the first modern performance, in 1829, of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* with the Berlin Sing-Akademie. Even though rooted in the Bach tradition of previous decades, the performance, given ample publicity in Berlin as well as in other German cities, was a major milestone in the revival of earlier music in general and Bach's music in particular. It was the most powerful sign of musical historicism in the nineteenth century, a monument or statue cast in sound rather than stone. It foreshadowed nothing less than a paradigmatic shift in musical culture—with repercussions far beyond Berlin and other musical centers in Germany. The revival of early music was to change concert life in the next hundred years; it turned the concert hall into a museum for the performance of musical artworks of the past rather than (as in, say, Beethoven's day) almost entirely of the present.<sup>10</sup>

Mendelssohn grew up in Berlin, which in comparison with Dresden, Munich, and Vienna was perhaps a cultural backwater. Still, the Prussian capital was eager to catch up with other European capitals in terms of arts and sciences, especially as a result of the reforms instituted after the devastating military defeat in 1806 at the hands of Napoleon. Family connections and influential teachers and friends may have helped as well in Mendelssohn's being considered to participate in the organization and artistic direction of official events. He indeed became a public figure quite early on. In 1828, he was asked to write the music for a cantata commemorating Albrecht Dürer at the tercentenary of the artist's death (see chapter 9). The somewhat amateurish poetry by Konrad Levezow may not have interested the few elder statesmen among the composers in Berlin (and there were very few to begin with), but Mendelssohn's teacher Zelter, claiming advanced age and other responsibilities to avoid the challenge, used his personal influence in favor of his prodigy student. For the nineteen-year-old youngster, it certainly was tempting to contribute music for a state occasion, and he accepted. Johann Gottfried Schadow and Karl Friedrich Schinkel, Berlin's most distinguished sculptor and architect, respectively, were both involved; royalty was present; and, of course, a statue of Dürer was unveiled at an appropriate moment during the festivities. True, Mendelssohn had composed better pieces a few years earlier, such as the *Midsummer Night's Dream* overture (MWV P3, op. 21) and the Octet (MWV R20, op. 20), but the *Festmusik* ("Dürer Festmusik," MWV D1) prompted the royal family, government officials, and Berlin's artistic and intellectual elite to take notice of him in a major public event.

Rehearsals for the performance of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* were fully under way early in 1829, when Mendelssohn had already contemplated his next move. The year following would be another anniversary, the tercentenary of the Augsburg Confession, a landmark in the consolidation of Protestantism



in Germany and thus an event of civic commemoration (well, at least in some regions of the German Confederation, especially those parts of Prussia that were Lutheran or Reformed). Perhaps it was foolhardy for a composer with a Jewish name, even though baptized and thus Christian, to believe that he could employ his art to commemorate an event dear to Protestantism. In any case, the commission never quite materialized. Anti-Semitism, even though difficult to pinpoint, may have been involved.<sup>11</sup> After completing the work, now known as the “Reformation” Symphony (MWV N15, op. posth. 107), he began his grand tour, exploring different cultures and different musical traditions. The work remained a stepchild throughout his life: he revised it, conducted a rehearsal of it in Paris early in 1832 (not really a locale where Lutheranism was rampant), premiered it in Berlin later in that year (apparently without the positive reception he might have expected), then abandoned it altogether. It was published and given an opus number only after his death (see chapter 3). And he was never awarded the appointment he had hoped for in Berlin, starting his career instead in Düsseldorf in the Rhineland and then moving to Leipzig, a city whose musical culture he decisively shaped during his tenure as conductor of the Gewandhaus Orchestra and, during his lifetime and beyond, as founding director of the conservatory there.

Berlin beckoned again in the 1840s as a result of Friedrich Wilhelm IV’s ascent to the throne. The aforementioned Rhine crisis of 1840 provided an impetus to the young monarch, who had just succeeded his father Friedrich Wilhelm III, aligning his state with German national aspirations. The Rhineland, a largely Catholic region, had become a Prussian province as a result of the treaties negotiated at the Congress of Vienna; any French ambitions of annexing that province would pit France against one of the two key-players in the German Confederation. At the beginning of his reign, the new king relaxed censorship, stopped the prosecution of so-called demagogues (i.e., political opponents), provided shelter to exiled artists and intellectuals, ameliorated tensions with the Catholics in his western provinces, and encouraged regional parliaments. His subjects had good reasons to hope that he would respond to political and social changes that, during the reign of his father, had built up but not been addressed. In short, Prussia was suffering from what in modern German parlance is known as a *Reformstau*: a pileup of needed reforms.

Alas, the king had rather antiquated ideas about his power being divinely ordained. While Felix was more guarded in his criticism, his sister Fanny, with refreshing irreverence, called some of the monarchical constructs “sentimental nonsense.”<sup>12</sup> And she was right: when the Paulskirche Parliament, a constitutional assembly that had met in Frankfurt/Main for much of 1848–49, offered Friedrich Wilhelm IV the crown of the German Empire—in its “kleindeutsch” manifestation without the German-speaking regions of the Habsburg Empire—he refused: he would not accept any power that

emanated from the street. As one historian has put it, the king would have liked “to do something great, something historical for ‘Teutschland’; he vacillated between his ambition and his hatred for anything modern, liberal, democratic. The latter prevailed.”<sup>13</sup>

Mendelssohn was to get an early preview of the monarch’s indecision. Friedrich Wilhelm IV had great plans for making Berlin a center of the arts, comparable to Dresden, Munich, and Vienna. He wanted to attract the most illustrious artists and intellectuals to the shores of the Spree or Havel Rivers, and, quite early, Mendelssohn figured in his vision. Mendelssohn was cautious, even strongly reluctant to move to Berlin (he had been disappointed by Berlin before), but he finally relocated his family. (After all, being close to his mother and the Hensels—his sister’s family—was tempting.) Defining his responsibilities as royal Kapellmeister proved difficult: he was supposed to head a new music institute, compose liturgical music at the command of the king, and perform large-scale works (meaning: oratorios). Mendelssohn was indeed on the verge of becoming the “Staatskomponist” of Prussia. Unfortunately, disentangling bureaucratic competencies and overcoming vanities and pettiness proved vexing and sapped the composer’s energies. Even two audiences with the king did not advance things much further, except for the conferral of the title of GMD or Generalmusikdirektor. To no avail: the first state-funded conservatory in German lands opened its doors to musicians in Leipzig in 1843 (a full quarter century before Berlin was ready); the king of Saxony (where Leipzig was located) proved to be more skillful in cutting through red tape than his counterpart in Prussia.

In spite of the frustrations that Mendelssohn encountered with court and bureaucracy in Berlin, the fruits of his Berlin appointment are not insubstantial: the music for Sophocles’s *Antigone* (MWV M12, op. 55, 1841), the incidental music for Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (MWV M13, op. 61, 1843—beginning with the eponymous concert overture composed when he was seventeen), the music to Racine’s *Athalie* and Sophocles’s *Oedipus at Colonus* (MWV M16 and M14, respectively—both of 1845). By the time the latter works were performed in the Neues Palais in Potsdam with royalty attending, Mendelssohn could no longer tolerate life in Berlin. He had taken care not to sever his ties to Leipzig anyway and could therefore move his family back to a city that provided him with a more flexible framework for his artistry.

It is, of course, futile to speculate as to how Mendelssohn would have negotiated the turbulence of the Revolution of 1848–49, and, even more futile, about how he would have responded to Friedrich Wilhelm IV’s rejection of the imperial crown, delaying the national and democratic aspirations of the German people, setting the stage for another decade of reactionary politics in Prussia, and dashing the high hopes in his reign once and for all. Mendelssohn died a few months before the revolution got its sputtering start in German lands. He most certainly sympathized with those demanding constitutional reform and

the right of citizens to participate in government. But he would have abhorred the excesses of the events and taken issue with the more radical factions that emerged in their wake. His response to the nationalistic rhetoric emanating during the Rhine crisis of 1840 perhaps provides a clue. Famous and not-so-famous poets produced lots of jingoistic verses: *Lied der Deutschen* (Song of the Germans) beginning with the famous line “Deutschland, Deutschland über alles” (Hoffmann von Fallersleben), *Die Wacht am Rhein* (The guard on the Rhine: Max Schneckenburger), and *Rheinlied* (Rhine song: Nikolaus Becker). The latter, starting with the assertive lines “Sie sollen ihn nicht haben / Den freien, deutschen Rhein” (They shall not have it / The free German Rhine) was set to music no fewer than seventy times (by luminaries such as Robert Schumann, Konradin Kreutzer, and Heinrich Marschner) and stimulated a French reply by the renowned poet Alfred de Vigny: *Le Rhin allemand* (set to music by Félicien David). Sensing a successful business venture for his music publishing company, Raimund Härtel encouraged Mendelssohn to set it as well: it had the potential of being quite profitable. Mendelssohn declined. In a letter to his brother Paul in November 1840, he found the issue “childish.”<sup>14</sup>

Mendelssohn died in 1847, at what was, even in those days, the early age of thirty-eight. In his short life, quite remarkably, he managed to commemorate at least four figures who later would be instrumental in defining German-ness: Dürer, Bach, Luther, and Gutenberg. Perhaps Beethoven should be added here as well, because both the “Reformation” Symphony and the “Lobgesang” Symphony invoke Beethoven as a point of reference (to say nothing about more subtle references to Beethoven in Mendelssohn’s early string quartets). Goethe and Schiller may be missing from the list, but we could imagine a composer such as Mendelssohn—who was imbued with an obvious sense of officialdom and was apparently motivated in part by a need to assimilate and pay his dues to the culture that was also his<sup>15</sup>—being present at a Goethe centenary in 1849 (he met the old man in Weimar three times) or at a Schiller commemoration in 1855 or 1859, and composing music for such events. Mendelssohn’s colleague Robert Schumann seems to have picked up, in or around 1849, the older composer’s knack for commemorative events: the *Lieder aus Wilhelm Meister*, *Requiem für Mignon*, and *Szenen aus Goethes Faust* can be linked, more or less persuasively, to the Goethe centenary being celebrated throughout German lands during that year. The oratorio on Luther that Schumann contemplated around 1852 may have, if it had been completed, fulfilled a similar function of cultural-national commemoration.

Throughout his life Mendelssohn contributed greatly to German nation building, in that he lent his talent as a creative and performing artist to markers and reminders that encouraged the people to imagine themselves as a nation having a common history and culture. And yet, it is difficult to see in him a proponent of national fervor, even less of nationalistic fervor. He spoke several languages, was widely traveled, and thus knew different nations, traditions, and cultures. He

was a cosmopolitan, and certainly as much so as his contemporary Franz Liszt. As a composer and conductor, Mendelssohn recognized and secured the legacy of non-German traditions: Palestrina (see chapters 1 and 2) and Handel's oratorios (see chapter 10). And he was instrumental in spurring on the initially mentioned Gauntlett in the English organ reform (see chapter 6).

While Dr. Gauntlett was never recognized with a statue for his accomplishments in the British Isles, Mendelssohn was honored after his death by the city that owed him so much: a monument in front of the Gewandhaus in Leipzig. Excesses of German nationalism, gaining the upper hand and, entwined with racial prejudice, becoming official politics in the 1930s, were the forces responsible for removing the statue from sight and site in 1936; the efforts to efface Mendelssohn's accomplishments and consign them to oblivion were, sadly, given the stamp of approval by certain German musicologists of the era.<sup>16</sup> The statue was not restored to its site until 2009 at the two-hundredth anniversary of the composer's birth.<sup>17</sup>

One concluding meditation on statues and monuments may be allowed here. When Ludwig I of Bavaria tried to make sure that he would not be outdone by any other monarch in proving his Teutonic credentials in the 1830s, he gave the order to build, near Regensburg, the Walhalla, a Greek-style temple on a high hill overlooking the Danube. The interior was conceived as a work in progress, having space for hundreds of plaques and busts commemorating the most illustrious figures of German history. Over the years, an odd collection of political, military, and cultural icons were honored with acceptance into Walhalla.<sup>18</sup> The editor of the volume at hand visited the place in May 2013 and was overwhelmed by the aura of the locale no less than by the problematic nature of the selection of iconic figures. Heinrich Heine was only recently admitted, so was Edith Stein, a Catholic nun of Jewish origin, who perished in Auschwitz. (Their inclusion was at least confirmed through an insert page in the official tourist brochure.) Mendelssohn, strangely enough, is still waiting to be recognized. But, then, why should he be added to that odd Pantheon of German-ness? His deeds constructed and celebrated the cultural legacies of German people in a civic form of nationalism whose positive influence is not often discerned in the statues and monuments that dot the lands of Central Europe.



A number of chapters of this book were lectures at a conference of the Eastman Rochester Organ Initiative in 2009, focusing on Mendelssohn and the Contrapuntal Tradition. Additional chapters were commissioned from various scholars to flesh out the richness of the topic, leading, in turn, to a slightly different framework for the contributions, captured in the book's title.

Part 1 ("Composition and Tradition") explores some of the compositional traditions Mendelssohn made his own by training and travel, and by dint of his



openness and curiosity to all things musical. R. Larry Todd, whose “Mendelssohn and the Contrapuntal Tradition” was originally the keynote lecture at the above-mentioned conference, lays out the richness of contrapuntal legacies Mendelssohn inherited. While J. S. Bach undoubtedly loomed large throughout the composer’s life, Mendelssohn also drew on other sources of contrapuntal thought: from Palestrina to the *stile antico* to post-Bachian contrapuntalists such as Mozart and Beethoven. Zelter’s teaching imbued Mendelssohn with a way of composing, performing, and thinking about music based on the conviction that music history is a living tradition that informs the present. Siegwart Reichwald continues with a detailed account of Mendelssohn’s indebtedness to what he calls the “Catholic Tradition,” discussing two works that originated—by and large—during the composer’s Italian journey: the *Kirchen-Musik* (MWV B19–21, op. 23) and *Drei Motetten* (MWV B23, B24, and B30; op. 39). In his reading of Mendelssohn’s “Reformation” Symphony (MWV N15, op. 107), Peter Mercer-Taylor adds another figure looming large in the composer’s inherited legacies: Beethoven. While acknowledging the symphony’s indebtedness to the contrapuntal traditions of Palestrina and Bach, he sees the work’s narrative goal in the vocality, represented by the Lutheran chorale, of the finale, and thus as Mendelssohn’s first essay in a symphony taking up the challenge of Beethoven’s Ninth. (The “Lobgesang” would be another such symphony.)

Part 2 pays homage to “Mendelssohn and the Organ.” As Wm. A. Little demonstrates in his contribution, Mendelssohn’s connections with the “queen of instruments,” as the Germans call it, were substantial and manifested themselves in a variety of activities—performing, composing, and editing works for organ—and in two countries: Germany and England. That Bach loomed large in these activities goes without saying: Russell Stinson shows how Mendelssohn’s tribute to the Thomas-Kantor was given body in sound in a special organ recital in 1840 in Leipzig’s St. Thomas Church with the purpose of gathering money for, and following up with, a tribute in stone a little later. (A reenactment of this famous recital, by three professors of organ at the Eastman School of Music, was made for use with this book and can be found at [www.esm.rochester.edu/organ/mendelssohn](http://www.esm.rochester.edu/organ/mendelssohn).) Mendelssohn brought his enthusiasm for all things Bachian to the British Isles, where he performed Bach’s works on a variety of organs in churches and in concert halls: Nicholas Thistlethwaite makes a persuasive case for Mendelssohn’s encounter with Henry Gauntlett in England as being significant for the latter’s setting in motion, almost single-handedly, the English organ reform during the Victorian era. Hans Davidsson continues with an essay on performance practice, highlighting the special qualities of the Craighead-Saunders Organ in Christ Church in Rochester, New York, and exploring the kinds of organs Mendelssohn’s organ works were written for, with particular emphasis on registration and tempo. He comes to the conclusion that Mendelssohn’s Sonatas for Organ (MWV W56–61, op. 65) most likely were composed as a homage to Bach—in other words, constitute another *Denkmal* to the Thomas-Kantor.

Part 3 (“Mendelssohn’s Inherited Legacies in Context”) presents essays related to the book’s title in widening concentric circles. Christoph Wolff explores the Bach tradition that flourished among members of Mendelssohn’s maternal forebears, especially his great-aunt, Sara Levy, and his grandmother, Bella Salomon, as well as in his paternal lineage. Mendelssohn’s early “Dürer” Cantata (MWV D1) is the focus of John Michael Cooper’s essay. Rather than tossing it off as an inconsequential, occasional, and youthful composition, he accords it significance as a contribution to a large historical project that manifests itself in literature, the visual arts, and in music since the early nineteenth century: the discovery of a distinctly German cultural identity. Mendelssohn’s performance practice in bringing to life Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion* or Handel’s oratorios may, nowadays, raise the eyebrows of those striving for authenticity; Glenn Stanley provides a historical context for the composer’s Handel reception by comparing it with other restorative efforts in architecture and literature in the early nineteenth century. Benedict Taylor takes on the “two Mendelssohns” thesis with which critics, of the past as well as of more recent times, tried to separate works of undisputed originality from those denounced as tired imitations, espousing religious sentimentality, such as *St. Paul, Elijah*, and the symphony cantata “Lobgesang.” Using philosophical thoughts from Kierkegaard’s *Either/Or* as a filter, the author reads the latter work as a heroic attempt to reconcile religious art with secular art-religion. Celia Applegate unfolds a panorama of Protestantism in its various manifestations in Prussia and England and explores Mendelssohn’s ability to negotiate religious tensions through his sacred music.

Taken together, the various chapters present a vivid picture of a serious yet frequently imaginative composer seeking to negotiate the interaction among and between a number of major principles and factors, including high-level musical creativity, national and religious identity, and the adaptive reuse of musical traditions from the recent and more distant past.

## Notes

- 1 See the title of chapter 6 in this volume by Nicholas Thistlethwaite.
- 2 Oliver Korte and Albrecht Riethmüller, eds., *Beethovens Orchesterwerke und Konzerte: Das Handbuch* (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 2013), 58–59 (Stefan Weinzierl on concert life in Vienna, 1807–14) and 256–78 (Frédéric Döhl on *Wellingtons Sieg*); Nicholas Mathew, *Political Beethoven* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
- 3 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); see also the revised and expanded second edition of 1991 with a new preface.
- 4 On Mendelssohn’s civic nationalism, see Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 3 of *The Oxford History of Western Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 166–77.

- 5 Christian Martin Schmidt, "Lobgesang—oder: Große Musik für Leipzig," in *Dem Stolz und der Zierde unserer Stadt: Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy und Leipzig*, ed. Wilhelm Seidel (Leipzig: Edition Peters, 2004), 163–72.
- 6 A fuller account of the Gutenberg ceremonies in Leipzig in 1840 can be found in R. Larry Todd, *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 395–97.
- 7 Chapter 4 and, in greater detail, chapter 5 describe the event. Mendelssohn's organ recital was "reconstructed" in a performance on the Craighead-Saunders Organ in Christ Church in Rochester, New York, during the Eastman Rochester Organ Initiative (EROI) Festival in 2009 and, again, on the same instrument during the EROI Festival 2012 by Hans Davidsson, David Higgs, and William Porter in Rochester. The performance on September 27, 2012, was recorded and can be accessed through an internet link: [www.esm.rochester.edu/organ/mendelssohn](http://www.esm.rochester.edu/organ/mendelssohn).
- 8 The book's cover shows Bendemann's drawing of the envisioned monument; another image can be found as figure 5.1 in Russell Stinson's chapter.
- 9 A fuller account can be found in Jürgen Ernst, Stefan Voerkel, and Christiane Schmidt, *Das Leipziger Mendelssohn-Denkmal* (Leipzig: Mendelssohn-Haus, 2009), 13–29.
- 10 Martin Geck, *Die Wiederentdeckung der Matthäuspassion im neunzehnten Jahrhundert* (Regensburg: Bosse, 1967); Celia Applegate, *Bach in Berlin* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); and also Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay on the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992).
- 11 Judith K. Silber, "Mendelssohn and the Reformation Symphony: A Critical and Historical Study" (PhD diss., Yale University, 1987); and Silber, "Mendelssohn and His 'Reformation' Symphony," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 40, no. 2 (1987): 324–31. See also Thomas Grey, "The Orchestral Music," in *The Mendelssohn Companion*, ed. Douglass Seaton (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 417.
- 12 Todd, *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music*, 87.
- 13 Golo Mann, *Deutsche Geschichte des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1992), 228: "Friedrich Wilhelm IV. hätte gern etwas Großes, Historisches für 'Teutschland' getan; er schwankte zwischen seinem Ehrgeiz und seinem Haß gegen alles Moderne, Liberale, Demokratische. Der letztere überwog." Translations are by the author unless otherwise indicated.
- 14 Todd, *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music*, 407.
- 15 Leon Botstein speaks of "the aesthetics of affirmation and assimilation." R. Larry Todd, *Mendelssohn and His World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 5–42. And Jeffrey Sposato devotes an entire monograph to the issue in *The Price of Assimilation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
- 16 See, for instance, the strategic omissions in Wolfgang Boetticher's writings about Robert Schumann after 1941, or the negative assessment of Mendelssohn in Gotthold Frotzcher's *Die Geschichte des Orgelspiels und der Orgelkomposition* (Berlin: M. Hesse, 1935; 2nd ed., Berlin: Merseburger, 1959—the second edition is a reprint of the first).
- 17 Ernst, Voerkel, and Schmidt, *Das Leipziger Mendelssohn-Denkmal*.
- 18 See Albrecht Riethmüller's critical assessment of the Walhalla concept, as it pertains to musicians, *Die Walhalla und ihre Musiker* (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1993).

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*Part One*

# Composition and Tradition

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## Chapter One

# Mendelssohn and the Contrapuntal Tradition

R. Larry Todd

We might begin with a statement uncontroversial enough: in matters of counterpoint, Mendelssohn was preoccupied with the music of J. S. Bach. The evidence is formidable and irrefutable. It is not just that Mendelssohn was disposed to writing fugues and canons, or to insinuating into his music familiar Lutheran chorales in order to accumulate extra layers of complexity. More to the point, Mendelssohn took the trouble to emulate distinctly Bachian counterpoint—I am thinking here of his preference for rich, involved, chromatic part writing—that was for the time historically remote and learned. Thus, as early as 1827 he published an erudite fugue in A major as the fifth of the *Sieben Charakterstücke* for piano (MWV U60; op. 7, no. 5)—a mirror-inversion fugue laden with augmentation and diminution, as though, one weary reviewer from the Leipzig *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* reported, “the composer officially wished to demonstrate how diligently he had studied and mastered his subject through counterpoint.”<sup>1</sup> In subsequent fugues Mendelssohn never exceeded the dense accumulations of special devices in this composition, but he did return to the esoteric technique of mirror inversion in the piano Fugue in B Minor (MWV U131; op. 35, no. 3 [1837]) and in the first movement of the Organ Sonata (MWV W56; op. 65, no. 1), and, perhaps most tellingly, incorporated a mirror-inversion fugue into the overture to *Elijah* (MWV A25, op. 70). There the inverted subject lends extra emphasis to the depiction of a world turned upside down by the calamitous seven-year drought, announced by the prophet in the opening recitative.

Presumably, Mendelssohn’s attraction to Bachian counterpoint was what led Hector Berlioz, who viewed the strictures of fugal composition as an “unpardonable offense against musical expression,”<sup>2</sup> to aver that his colleague was “a little too fond of the dead.”<sup>3</sup> (Berlioz also acknowledged, it should be added,

that Mendelssohn possessed “une des capacités musicales les plus hautes de l’époque.”)<sup>4</sup> Berlioz’s rejection of traditional counterpoint reflected in no small way his student experiences at the Paris Conservatoire, where he encountered not so much the rigors of Bach as the annoying pedagogical habits of another scrupulous contrapuntist, Luigi Cherubini, who will briefly emerge later in this essay. Still, we must concede that Mendelssohn would have expended no little effort in refuting Berlioz’s judgment, for Mendelssohn’s engagement with Bach’s music was certainly deep and enduring, and it began early, at least when the composer was only ten.

Writing to Goethe in 1819, Carl Friedrich Zelter relayed a remarkable anecdote about the prodigy’s Bachian ruminations: “In the score of a magnificent concerto by Sebastian Bach the hawk eyes of my Felix, when he was ten years old, became aware of a succession of six pure fifths, which I perhaps never would have found, since I did not pay attention to them in larger works, and the passage is in six parts. But the handwriting is autograph, beautifully and clearly written, and the passage occurs twice. Now is that an oversight or a license?”<sup>5</sup> The work in question was the Brandenburg Concerto no. 5, in particular, measure 11 of the first movement, as Bach had notated it in the 1721 fair-copy holograph prepared for the Margrave of Brandenburg. As example 1.1 reveals, Bach here attempted to improve a series of hidden octaves between the viola and solo violin, only, according to Albert Schweitzer, “to fall out of the frying pan into the fire”<sup>6</sup> by inadvertently engendering between the viola and harpsichord dreaded parallel fifths.

Now just around this time, in the latter half of 1819, the young Mendelssohn was beginning to fill, under Zelter’s supervision, a musical album with exercises in figured bass, followed the next year by chorale harmonizations, exercises in double counterpoint, and fugue and canon in two and three parts.<sup>7</sup> Our student then proceeded to four-part fugue in 1821 and produced twelve fugues for string quartet (several of them double fugues or chorale fugues),<sup>8</sup> which in turn gave way to choral, motet-like fugues in five voices.<sup>9</sup> He thus pursued a systematic course in increasing degrees of contrapuntal complexity, from two- to three-, four-, and five-part counterpoint. Taking a broad view, we might suggest that the culmination of this graduated method came in 1825, when the sixteen-year-old completed the finale of his Octet (MWV R20, op. 20), with its energetic, opening eight-part fugato and subsequent treatments of eight-part counterpoint. Mendelssohn’s elder sister, Fanny, followed a somewhat similar course of instruction with Zelter, who revealed to Goethe in December 1824 that she had just completed her thirty-second fugue (regrettably, almost all are lost).<sup>10</sup> Thus, we must imagine a scenario in which two sibling prodigies together fathomed the cerebral tradition of high counterpoint, through which of course they deepened their musical relationships to Bach.

Zelter’s tuition was in fact heavily indebted to the writings of two eighteenth-century Berlin theorists devoted to Bach—Johann Philipp Kirnberger and

Example 1.1. Bach, Brandenburg Concerto no. 5, mvt. 1, mm. 10–11

Flauto traverso

Violino principale

Violino di ripieno

Viola di ripieno

Violoncello

Violone

Cembalo concertato

Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg. With respect to Kirnberger, Zelter drew upon *Die Kunst des reinen Satzes in der Musik* (1771–79), an imposing treatment of figured bass, chorale harmonization, and double counterpoint based on the precepts of Kirnberger’s teacher, J. S. Bach.<sup>11</sup> It was Kirnberger who, in response to Rameau’s *basse fondamentale*, developed the *Grundbass* as an analytical tool for interpreting bass lines, an approach Zelter was still following in 1819, as revealed by Felix’s exercises, several of which display an added, abstract bass line tracing the motion of the underlying *Grundbass*. With regard to Marpurg, Zelter drew upon the *Essay on Fugue* (*Die Abhandlung von der Fuge*, 1753–54), where he could have found some of the earliest analyses of Bach’s *Art of Fugue* and thorough explications of the more esoteric forms of counterpoint, such as double counterpoint at the ninth and eleventh. Hyphen-like, Zelter thus effectively linked Felix to a distinctly eighteenth-century, Bachian approach to composition, a transmission of influence that we can conveniently summarize in a pedagogical tree connecting Bach to arguably his most devoted nineteenth-century follower (fig. 1.1). Mendelssohn’s memories of his childhood studies



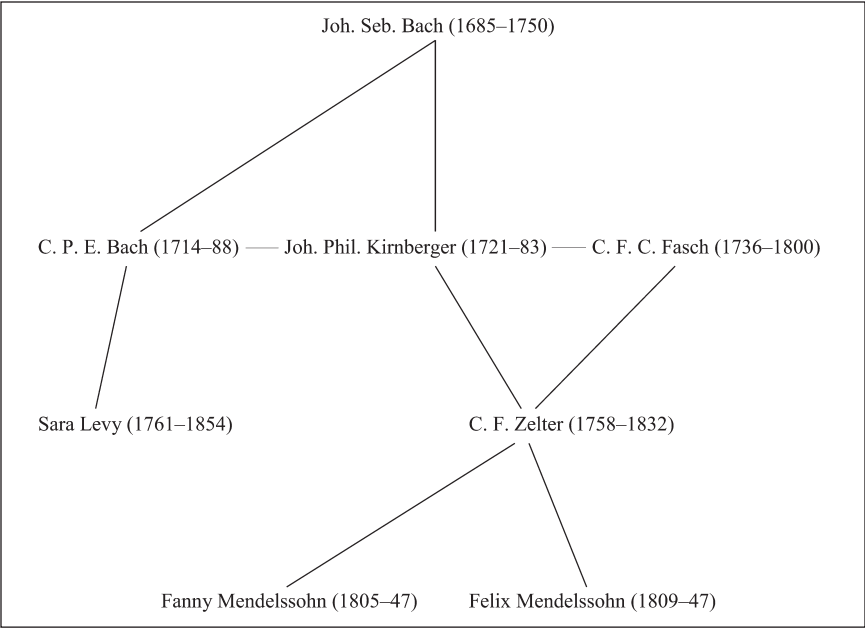


Figure 1.1. Pedagogical tree from Bach to the Mendelssohns.

still resonate years later when he confessed to Johann Christian Lobe, who in 1846 became the editor of the Leipzig *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, his preference for “the finely woven voices, the polyphonic movement,” and then added, “here my early studies in counterpoint with Zelter and my study of Bach may have had their principal impact.”<sup>12</sup>

Marking Mendelssohn’s life like recurring signposts are numerous events that reinforced his ties to Bach, of which we may briefly review just a few. First of all, there is the date Abraham and Lea chose for their son’s baptism—March 21, 1816, coincidentally or not, the birthday of Bach. Knowing what we now know about the Bachian proclivities of the Mendelssohn family—the composer’s mother, Lea, and elder sister, Fanny, made a habit of playing the *Well-Tempered Clavier*; his great aunt Sara Levy, a patroness of C. P. E. Bach and student of W. F. Bach, had performed the Fifth Brandenburg at the Berlin Sing-Akademie as early as 1805; and his father, Abraham, was actively involved in collecting Bach manuscripts—I am inclined to imagine that the date was no coincidence. Be that as it may, as early as 1821, the twelve-year-old Felix was reporting from Leipzig that he had visited the current Thomas-Kantor, Johann Gottfried Schicht, and readily connected him to the grand tradition: Schicht, Felix wrote, “sleeps in the same chamber in which Sebastian Bach lived, I have seen it, I have seen the little spot, where his Clavier stood, where he composed his immortal motets, where he (in Professor Zelter’s

expression) punished [*kuranzte*] his young charges, and hopefully I will bring along a drawing of this honorable house, in which Rosenmüller, Bach, Doles, Hiller, and Schicht worked and still work."<sup>13</sup> Just a few years later, Felix received from his maternal grandmother, Bella Salomon, a copy of the score of the *St. Matthew Passion*. Probing and absorbing its complex mysteries required several years before, at age twenty, the young composer gave the celebrated revival of the work in 1829 at the Berlin Sing-Akademie, the signal event that stirred the German musical consciousness and identified the *Neuchrist* Mendelssohn as an unabashed Bach disciple.

Mendelssohn's study of the Passion produced tangible results in his own music, including the extended series of chorale cantatas from the later 1820s and early 1830s, and of course his first oratorio, *St. Paul* (MWV A14, op. 36), brimming with fugues (four- and five-part), chorales, and involved, chromatic part writing. Yet another facet of his Bachian pursuits was on display in 1840, when he gave a monumental concert of Bach's organ music at the Leipzig Thomas-Kirche.<sup>14</sup> Robert Schumann informs us that Mendelssohn concluded with an improvisation on the chorale "O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden" (the Passion chorale that figures so prominently in the *St. Matthew Passion*), into which he wove a fugue on B–A–C–H. The purpose of the organ concert was to raise funds for a Bach statue, which was finally unveiled in 1843, incredibly enough the first modern remembrance of the composer. On April 13, 1843, Mendelssohn presented an all-Bach program at the Gewandhaus, and then reconvened with a select audience before the Thomasschule for the unveiling of the statue, a four-sided sandstone monument, adorned by a Gothic covering and cross, that featured on one side a colossal bust of Bach, and, on the other three, bas-reliefs symbolizing the Thomas-Kantor's work as organist, teacher, and composer. Attending the event was Wilhelm Friedrich Ernst Bach (1759–1845), J. S. Bach's last surviving grandson, a living link to what for most was an increasingly distant, receding tradition, though as far as Mendelssohn was concerned, a tradition that remained timelessly relevant. Writing to his mother, Mendelssohn expressed his satisfaction at the intricate design of the monument: "The many columns, little columns and scrollwork, above all the bas-reliefs and the old, splendid wig-adorned countenance shone freely in the sunlight, and gave me great joy. With its many decorative ornaments the whole really recalled the old Sebastian."<sup>15</sup>

Not surprisingly, Bachian allusions inform Mendelssohn's music on several levels, and not infrequently his reflections about Bach triggered contrapuntal responses. One example is the relatively little-known piano Fugue in E-flat Major (MWV U57) of September 1826, finished exactly one month after one of Mendelssohn's most un-Bachian creations, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* overture. The subject of the fugue, which describes a triadic descent from the fifth scale degree followed by an expressive ascending seventh and stepwise descending resolution, impresses as a contrapuntal gloss on the terse, chromatic recitative

in the *St. Matthew Passion* in which Christ predicts his betrayal before the gathered disciples, “Wahrlich, ich sage Euch: Einer unter Euch wird mich verrathen” (exx. 1.2a and 1.2b). Suffused with chromatic dissonances, Bach’s recitative pivots deceptively from E-flat major to C minor, a trace of which may be found in measures 5–6 of Mendelssohn’s composition, with the entrance of the fugal answer, in which the harmony momentarily swerves toward C minor.

No less revealing is the subject of Mendelssohn’s Fugue in D Major (MWV U105), the second of the Six Preludes and Fugues for Piano, op. 35, published in 1837. Here the composer took the trouble to disguise somewhat the source of the fugue, the D-Major Fugue from Book I of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* (exx. 1.3a and 1.3b), by removing the florid thirty-second notes and stately dotted rhythms of Bach’s subject, leaving, as it were, a skeletal reduction. Bach’s fugue had made a memorable impression on Mendelssohn in Switzerland in 1831, when he practiced it on an organ in the village of Sargans. From his close friend Eduard Rietz, Mendelssohn had learned that the Dresden organist Johann Gottlob Schneider had routinely played the subject of Bach’s fugue in the bass voice in the pedals, an effect that Mendelssohn deemed unimaginable, until he tried the passage for himself, along with other organ works of Bach, and concluded, “Das war ein furchtbarer Cantor.”<sup>16</sup> Recently Wm. A. Little has cast some doubt on the veracity of Mendelssohn’s claim—it is unclear whether the Swiss organ could have accommodated Bach’s subject in the pedals<sup>17</sup>—but in any event, by the time Mendelssohn finished his own D-Major Fugue in 1834, originally in a version for organ, Bach’s subject was already transformed into the simplified form also used in the piano fugue that Mendelssohn ultimately published as op. 35, no. 2. The result, as Robert Schumann recognized, was a lyrical composition nearly mistakable for a *Lied ohne Worte*. Still, like its brethren in opus 35, the D-Major Fugue contained

much of Sebastian, and might deceive the sharp-sighted reviewer, were it not for the melody, the finer bloom, which we recognize as modern; and here and there those little touches peculiar to Mendelssohn, which identify him among a hundred other composers. Whether reviewers agree or not, it remains certain that the artist did not write them for pastime, but rather to call the attention of pianoforte players once more to this masterly old form, and to accustom them to it again. That he has chosen the right means for succeeding in this—avoiding all useless imitations and artificialities, allowing the melody of the cantilena to predominate while holding fast to the Bach form—is very much like him.<sup>18</sup>

Of course, during the mid-1840s, Robert Schumann himself succumbed to *Bachmanie*. Together with his wife, Clara, he undertook a rigorous course in counterpoint that involved a close study of Bach’s fugues, and the composition of three cycles—Robert’s Six Fugues on B–A–C–H for Organ, op. 60, and Four Fugues for Pedal Piano, op. 72, and Clara’s Three Preludes and Fugues for

Example 1.2a. Mendelssohn, Fugue in E-flat Major, subject

Example 1.2b. Bach, *St. Matthew Passion*, Recitative “Wahrlich ich sage euch”

Example 1.3a. Mendelssohn, Fugue in D Major, op. 35, no. 2, subject

Example 1.3b. Bach, *Well-Tempered Clavier* I, Fugue in D major, subject

Piano, op. 16, all from 1845. Presumably around this time Robert had a remarkable conversation with Mendelssohn that reinforced, albeit in an unusual way, his uncompromising devotion to Bach, a conversation that Robert later summarized in his *Erinnerungen an Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy*, drafted in memoriam after the composer's death in November 1847.

What prompted this conversation was not a musical issue, but an advance in astronomy—the dramatic announcement of a powerful, new telescope known as the Leviathan of Parsonstown. In 1845 the third Earl of Rosse, William Parsons, successfully installed a seventy-two-inch reflecting telescope at Birr Castle in Ireland; it was the largest telescope in the world until 1917, when the one-hundred-inch Hooker telescope was inaugurated on Mount Wilson in California. Though Irish weather was not especially accommodating to nineteenth-century astronomers, Parsons's Leviathan facilitated the detection of previously unknown stars of the eighteenth magnitude and revealed for the first time spiral structures of certain galaxies. Schumann shared with

Mendelssohn the reaction of one awed commentator, who observed that if solar inhabitants were to peer down at the earth through such a device, earthlings would impress as nothing more than diminutive mites on a cheese. But Mendelssohn had an answer for this sobering thought, and brought Schumann back down to earth by unexpectedly invoking the Bachian sublime: "Yes," he replied, "but the *Well-Tempered Clavier* would certainly instill respect in them."<sup>19</sup>

Confirmed Bachian that he was, Mendelssohn was still cognizant of a broader contrapuntal tradition, of which Bach formed a central pillar. If Mendelssohn returned again and again to Bach as a wellspring of inspiration, he did not hesitate to explore and emulate a variety of historical models that epitomized the art of counterpoint. Because Mendelssohn's eclecticism as a contrapuntist is often overlooked in a literature that has privileged his role in the Bach Revival, I would like to consider a few examples of non-Bachian sources that figured in Mendelssohn's conception of counterpoint. For even if he preferred Bach, there was no shortage of other contrapuntists to pique his curiosity about the most learned and august of musical disciplines. His study of Bach was part of a larger project, to restore to modern European musical culture the relevance and immediacy of the contrapuntal tradition writ large.

Occasionally Mendelssohn's immersion in Bach in fact masked a deep knowledge of other eighteenth-century composers. A case in point is Mendelssohn's early setting of the *Magnificat* from 1822 (MWV A2), sometimes thought to have been inspired by Bach's *Magnificat* BWV 243. But as Ralf Wehner argued in 1997,<sup>20</sup> in the library of the Berlin Sing-Akademie Mendelssohn had available to him a setting of the *Magnificat* in D Major, Wq. 215 by C. P. E. Bach,<sup>21</sup> a composer whose mannered, eccentric style Mendelssohn had absorbed into several of his string symphonies of 1821 and 1822. Emanuel Bach's *Magnificat* attracted Mendelssohn's attention not so much for its *Empfindsamkeit* as for its closing double fugue in the Gloria on "Sicut erat." The challenge of taking up this text inspired Mendelssohn to go two steps further by creating a quadruple fugue on four subjects, the first of which bears striking resemblances to Emanuel Bach's opening subject (exx. 1.4a and 1.4b). The result attained a complexity worthy of J. S. Bach, though the impetus for the composition appears to have been the contrapuntal display of his son.

In a similar way, the fifth of Mendelssohn's twelve fugues for string quartet (MWV R1–8, R11–12, R14, R17), from April 1821, might initially impress as a studious double fugue in the Bachian mold. In C minor, it uses an ascending triadic subject that then moves chromatically from G to F♯, before tracing a step-wise descent to the tonic pitch (ex. 1.5a). Well into the fugue, after the entrance of the second subject, and after Mendelssohn begins combining the two, something remarkable happens, when the subject returns in the subdominant in measure 99 (ex. 1.5b). Here Mendelssohn, or possibly Zelter—the handwriting in the autograph is unclear—took the trouble to write out the pitches of the subject, which in German nomenclature spell F–As–C–H. Mendelssohn thus

Example 1.4a. Mendelssohn, *Magnificat*, fugal subjects

(a)

Si - cut e - rat in prin - cip - i - o et nunc, et sem - - - per,

(b)

Et nunc, et sem - - - - - per,

(c)

et in sae - - - cu-la sae - cu - lo - rum

(d)

A - - - - - men,

Example 1.4b. C. P. E. Bach, *Magnificat* in D Major, Wq. 215, subject

Si-cut e-rat in prin-ci-pi - o et\_nunc et sem-per et in\_sae - cu-la

Example 1.5a. Mendelssohn, Fugue in C Minor, beginning

The image displays a musical score for the song "The Rose Tree". It is written for a piano and voice. The score is in 2/4 time and features a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The piano accompaniment is written on a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The melody is written on a single staff with a soprano clef. The score is divided into two systems, each containing two measures. The first system shows the piano introduction and the first measure of the melody. The second system shows the second measure of the melody and the piano accompaniment. The melody is a simple, catchy tune that is easy to remember. The piano accompaniment provides a steady, rhythmic foundation for the melody. The overall mood of the piece is light and cheerful.

Example 1.5b. Mendelssohn, Fugue in C Minor, mm. 99–100

The musical score for Example 1.5b shows measures 99 and 100 of Mendelssohn's Fugue in C Minor. The staves are for Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, and Cello. Above the staves are the letters F, As, C, and H, which correspond to the notes F, A-flat, C, and B-flat respectively. Violin 1 plays a half note F in measure 99 and a half note A-flat in measure 100. Violin 2 plays a quarter rest in measure 99 and a quarter note C in measure 100. Viola and Cello play a half note C in measure 99 and a half note B-flat in measure 100.

embedded into his exercise a clear, homage-like reference to Zelter's teacher, Carl Friedrich Christian Fasch, founder of the Berlin Sing-Akademie.

Appropriately, Fasch was one of the most dedicated contrapuntists of his age, as we learn from a biographical account of the composer published by Zelter in 1801, the year after Fasch's death.<sup>22</sup> There we read of his peculiar, obsessive habits: how he would expend a year or two constructing a playhouse out of cards, track the military maneuvers of the major powers in war- and peacetime, maintain detailed charts of seafaring vessels, notate thousands of figured-bass exercises for his students, and, in order to gauge his own inspiration for composition, multiply series of numbers. A successful effort would incline him toward composition; a miscalculation could banish his musical creativity for a day. According to Zelter, Fasch consumed little more effort in solving a contrapuntal conundrum than in dispatching a routine harmonization.<sup>23</sup> Fasch was especially drawn to designing complex canons, many of which he shared with the indomitable Kirnberger, whose usually grudging respect Fasch easily won. In particular, Zelter cited Fasch's imposing *Fünf-facher Canon*—a perpetual, quintuple canon for twenty-five parts—eventually published in the collected edition of Fasch's works released by the Sing-Akademie in 1839.<sup>24</sup> This labyrinthine riddle would have tested the patience of most musical enigmatologists: all told, it combines in a vertical array three four-part canons, and one each for six and seven voices. Not satisfied with this feat, Fasch was also able to infiltrate into the various parts liberal examples of inversion, diminution, augmentation, and stretto, so that, in Zelter's words, "with every note the eye fell upon a hidden artifice."<sup>25</sup>

Today Fasch's music is largely forgotten, but in the 1820s Felix was an avid student of it. The bulk of Fasch's surviving music comprised sacred works, including chorale arrangements and cantata-like psalm settings (one, titled *Mendelssohniana*, used the translation of Psalm 30 by Felix's grandfather, Moses Mendelssohn). The summit of Fasch's art, however, and the work that

intrigued Felix, was a Mass for sixteen voices (four four-part choirs) and continuo from 1786; Felix's copy of the Kyrie survives in the Bodleian Library at Oxford.<sup>26</sup> Fasch had conceived this magnum opus after examining a sixteen-voice Mass by the seventeenth-century Roman composer Orazio Benevoli and finding its antiphonal effects monotonous and lacking in harmonic variety. The expansive scoring permitted Fasch to test various combinations of voices, now dividing the ensemble into four-part choirs or eight-part complements, and occasionally indulging in the most complex and demanding texture, that of sixteen-voice imitative polyphony, as in the fugal "Cum sancto spiritu" of the Gloria, which, according to Zelter, Fasch composed in just two days.<sup>27</sup>

In 1828, the nineteen-year-old Mendelssohn responded to Fasch's polychoral experiment by designing his own, the similarly scored motet *Hora est*, on two Office texts for Advent (MWV B18). Here Mendelssohn strove to observe Fasch's cardinal principle, that each four-part choir should be harmonically self-sufficient and "pure." But like Fasch, Mendelssohn could not resist the temptation to attempt sixteen-part polyphony, and in one stunning, radiant passage, to introduce the image of Christ appearing on a cloud with the hosts of saints, he contrived a passage with sixteen cascading entries (only six of them shown in ex. 1.6), thereby easily breaching the eight-part textures of the finale of the Octet.

If Mendelssohn received through Fasch's Mass the monumental style of seventeenth-century Italian polychoral music, another more remote source of the contrapuntal tradition was available to him in the *stile antico* associated with Palestrina. Most likely, Mendelssohn first became acquainted with the *stile antico* through J. S. Bach.<sup>28</sup> We know, for example, that earlier in the nineteenth century Zelter had begun rehearsing portions of the B-Minor Mass, and in that work Mendelssohn could have found ready examples in the framing movements of the Credo. Less clear is how early Mendelssohn had access to the music of Palestrina, who did not figure in Mendelssohn's correspondence until November 1830, during his Roman sojourn, when, safely settled in his lodging on the Piazza di Spagna, he reported to his family that he had a Viennese piano, and portraits and scores of Palestrina and Allegri.<sup>29</sup> Be that as it may, Mendelssohn first employed the *stile antico* three years earlier, in 1827, when he composed a large-scale motet for five-part chorus and orchestra on the archetypical Catholic text, *Tu es Petrus* (MWV A4; "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church," Matthew 16:18), causing his friends, according to his sister Fanny, to "fear that he might have turned Roman Catholic."<sup>30</sup> Traveling to Heidelberg in November, Mendelssohn visited the jurist Anton Friedrich Justus Thibaut, author of *On Purity in Music* (*Über Reinheit der Tonkunst*, 1825) and an unabashed enthusiast for Palestrina. According to Mendelssohn, it was Thibaut who awakened his new passion for "die alt-Italienische Musik,"<sup>31</sup> by which he meant old Italian sacred polyphony. While Mendelssohn argued that everything converged in Bach, Thibaut offered as a counterweight Tomás