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Politics Without Words:

Mendelssohn and His Music in Restoration-Era Prussia (1841-47)

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in Musicology

by

Julius Reder Carlson

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Professor Raymond L. Knapp, Chair

Using hermeneutic analyses of compositions Felix Mendelssohn wrote during the 1840s as points of departure, this dissertation depicts him as a cultural figure who used music to both underwrite and transform the state and identity politics of Restoration-era Prussia and, more broadly, German-speaking Europe. Four musical case studies point to diverse facets of this sociopolitical engagement, contextualizing it within contemporary Prussian politics and the history of German-speaking Jewry. In Chapter 2, a Sir Walter Scott-inflected examination of the narrative of the *Scottish* Symphony sheds light on Mendelssohn's investment in a "politics of reconciliation," a state-sponsored discourse that advocated the integration of minority groups into Prussian modernity through the historicization of difference. In Chapter 3, a Ludwig Tieck-informed hearing of the incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* reveals an effort at

state-sponsored cultural appropriation that both glorified and critiqued the Prussian monarchical order. In Chapter 4, comparison of Mendelssohn's Prussian sacred music with the work of contemporary plastic artists August Reichensperger and Philipp Veit suggests that the composer's use of historical "Catholic" styles was intended as a form of engagement in nationalist politics, both Prussian and pan-German. In Chapter 5, a rehearing of the opening *Allegro* of the Violin Concerto is used as a metaphor for the leadership role that Mendelssohn assumed in developing a "German" musical canon, building "German" musical institutions, and assimilating Jewish musicians into "German" musical life. The dissertation concludes, in Chapter 6, with a brief look at Weimar-era anti-Semitic and philo-Semitic reactions to Mendelssohn's oeuvre, an exploration intended to emphasize the sociopolitical stakes of discourse about music and to invite further research on Mendelssohn reception.

The dissertation of Julius Reder Carlson is approved.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>List of Figures</i>		vi
<i>List of Tables</i>		viii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>		ix
<i>Vita</i>		xi
Chapter 1	Politics Without Words: Mendelssohn and his music in Restoration-Era Prussia (1841-47).....	1
Chapter 2	The Politics of Reconciliation: The <i>Scottish</i> Symphony and the <i>Waverley</i> Novels.....	22
Chapter 3	The Politics of Appropriation: <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> , Op.61.....	54
Chapter 4	The Politics of Religion: Mendelssohn's Prussian Sacred Music.....	91
Chapter 5	Beyond Prussia: The German Politics of the Violin Concerto.....	127
Chapter 6	Epilogue: <i>Das Judentum in der Musik</i> , or Mendelssohn's Conversion to Judaism.....	159
Bibliography		169

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1	The German Confederation as it existed for the majority of Mendelssohn’s lifetime.....	10
Figure 1.2	Members of the Mendelssohn and Itzig families mentioned in this text.....	13
Figure 2.1	The title page of Mendelssohn’s <i>Scottish</i> Symphony (1842), “composed and dedicated to her majesty Queen Victoria of England by Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy.”.....	28
Figure 2.2	The conclusion of the <i>Andante con moto</i> .....	33
Figure 2.3	The storm of the <i>Allegro un poco agitato</i> .....	33
Figure 2.4	The human community of the <i>Allegro non troppo</i> .....	35
Figure 2.5	The battle scene of the <i>Allegro vivacissimo</i> .....	35
Figure 2.6	The <i>Männerchor</i> opening of the <i>Allegro maestoso assai</i> .....	37
Figure 2.7	The melody of the <i>Allegro maestoso assai</i> (above) and that of <i>Vaterland in deinen Gauen</i> , one of four <i>Männerchor</i> part songs that Mendelssohn wrote for the Leipzig Gutenberg Festival of 1840.....	45
Figure 3.1	A gust of wind followed by falling leaves — or perhaps the elves’ reaction to Titania’s and Oberon’s fight ( <i>Scherzo</i> ).....	63
Figure 3.2	“Hermia searches everywhere for Lysander, and eventually loses herself in the woods.”.....	64
Figure 3.3	The <i>Notturmo</i> horn theme.....	65
Figure 3.4	Courtly fanfares and galloping horses in the <i>Hochzeitsmarsch</i> .....	66
Figure 3.5	Oberon restores order in the <i>Andante tranquillo</i> of melodrama No.8.....	68
Figure 3.6	Puck leads Demetrius and Lysander “up and down” and then breaks into hysterical laughter (Melodrama No.6).....	69
Figure 3.7	The Tieck-Mendelssohn staging of <i>A Midsummer Night’s Dream</i> at Sansoucci, 1843.....	73
Figure 3.8	The <i>Waldhörner</i> (in C and F) from the Overture of <i>Der Freischütz</i> .....	78
Figure 3.9	Mendelssohn’s <i>Notturmo</i> theme.....	78

Figure 3.10	Weber's <i>Wolfsschlucht</i> scene, a probable inspiration for Mendelssohn's <i>Intermezzo</i> No.5.....	79
Figure 3.11	Oberon resolves conflict, guiding his subjects forwards in tranquil harmony.....	82
Figure 3.12	"All is well" accompanied by a descent from major to minor mode in "Bundte Schlangen," No.3.....	88
Figure 4.1	<i>Am Neujahrstag</i> , the first of the penitential <i>Sechs Sprüche</i> .....	106
Figure 4.2	West facade of the Cologne Cathedral, Meister Arnold c.1280.....	112
Figure 4.3	The centerpiece of Philipp Veit's <i>The Introduction of Christianity into Germany by St. Boniface</i> (1836).....	116
Figure 4.4	Philipp Veit's depiction of <i>Germania</i> in <i>The Introduction of Christianity into Germany by St. Boniface</i> (1836).....	117
Figure 4.5	An excerpt from <i>Civitas sancti tui</i> as published by the <i>Musical Antiquarian Society</i> in 1842.....	124
Figure 5.1	The cadenza and opening bars of the recapitulation of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto.....	128
Figure 5.2	The integration of the <i>Allegro</i> and <i>Andante</i> of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto.....	133
Figure 5.3	The Leipzig Music Conservatory circa 1850.....	142
Figure 5.4	The "Jewish" theme of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto.....	155
Figure 5.5	Excerpt from the <i>Allegro</i> of Mozart's Violin Concerto No.5.....	156
Figure 5.6	Excerpt from the <i>Allegro</i> of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto.....	157

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Mendelssohn's five mature symphonies.....	27
Table 2	The narrative of the <i>Scottish</i> Symphony.....	32
Table 3	The “natural” narrative of the <i>Scottish</i> Symphony, section 1.....	34
Table 4	The human narrative of the <i>Scottish</i> Symphony.....	36
Table 5	Narrative similarities between <i>Waverley</i> and the <i>Scottish</i> Symphony.....	42
Table 6	The structure of the incidental music to <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> , Op.61.....	61
Table 7	Compositions written by Mendelssohn for the <i>Prussian Agende</i> .....	100
Table 8	Heinrich Berl's Jewish music publications over the course of the 1920s.....	163

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## **CHAPTER I — POLITICS WITHOUT WORDS: MENDELSSOHN AND HIS MUSIC IN RESTORATION-ERA PRUSSIA (1841-47)**

In the winter of 1843, Hector Berlioz visited Leipzig, where Felix Mendelssohn — himself visiting the city temporarily from his residence in Berlin — helped him to prepare performances of his music with the *Gewandhaus* Orchestra.<sup>1</sup> Acquainted with one another since 1831, when they had crossed paths in Rome, the two composers expressed mutual admiration, and seem to have gracefully shared the stage at a charity concert (Cooper 2012). But, as with their initial interactions over a decade earlier, the fundamental differences between the two composers quickly came to the fore. Indeed, as Felix’s sister, Fanny, noted in her diary, Berlioz’s “odd manners gave so much offense that Felix was continually being called upon to smooth somebody’s ruffled feathers,” and these fraught interactions culminated at the end of the visit, when the two men exchanged gifts. “When the parting came,” related Fanny, Berlioz offered to exchange batons, ‘as the ancient warriors exchanged their armor,’ and in return for Felix’s pretty light stick of whalebone covered with white leather sent an enormous cudgel of lime-tree with the bark on, and an open letter, beginning, ‘Le mien est grossier, le tien est simple.’ A friend of Berlioz’ who had brought the two translated this sentence ‘I am coarse, and you are simple,’ and was in great perplexity how to conceal the apparent rudeness from Felix” (Hensel 1882: 185-6).

Hector Berlioz’s eccentric farewell gesture is emblematic of the ambivalent nature of Mendelssohn’s place in Restoration-era German-speaking Europe. One aspect of this positioning was musical. Indeed, although Mendelssohn was a pioneer of new genres like the concert

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<sup>1</sup> Berlioz attempted to prepare excerpts from *Romeo and Juliet*, but was ultimately able to stage only his *King Lear Overture* and *Symphonie Fantastique*.

overture, and new practices including that of the public symphonic concert and the baton-wielding orchestral conductor, his mature music was characterized by something approaching neoclassicism; a predilection for technical precision and formal and harmonic balance seemingly at odds with the raw, often intentionally unrefined, Romanticism of many of his contemporaries.<sup>2</sup> But Berlioz's juxtaposition of his and Mendelssohn's "batons" (one "natural"; the other without the [fore]skin)<sup>3</sup> was more than a euphemism for the composer's liminal positioning between artistic innovation and conservatism. It was also a not-so-thinly-veiled commentary on his bifurcated identity as a Protestant of Jewish heritage; a suggestion that the orthodoxy of his

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<sup>2</sup> W.S. Rockstro summarized this paradox cogently in the 1911 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: "Though caring nothing for rules, except as means for producing a good effect, he scarcely ever violated them, and was never weary of impressing their value upon the minds of his pupils. His method of counterpoint was modeled in close accordance with that practiced by Sebastian Bach. This he used in combination with an elastic development of the sonata-form, similar to that engrafted by Beethoven upon the lines laid down by Haydn. The principles involved in this arrangement were strictly conservative, yet they enabled him, at the very outset of his career, to invent a new style no less original than that of Schubert or Weber, and no less remarkable as the embodiment of canons already consecrated by classical authority as a special manifestation of individual genius. It is thus that Mendelssohn stands before us at the same time as champion of conservatism and an apostle of progress; and it is chiefly by virtue of these two apparently incongruous though really compatible phases of his artistic character that his influence and example availed for so many years..." (Quoted in Mintz 1992: 128).

<sup>3</sup> Recent scholarship indicates that Mendelssohn may not have been circumcised. The symbolism of Berlioz's commentary remains poignant, nonetheless.

musical style was rooted in an attempt to disguise fundamental difference; that his role as an “insider” in European musical life was compromised by his status as a cultural “outsider.”<sup>4</sup>

Over the past three decades, music scholars have become increasingly interested in exploring Mendelssohn’s liminality, both as a musician and as a personality. With respect to the composer’s style, musicologists of the post-Dahlhaus generation<sup>5</sup> have tended to hear Mendelssohn’s work as a reflection of the artistic conditions of the *Epigonenzeit*, an era in which composers struggled to balance the demands of a nascent public sphere with the growing artistic dictate of “originality.” As the director of institutions like the Gewandhaus and the Lower Rhine Music Festival, suggest these authors, Mendelssohn was deeply engaged in this balancing act, writing music that was geared simultaneously at appealing to the tastes of bourgeois audiences and “overcoming” the artistic achievements of the past (Mercer Taylor 1995; 2004; Garratt 2004; 2010). Mark Evan Bonds’ reading of Mendelssohn’s *Lobgesang* (1840) — a fusion of a symphony and a cantata — is paradigmatic in this respect. The paradox between the formal innovation and stylistic conservatism of this work, he argues, can be attributed to an effort to “rewrite” Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony*; to make its choral finale comprehensible to contemporary listeners (Bonds 1996).

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Wagner’s infamous essay *Das Judentum in der Musik* is among the most radical examples of this sentiment, and is discussed at some length in Chapters 4 and 6. My decision to forgo a more detailed engagement with Wagner at this point in the dissertation is meant to reflect two historical realities: first, Mendelssohn and Wagner were not colleagues, and appear to have only rarely crossed paths. Second, and more importantly, Wagner’s anti-Semitic essay was written well after Mendelssohn’s death (1850), and was credited to him only in its second printing, in 1869.

<sup>5</sup> Carl Dahlhaus’ *Das Problem Mendelssohn* (1974) has been credited with initiating an interest in Mendelssohn’s “problematic” role in German-speaking Europe, past and present — including a debate over whether it should be characterized as a “problem” in the first place.

While traditional musicological readings of Mendelssohn's mature compositions have tended to limit analysis to purely musical spheres, more intrepid work has introduced an interdisciplinary bent, linking Mendelssohn's style to other aspects of socio-cultural life during the 1830s and '40s. Of particular note in this respect has been an increasing trend to hear Mendelssohn's music as a reflection of — and a reaction to — Restoration-era Prussian politics. In their work on the cultural politics of Friedrich Wilhelm IV's court, John Edward Toews and Jason Geary have convincingly argued for the former perspective, hearing instrumental works like the *Reformation Symphony* and the *Lobgesang* as statements of support for the restitution of the Prussian "Christian-German" monarchical order (Toews 2005), and stage works like *Antigone* and *Oedipus at Colonus* as reflections of an effort to appropriate the legacy of ancient Greece for Prussian cultural-nationalist aims (Geary 2014). Interpretations of *Lobgesang* and *Antigone* by James Garratt (2010) and Michael P. Steinberg (2004a), meanwhile, have suggested that these works may also have had more ambivalent content, serving as vehicles for messages concerning political reform and critique.

Perhaps the most heated, and long-running, aspect of recent scholarship on Mendelssohn's musical activity during the 1840s, however, has been the degree to which it can be related to the composer's personal identity as a Protestant composer of Jewish heritage. This discussion, which was set off anew by Jeffrey Sposato at the turn of the twenty-first century,<sup>6</sup> is multifaceted: according to Sposato, Mendelssohn's oratorios, *Paulus* and *Elijah*, could be heard as reflections of the composer's changing understanding of his religious identity, showing a

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<sup>6</sup> The discussion has a long prehistory, beginning with Richard Wagner, which I explore at some depth in Chapters 4 and 6.

progression from a rejection of Judaism (*Paulus*) to an attempt at christological reconciliation between Old Testament and New Testament texts (*Elijah*) (2006). For other scholars, meanwhile, Mendelssohn's "Jewishness" has been perceived less as a question of religious belief than as a cultural heritage informing an approach to aesthetics and politics. Leon Botstein, for his part, has argued that Mendelssohn's neoclassicist aesthetics can be understood as an inheritance from the enlightened values of his grandfather, the Rabbi Moses Mendelssohn (Botstein 2001); Michael P. Steinberg, that his affinity for the trying sociopolitical situation of Jews in Prussia encouraged engagement with potentially subversive works like *Antigone* and the *Die erste Walpurgisnacht* (Steinberg 2004a; 2004b).

Through hermeneutic readings of works that Felix Mendelssohn wrote between 1841 and 1847 — a period during which he served as *Kapellmeister* and *Generalmusikdirektor* of the Prussian state — this dissertation synthesizes and develops the themes outlined above, arguing that the mature Mendelssohn used his music as a vehicle for commentary and critique regarding both the Prussian cultural-nationalist policies of King Friedrich Wilhelm IV and his own identity as a Protestant of Jewish heritage. Each of the four musical case studies in the dissertation points to facets of this musical-political engagement, often through works that have received very little attention by scholars of Restoration-era German-speaking Europe. Hearings of Mendelssohn's *Scottish Symphony* (Chapter 2) and Prussian sacred music (Chapter 3) highlight the composer's investment in a Prussian ethos of reconciliation that advocated Catholic and Jewish integration within the "German" state. An interpretation of the incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Chapter 4) explores his engagement with a Prussian politics of cultural appropriation through aesthetic "Germanization." A reading of the Violin Concerto (Chapter 5), meanwhile,

pans outwards to explore Mendelssohn's efforts at constructing an integrative "German" national community beyond the ideological confines of the Prussian order.

My exploration of the significance of Mendelssohn's oeuvre for Restoration-era state and identity politics contributes to several theoretical discussions central to contemporary musicological thought, including the burgeoning literature on the role of music in nationalism and the relationship of music to sociocultural difference — particularly Jewishness. In both cases, I take a markedly constructivist position: in accordance with the arguments propounded by scholars like Richard Taruskin (2010; 2015), Michael P. Steinberg (2004a), and Celia Applegate (2002; 2005), I approach music as a cultural text through which groups of people "imagine" national communities,<sup>7</sup> defining the boundaries of state and cultural allegiance. Similarly, I follow Beatrix Borchard (2009), Tina Frühauf (2009), James Loeffler (2010), and Ruth HaCohen (2011) in understanding musical practice as a space for the contestation of Jewish identity, one in which the parameters of "Jewishness" are reconstituted and redefined. Mendelssohn's music, I argue, did not simply *reflect* a pre-established political or ethnic identity. It was intended to actively *shape* the sociocultural structures in which he and his contemporaries lived.

The broad theoretical engagement of this dissertation is framed within a historiographic exploration of the growing political significance of cultural activity in Restoration-era German-speaking Europe. Like Mendelssohn's sociocultural identity, these cultural politics were liminal. On the one hand, aspects of the Enlightenment idea of universal cultivation, or *Bildung*, were increasingly embraced by Restoration-era German states as a tool for nation-building; a means of

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<sup>7</sup> In his influential work on nationalism, Benedict Anderson coined the term "imagined community" to refer to the nineteenth-century emergence of the nation state (1983).

“creating” good “German” citizens and facilitating solidarity among diverse groups of people.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, the conservative, often repressive, nature of these national projects, meant that cultural activity was one of the few outlets for the expression of public critique (Heady 2009).

Heinrich Heine summarized this paradox in typically sardonic fashion when he wrote that the (temporary) instability of the monarchical order during “the Revolution” had seriously threatened art criticism in Germany. Thankfully, he quipped, order had been restored, and Germans were once again protected “from the guillotine and the terrors of the freedom of the press...and art has been saved. Everything possible is now being done in Germany for art, especially in Prussia” (Heine 1985: 62).<sup>9</sup>

Hearing the political nature of music in Restoration-era German-speaking Europe requires a detailed understanding of a historically-specific context whose contours are often startlingly unfamiliar. In the following, I provide sketches of the two overlapping spheres of

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<sup>8</sup> Emergent understandings of *Volkstümlich* cultural identity had an increasing presence in Restoration-era thought, but, as Mendelssohn’s case shows, it would be misleading to conflate them with the radically essentialist discourses that emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century.

<sup>9</sup> “In point of fact,” wrote Heine in *The Romantic School*, “when the Revolution broke out in Germany, this was the end of theater and theater criticism, and the alarmed writers of novellas, actors, and theater critics feared quite rightly ‘that art was dying.’ But our fatherland was successfully saved from this horrible fate by the wisdom and energy of the Frankfurt Diet of the German Confederation. It is to be hoped that no revolution will break out in Germany; we are protected from the guillotine and all the terrors of the freedom of the press; even the chamber of deputies, whose competition has done so much harm to the theaters, despite concessions to these granted long before, are being abolished, and art has been saved. Everything possible is now being done in Germany for art, especially in Prussia. The museums are ablaze with artful delight in color, the orchestras roar, the danseuses leap their loveliest *entrechats*, the public is enchanted with the Arabian Nights of novellas, and theater criticism flourishes once more” (Heine 1985: 62).

sociopolitical life that are of particular concern to my work: the Restoration-era state politics of Prussia, and the Restoration-era identity politics of “Jewishness.”

### **Mendelssohn and the politics of the Prussian state**

As Celia Applegate has shown, Mendelssohn’s career was tied to Prussian nationalism from its inception: raised in the Prussian aristocratic circles of Berlin, and launched into the public eye with the revival of the *Saint Matthew Passion* at the *Singakademie*, the young composer landed his first job in Düsseldorf, the capital of the Prussian Rhineland, before heading to Leipzig in 1835.<sup>10</sup> But the height of Mendelssohn’s official involvement in Prussian state politics was reached during the 1840s, a period in which he served as *Kapellmeister*, and later *Generalmusikdirektor*, for Friedrich Wilhelm IV’s court, joining other German-speaking cultural figures in constructing a “Christian-German” culture. For scholars like Toews (2005) and Geary (2014), the music that Mendelssohn wrote for Friedrich Wilhelm IV’s court was a relatively transparent reflection of the state’s conservative ambitions for cultural and political unity through monarchical leadership. In this dissertation, I argue that this engagement can be heard in a more ambivalent light.

The story of Mendelssohn’s involvement with Friedrich Wilhelm IV’s court begins with this monarch’s ascent to power in 1840. A self-stylized “artist prince,” the new king promised to steer Prussia away from the reactionary policies of his father, Wilhelm III, through cultural reform, inviting some of the most prominent German-speaking artists of the time to serve as his advisors (Berdahl 1988; Barclay 1993; 1995; Levinger 2001; Toews 2005). Among those who

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<sup>10</sup> Mendelssohn led the Gewandhaus Orchestra from 1835 to 1841.

answered Friedrich's call were the literary giant Ludwig Tieck, the philologists Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, the architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel, and the painter Peter von Cornelius. Felix Mendelssohn, who was charged with the task of designing and administering a music department in the Prussian Academy of Art, directing the musical activities of the Potsdam court, and composing music for the revised "Prussian" liturgy, was among the last of the artists and thinkers to join the court's intellectual entourage (Werner 1963; Todd 2003; Toews 2005).

Friedrich Wilhelm IV's efforts at creating a unified Christian-German Prussian culture were intended as an antidote to the pressing sociocultural and political problems that had emerged in German-speaking Europe in the wake of Congress of Vienna. In broad strokes, these problems were twofold. First, as can be seen on the attached map (Figure 1.1), the German Confederation (*Deutscher Bund*) conceived by the Congress left both Prussia and the "Holy Roman Empire" deeply divided along Protestant and Catholic lines.<sup>11</sup> Second, it failed to respond coherently to calls for a united "German" nationstate, opening the floodgates for a chaotic mix of ideologically heated political factions.<sup>12</sup> By providing a common basis for "Prussian" identity, argued Friedrich Wilhelm IV and his advisors, a shared "Christian-German" culture could serve

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<sup>11</sup> Prussia, while greatly expanded, was split into two halves, an eastern, Protestant heartland, and a western, Catholic Rhineland. The entire Confederation rested on the unstable checkmate between the Protestant Prussian-allied north and the Austrian, Catholic-allied south.

<sup>12</sup> A small minority of German-speakers identified with Republican radicalism, agitating for a unified, monarchy-less, *Großdeutschland*. Most, however, were allied with pro-monarchical liberal and conservative factions: conservatives (who tended to be Prussian and Austrian loyalists) advocated for a redoubling of monarchical authority; liberals for varying degrees of constitutional reform.



to resolve these local — and ultimately international<sup>13</sup> — sectarian conflicts, and pave the way for political reform, “cultivating” the values necessary for increased public participation in monarchical governance (Sheehan 1989; Barclay 1995; Levinger 2001; Toews 2005).

As John Edward Toews has argued, the Christian-German culture envisioned by Friedrich Wilhelm IV and his advisors drew deeply from the nascent historicism then sweeping the German-speaking world, seeking to root Prussian identity in symbols of the “German” past, including Lutheranism, “Gothic” medievalism, and folklore.<sup>14</sup> That said, the models that were used in Prussia’s historical constructions were not always as “Teutonic” as might be expected. Indeed, if any single cultural milieu can be claimed as a model for Friedrich Wilhelm IV’s cultural-nationalist efforts, it would almost certainly be British. The most powerful political entity in Protestant Europe, and among Prussia’s strongest allies,<sup>15</sup> Great Britain had tackled many of the challenges facing German-speaking Europe,<sup>16</sup> and Prussian admiration for these achievements found outlet not only in political alliance, but also in cultural imitation: Sir Walter Scott’s novels, popular Europe-wide, dominated the Prussian historical imagination of the 1830s and ‘40s, Shakespeare’s plays were quickly gaining a reputation as works of “German”

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<sup>13</sup> Prussia had ambitions for leading the Confederation towards nationhood. It was also deeply invested in developing a colonial empire.

<sup>14</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm IV was an avid medievalist, and seems to have enjoyed dressing himself and his courtiers in antique “German” garb (Barclay 1993; 1995).

<sup>15</sup> As Europe’s two great Protestant empires, Great Britain and Prussia were frequently allied in geopolitical conflicts, the most recent having been the Napoleonic Wars.

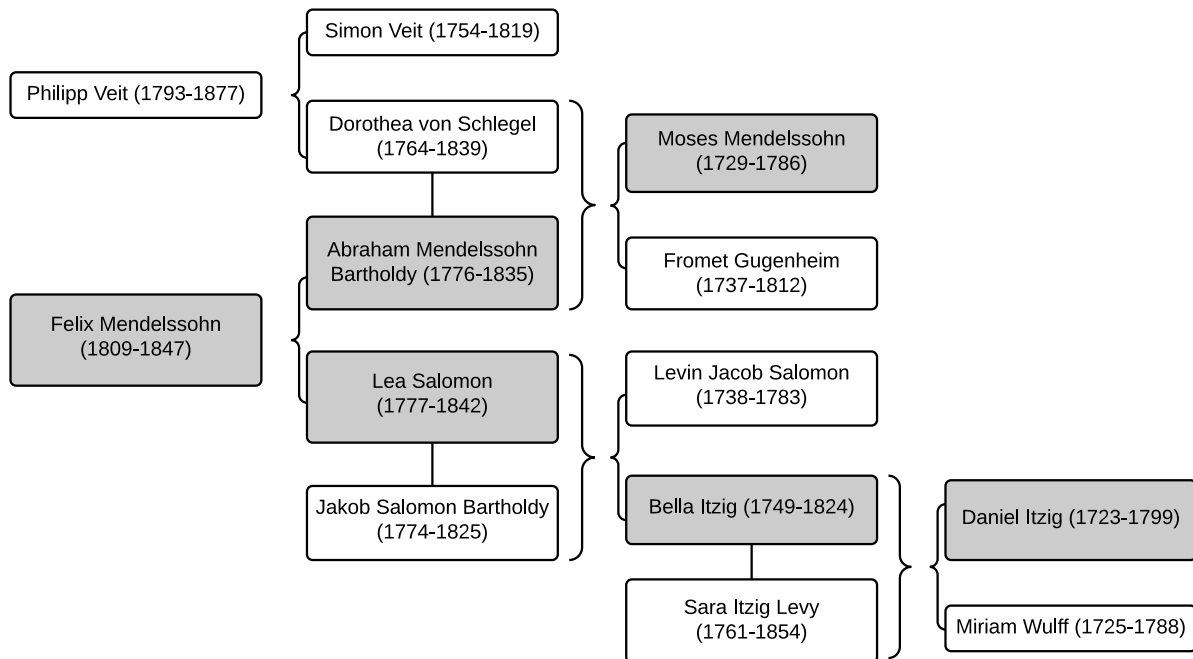
<sup>16</sup> The United Kingdom served as an important alternative to the French revolutionary model, having managed to weather the late eighteenth century without catastrophic sociopolitical upheaval, to unite diverse nations under a single crown (the United Kingdom comprised England, Ireland, and Scotland from 1801 until 1921), and to develop a colonial empire.

*Weltliteratur*, and the Anglican Church, which had maintained its integrity and power to a much greater extent than the fractured German Protestant denominations, was a clear blueprint for “Prussian” liturgical reform.

As I explore in this dissertation, much of the music that Felix Mendelssohn wrote as Prussian *Kapellmeister* and *Generalmusikdirektor* can be heard to participate in Friedrich Wilhelm IV’s cultural nationalist efforts, a circumstance that would seem to reinforce the composer’s commitment to official state agenda, and, by proxy, the conservative monarchical order. And yet, there is a great deal of reason to believe that Mendelssohn’s relationship to the Prussian state was more ambivalent than some previous scholarly work has implied. The first factor to consider in this regard are the oft-mentioned, but rarely-explored, complexities of Mendelssohn’s relationship to his official post: invited to serve as Prussian *Kapellmeister* in early 1841, Mendelssohn delayed acceptance of his position for the better part of a year, tried to resign in 1843, and by 1845, had reached a compromise in which he retained the title of *Generalmusikdirektor*, but was effectively relieved of his responsibilities to the court. Equally worthy of note, are the complex implications of Mendelssohn’s identity as a Prussian Protestant of Jewish heritage, ramifications that I explore in greater detail below.

### **Mendelssohn and the politics of (German) Jewishness**

The politics of Mendelssohn’s Jewish heritage were deeply intertwined with his relationship to the Christian-German Prussian state and, accordingly, the music that he wrote as Prussian *Kapellmeister* and *Generalmusikdirektor*. These politics were fraught: a Lutheran by



**Figure 1.2: Members of the Mendelssohn and Itzig families mentioned in this text. Individuals connected by lines are siblings. Left-facing brackets indicate marriage; right-facing brackets, siblings.**

religious affiliation, Mendelssohn was also the heir to an illustrious lineage of Prussian Jews,<sup>17</sup> a “bifurcated identity”<sup>18</sup> intimated in his lifelong use of the double name Mendelssohn Bartholdy.<sup>19</sup>

For the majority of scholars who have chosen to explore this aspect of his life and work,

Mendelssohn’s Jewish heritage has tended to be heard in opposition to his Christian-German

<sup>17</sup> Felix was the grandson of the Rabbi Moses Mendelssohn, who is generally identified as the pioneer of Reform Judaism. As detailed below, he was also the descendant of one of Prussia’s first Court Jews, Daniel Itzig.

<sup>18</sup> The term “bifurcated identity” is borrowed from Paul Mendes-Flohr, who describes it as follows: “...by virtue of the adoption of *Kultur* and *Bildung* — grounded in the cultivation of universal values sponsored by enlightened, liberal German discourse — German Jews were no longer simply or unambiguously Jewish. Their identity and cultural loyalties were fractured, and they were consequently obliged to confront the challenge of living with plural identities and cultural affiliations” (Mendes-Flohr 1999:3).

<sup>19</sup> Likely inspired by the example of his successful brother-in-law, Jakob Salomon Bartholdy, Felix’s father, Abraham, began using the “Christian” name Bartholdy at around the time that he converted to Lutheranism (1822). He had converted his children several years before (1816).

affiliations as a statement of religious and/or political difference. In this dissertation, I strive to present a more nuanced portrayal of this situation, one in which Mendelssohn's "Jewishness" is understood as a social, rather than religious, identity; one tied less to a politics of alterity than an investment in political reform and cultural reconciliation.

My first contention with respect to Mendelssohn's "Jewish" experience is that, despite its frequent correlation with that of his grandfather, the Rabbi Moses Mendelssohn,<sup>20</sup> it is unlikely to have had much to do with Judaism. Baptized a Lutheran at the age of seven (1816), and raised outside of the practicing Jewish community, Mendelssohn was probably unfamiliar with Jewish tradition (Sposato 2006), and is unlikely to have publicly displayed this knowledge were he to have had it. Indeed, coming of age in the decades between the decline of the Enlightenment-era Berliner Jewish salons and the mid-nineteenth-century establishment of "Germanized" Jewish institutions,<sup>21</sup> Mendelssohn lived in a world in which Jews had few opportunities for musical education, and in which there was little in the way of a "Jewish" musical audience.<sup>22</sup> To hear Jewish religious content or musical aesthetics in Mendelssohn's mature compositions, then, is to

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<sup>20</sup> Moses Mendelssohn advocated that his coreligionists participate culturally in the German-speaking world while remaining practitioners of the Jewish faith.

<sup>21</sup> As Deborah Hertz has noted, the celebrated Berliner "Jewish salons," a safe-space for interchange between German-speakers from a wide variety of social and religious backgrounds, all but disappeared during the Restoration era (Hertz 2007). The same can be said for efforts at the "Germanization" of Jewish life, among them *Das Wissenschaft des Judentums*, which disbanded in 1822.

<sup>22</sup> As Tina Frühauf documents, the use of instrumental music in Berliner Synagogue services was heavily contested until late in the nineteenth century (Frühauf 2009). The first non-converted Jew to be admitted to a Prussian musical institution was Louis Lewandowski, who began studying with members of the *Singakademie* in the mid 1840s.

project a set of religious and cultural references on to these works that he is unlikely to have shared, and which (had he shared them) he would have had little prerogative to publicize.

And yet, while it may be misleading to hear Jewish religious content in Mendelssohn's music, the composer's social status as an individual of Jewish heritage powerfully informed his creative work in other ways, particularly with respect to its relationship to the Prussian state. On a generic level, this Jewish heritage can be observed in Mendelssohn's commitment to Friedrich Wilhelm IV's efforts at cultural education, or *Bildung*, a concept at the heart of Jewish Enlightenment thought.<sup>23</sup> But it can also be perceived in Mendelssohn's specific political views. Perhaps most expected in this sense, given the precarious situation of non-converted Jews in Restoration-era German-speaking Europe,<sup>24</sup> is Mendelssohn's apparent sympathy for the political

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<sup>23</sup> The *Bildung* concept promised Jews the possibility of becoming "German" through cultural acquisition, and was ardently embraced by Jewish individuals in the wake of Moses Mendelssohn's pioneering reforms.

<sup>24</sup> Among the results of the Congress of Vienna was a *de facto* repeal of Jewish citizenship in much of the Holy Roman Empire, an unexpected turn of events that precipitated widespread conversions among Berliner Jewish elite, including Mendelssohn's immediate family. As reflected in Bruno Bauer's and Karl Marx's famous interchange of 1843/44, the re-adjudication of Jewish emancipation remained an important issue during the early years of Friedrich Wilhelm IV's reign.

perspectives of liberals like Johann Jacoby,<sup>25</sup> for whom Jewish emancipation and Prussian constitutional reform were closely linked.<sup>26</sup> Less expected (and much more seldom explored) is the way in which Mendelssohn's identity as a descendant of the Itzig family tied him closely to the Prussian monarchy,<sup>27</sup> obligating him to Prussian service,<sup>28</sup> and alienating him from anything that might smack of revolutionary activity.<sup>29</sup> In this dissertation, I argue that the music that Mendelssohn wrote for Friedrich Wilhelm IV was influenced by both of these aspects of his

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<sup>25</sup> With respect to Johann Jacoby's *Vier Fragen*, Mendelssohn wrote his brother Paul that (March 3, 1841): "Eine ausserordentliche Freude hast Du mir durch die gestern empfangene Broschüre gemacht... Wieder hat mir ein wehmütiges Gefühl ergriffen, wenn man so gewiss sieht, oder zu sehen glaubt, dass der Weg offen, gebahnt, deutlich daliegt, auf dem das ganze Deutschland einen Umschwung bekäme, wie es ihn vielleicht nie gehabt hat... und wenn dieser Weg noch dazu der der Wahrheit und der Ehrlichkeit, des Worthaltens ist, und er war immer und immer nicht betreten, und aus immer neuen Gründen vermeiden — das ist betrübt! Einstweilen ist es aber gut, dass Leute kommen, die das auszusprechen wissen, was die so überwiegende Mehrzahl fühlt, ohne es sagen zu können; ich müsste die ganze Broschüre anführen, um Dir alle einzelnen Stellen zu nennen, die mir so recht aus dem Herzen geschrieben sind...(Mendelssohn 1997: 278-279).

<sup>26</sup> Scholars like George L. Mosse (1985) have tended to emphasize the German Jewish engagement with liberal/progressive politics. The work of Hannah Arendt (1994) and Robert M. Berdahl (1988) serves as a reminder that German-speaking individuals of Jewish heritage also played central roles in the development of conservative ideologies.

<sup>27</sup> One of three Jewish banking families to have been granted citizenship by Friedrich the Great, the Itzigs were central to the Restoration-era Prussian establishment. Following the wars of liberation, Mendelssohn's uncle, Jakob Salomon Bartholdy, was appointed Prussian ambassador to Rome. The Mendelssohn/Itzig family home, for its part, served as part Prussian bank, part Prussian embassy, and part public salon.

<sup>28</sup> As Eric Werner has noted, Mendelssohn's mother, Lea Salomon, seems to have been one of the driving forces behind the composer's appointment to Prussian *Kapellmeister* in 1841. Her death a year later precipitated Mendelssohn's first effort at extricating himself from Prussian service.

<sup>29</sup> In this regard, it is worth noting the conspicuous absence of Heinrich Heine in Mendelssohn's correspondence. Heine did not return the favor, publicly voicing his dismay at Mendelssohn's political allegiances at several junctures (see Chapter 4).

“Jewishness”: assiduously avoiding radical aesthetic content, Mendelssohn’s “Prussian” compositions dodged direct confrontation, working instead within accepted power structures to achieve political reform.

In addition to informing his overall approach to politics, I argue, Mendelssohn’s experience as an individual of Jewish heritage also influenced one of the overarching themes of his “Prussian” music: the call for sociopolitical integration through the historicization of alterity. On the one hand, this message of reconciliation with the “modern” Christian-German state was part of an official Prussian doctrine aimed at encouraging political unity, particularly among Protestants and Catholics. But it was also a narrative to which Mendelssohn himself ascribed on a personal level. Indeed, while post-Holocaust scholars have tended to see the trajectory of German Jewry in a tragic light, pointing up the ultimate failure of Jewish acculturation and conversion, Mendelssohn and his immediate community lived in a moment in which the achievements of assimilated Jewry were seen (by some) with a tremendous degree of optimism; confirmation of Jews’ capacity to be full participants in the modern political order. As a cultural representative of the Prussian establishment, I argue, Mendelssohn both embodied this optimism and promoted it with his music, transforming the message of his grandfather, Moses, in a way that was applicable not just to Jews, but to *all* Germans: (Jewish) alterity could be celebrated in the present by understanding it as a part of the *past*; a historical identity that had been overcome — but not erased — by Christian-German modernity.

## Politics without words

In this dissertation, I use a selection of musical works written by Felix Mendelssohn during his tenure as Prussian *Kapellmeister* and *Generalmusikdirektor* as points of departure for exploring this composer's engagement with Prussian state and identity politics. My analyses begin with the *Scottish* Symphony (Chapter 2), a composition that I compare with Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* Novels in order to shine light on Mendelssohn's role as a Prussian cultural statesman. Departing from previous scholarship about this symphony, which has tended to focus on the ways in which "Scottishness" is musically characterized, I shift my focus to narrative, arguing that the "Scottish" storyline of this symphony was a parable for a state-sponsored "politics of reconciliation"; a story of peaceful integration into Christian-German modernity in which the alterity of minority groups — including Catholics and Jews — was rendered possible (and palatable) through historicization.

Like my analysis of the *Scottish* Symphony, my interpretation of Felix Mendelssohn's incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Chapter 3) finds new, political, meaning in a well-known work, reframing it as part of a project of cultural appropriation underwritten by the Prussian state. This rehearing is based on both historiographic re-contextualization and hermeneutical analysis. Divorcing Mendelssohn's incidental music from his youthful *Overture to A Midsummer Night's Dream*, I first associate the work in question with Friedrich Wilhelm IV's cultural politics, detailing its genesis as a state commission undertaken in collaboration with court dramaturge Ludwig Tieck. On a general level, this nationalist context opens the door to hearing Mendelssohn's musical translation as an attempt to "Germanize" Shakespeare's comedy. More specifically, it invites speculation as to the degree to which his music was intended as

political commentary. I provide two interpretations in this regard, the first of which hears Mendelssohn's emphasis on monarchical authority as an endorsement of the Prussian order, the second of which hears the prominence of supernatural characters as a more ambivalent, perhaps even destabilizing, statement with regards to this status quo.

Building upon the discussions of "Jewishness" in the Chapter 2, my exploration of Mendelssohn's contributions to the revised "Prussian" church service (Chapter 4) approaches this composer's sacred music in a novel way, shifting hermeneutic emphasis from its significance for his personal beliefs and practices to its role in the political agenda of the Prussian state. I begin my analysis by stressing the nationalist significance of the music that Mendelssohn wrote for Friedrich Wilhelm IV's revised liturgy. Comparisons of the historical "Catholic" musical styles used in these works with the medievalist tendencies of contemporary plastic artists reinforce and expand upon this central claim: like August Reichensperger's reconstruction of the Cologne Cathedral, I argue, Mendelssohn's use of the "Palestrina style" can be heard as an effort to appropriate Catholic culture for the Protestant state. Alternately, I suggest, the similarities of Mendelssohn's historicist approach to that of his cousin, the painter Philipp Veit, may indicate that the composer intended to advocate for a more liberal, *Großdeutsch* conception of the German nation. I conclude the chapter by suggesting that Mendelssohn's Prussian sacred music may have been inspired by Anglican models.

In the final case study of this dissertation (Chapter 5), I return to — and expand upon — the idea of Mendelssohn as a cultural statesman, hearing this composer's Violin Concerto as a metaphor for his sociopolitical leadership in Prussia and beyond. Like the soloist in his concerto, I argue, Mendelssohn assumed a leadership role in the German-speaking community, advocating

for a “third space” between the monarchical order and the nascent Republican values of the public sphere, and actively supporting the assimilation of German-speaking Jews, a minority group for whom he was a (*de facto*) cultural icon. Apart from highlighting its musical symbolism, I use Mendelssohn’s Violin Concerto as a point of departure for exploring two ways in which this composer can be understood to have worked towards these goals: the establishment of conservatories in Berlin and Leipzig, and the mentorship of Jewish violinists. Ultimately, these enterprises met with varying degrees of success: while the Leipzig Conservatory’s “universalist” conception of German musical culture quickly gained an international reputation, plans for the Berlin *Musikhochschule* were irrevocably at odds with the extant Prussian sociopolitical order, and were not realized until the Bismarckian era. Mendelssohn’s attempts at integrating Jewish violinists into the German musical community, for their part, had a particularly unanticipated result, contributing to the transformation of the instrument into a symbol of “Jewish” culture.

By hearing works like the *Scottish Symphony*, the incidental music to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, the Prussian sacred music, and the Violin Concerto as texts intimately related to the state and identity politics of Restoration-era German-speaking Europe, this dissertation strengthens the growing scholarly consensus that Felix Mendelssohn was deeply engaged in the sociocultural developments of his time, and that the contextual, formal, and aesthetic attributes of his music can be understood as both a reflection of, and an effort at influencing, the world in which he lived. As I explore in the epilogue (Chapter 6), future addenda to this study will balance and enrich my exploration of Mendelssohn’s authorial intentions with a more detailed

examination of reception history, exploring the ways in which Mendelssohn's oeuvre was — and is — heard by audiences in diverse locations and from diverse sociocultural backgrounds.

## **CHAPTER 2 — THE POLITICS OF RECONCILIATION: THE *SCOTTISH* SYMPHONY AND THE *WAVERLEY* NOVELS**

As has been explored in a substantial body of recent scholarship, late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century German speakers were fascinated with Scotland. Inhabiting a semantic terrain somewhere between the “exotic” and the “national,” the Scottish imaginary was first introduced to the German-speaking world through the work of James Macpherson, whose epic poem, *Ossian* (1760), achieved a solid presence in the writings of *Sturm und Drang* literati, Klopstock and Goethe among them.<sup>30</sup> By the early decades of the nineteenth century, meanwhile, Macpherson’s work had been superseded by that of Sir Walter Scott,<sup>31</sup> whose Scottish poems and, later, historical novels, inspired German speakers to theatrical, plastic, and musical creation, and — in a development new to the nineteenth century — cultural tourism.

In his seminal article, “Mendelssohn’s Ossianic Manner,” Larry Todd opened a new and productive avenue for Mendelssohn scholarship by linking the style of the *Scottish* Symphony, Op.56 with this “Germanic” Scottish imaginary (2008). Along with the *Hebrides Overture* (Op. 26) and a collection of five other less ambitious compositions,<sup>32</sup> argued Todd, Mendelssohn’s

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<sup>30</sup> The story of the German fascination with Scotland arguably begins with J.G. Herder, who understood “Scottishness” as a model for cultural nationalism. The extended *Ossian* citation at the climax of Goethe’s *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* demonstrates the degree to which Macpherson’s epic had become a point of cultural reference for eighteenth-century German speakers.

<sup>31</sup> According to Reitemeier, Sir Walter Scott’s *The Pirate* and *Rob Roy* were “the most popular novels in Germany shortly before Scott’s death in 1832” (Reitemeier 2006: 98). 197 German-language editions of Scott’s work were published between 1800 and 1830.

<sup>32</sup> These include the *Sonata escossaise* (Op.28), the *Jagdlied* (Op.120 No.1), *Sechs scottische-National-Lieder* (unpublished), Duet Op.63 No.5, and *On Lena’s Gloomy Heath* (unpublished).

symphony was an outgrowth of the composer's 1829 visit to Scotland, and the Macpherson- and Sir Walter Scott-inspired exoticism that informed his voyeuristic journey. Through the use of musical "special effects," including tone color, modality, and parallel fifths, he concluded, the composer had striven to depict an "Ossianic manner"; to capture the Scottish "exotic" in sound.

By depicting Mendelssohn as an artist who "succeeded in unleashing his romantic imagination"(Todd 2008: 77), Todd's identification of the *Scottish* Symphony as a representative of a Mendelssohnian Scottish "style" contributes to a more complete understanding of this composer's artistic relationship to Romanticism. But Todd's claim also raises a series of important questions, especially in the case of the *Scottish* Symphony, a work whose positioning as Mendelssohn's sole mature publication in the symphonic genre — and his first major instrumental essay as Prussian *Kapellmeister* —, demands a more thorough interrogation of the significance of the "Scottish" style for this composer and his audiences. After all, what did it mean for a cultural representative of Prussia to write a work depicting an "exotic" other? Equally importantly, how did this portrayal of otherness relate to the composer's own "exotic" (Jewish) identity?

In this chapter, I respond to these questions by shifting focus from the ways that Mendelssohn characterized "Scottishness" to the narrative that he told *about* Scottish alterity, asserting that, like Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* Novels, the *Scottish* Symphony is a parable for a "politics of reconciliation"; a story in which the alterity of minority groups is integrated into Christian-German modernity through the historicization of difference. On the one hand, I argue, Mendelssohn's "Scottish" storyline can be heard as a parable for the politics of the Prussian state, an empire that had just prevailed over a powerful secessionist uprising, and that was aiming to

expand into the colonial arena. On the other, it can be understood as a statement of Mendelssohn's approach to "Jewishness," a *historical* identity that he understood to have been overcome — but not erased — by the Christian-German present.<sup>33</sup>

The chapter proceeds in three main sections. In a first section, I place the *Scottish* Symphony within its political context as a vehicle for Prussian cultural diplomacy. In a second section, I use Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* Novels as a means of highlighting the "Scottish" narrative of the work. In a third section, I explore how this narrative related to both Mendelssohn's engagement with Prussian state politics and the identity politics of Jewishness.

## **PART I — The *Scottish* Symphony as a Prussian symphony**

In the immediate aftermath of his revival of the *Saint Matthew Passion* at the Berliner *Singakademie* (1829) — an event that marked the end of his tutelage under C.F. Zelter, and his right of passage into the professional world — Mendelssohn embarked on a *Bildungsreise*, a pan-European "educational journey" that was aimed at both finding artistic inspiration and introducing himself and his work to the international community. Among the first destinations on Mendelssohn's itinerary<sup>34</sup> was Scotland, where, accompanied by his chaperone, Karl Klingemann<sup>35</sup> and a large collection of "Scottish" literature, he made his way along the nascent tourist routes of the Scottish Highlands, visiting attractions in the Hebrides, Edinburgh, and

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<sup>33</sup> Although I do not frame them this way here, both approaches are notably Hegelian.

<sup>34</sup> The twenty-year-old would eventually visit Paris and Rome.

<sup>35</sup> Klingemann was the secretary for the Prussian Embassy in London. He knew the Mendelssohns from his previous position as secretary for the Hanoverian embassy in Berlin (1818-1827), which was located in the Mendelssohn house on the Leipzigerstraße.

Abbotsford. While these hyperreal experiences inspired Klingemann to write Macpherson- and Scott-influenced prose, they were the catalyst for Mendelssohn to compose two of the musical ideas at the heart of his “Ossianic Manner.” Following a visit to Fingal’s Cave on August 11, Mendelssohn penned the opening phrases to a concert overture now known as *The Hebrides*. A visit to Holyrood castle on July 30, meanwhile, inspired fifteen bars of music that would later serve as the introduction to the *Scottish Symphony*. As Mendelssohn wrote his family on July 31,

In the evening twilight we went today to the palace where Queen Mary lived and loved; a little room is shown there with a winding staircase leading up to the door; up this way they came and found Rizzio in that little room, pulled him out, and three rooms off there is a dark corner, where they murdered him. The chapel close to it is now roofless, grass and ivy grow there, and at that broken altar Mary was crowned Queen of Scotland. Everything around is broken and mouldering, and the bright sky shines in. I believe I found today in that old chapel the beginning of my Scotch symphony (Hensel 1882: 198).<sup>36</sup>

In combination with the work’s posthumous title (*Scottish*), numbering (No.3), and eventual dedication to Queen Victoria, Mendelssohn’s appealing story has encouraged two important misconceptions about the *Scottish Symphony*: first, that the symphony itself was written during the composer’s *Bildungsreise*, and, equally significantly, that it reflected a personal connection with the British Royalty, and particularly the British Queen (Eatock 2009).

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<sup>36</sup> In der tiefen Dämmerung gingen wir heute nach dem Palast, wo Königen Maria gelebt und geliebt hat; es ist da ein kleines Zimmer zu sehen, mit einer Wendeltreppe an der Tür; da stiegen sie hinauf und fanden den Rizzio im kleinen Zimmer, zogen ihn heraus, und drei Stuben davon ist eine finstere Ecke, wo sie ihn ermordet haben. Der Kapelle daneben fehlt nun das Dach, Gras und Efeu wachsen viel darin, und am zerbrochenen Altar wurde Maria zur Königen von Schottland gekrönt. Es ist da alles zerbrochen, morsch und der heitere Himmel scheint hinein. Ich glaube, ich habe heut da den Anfang meiner Schottischen Symphonie gefunden...” (Hensel 1908: 268).

The central argument of this chapter rests on challenging these assumptions; reframing the *Scottish* Symphony as a work written during Mendelssohn's tenure as Prussian *Kapellmeister* and, as such, a vehicle for messages pertaining to Prussian political and social life.

The first order of business is to establish the *Scottish* Symphony as a product of Mendelssohn's tenure as Prussian *Kapellmeister*, a task that is complicated by the confusing numbering of Mendelssohn's symphonic oeuvre. Indeed, given that the *Scottish* Symphony is generally referred to as the third of five published symphonies (see Table 1), it seems plausible to consider it as a contemporary of works like *The Hebrides* (Op.26), a concert overture written between Edinburgh and Rome in 1830, and premiered immediately thereafter in 1832. That said, the publication order of Mendelssohn's symphonies does not reflect the sequence in which they were composed: while Mendelssohn did in fact write a few bars of the *Scottish* Symphony in Edinburgh, he did not complete the symphony until over a decade later, in 1841-42 (Schmidt-Beste 2002). The first of his mature instrumental symphonies to be published,<sup>37</sup> it was also his last: half symphony, half cantata, the *Lobgesang* is a generic crossover; the *Italian* and the *Reformation* symphonies did not enter the public domain until 1851 and 1868, respectively.

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<sup>37</sup> The centrality of the *Scottish* Symphony to Mendelssohn's compositional oeuvre is reinforced by Robert Schumann's private remarks of 1842: "All of us who have rejoiced in Mendelssohn's brilliant career thus far, looked forward to the new symphony with the utmost interest. It was properly regarded as virtually his first venture into the symphonic field. His true first symphony, in C minor, belongs to his tenderest youth. His second, written for the London Philharmonic Society, has not been published. The *Hymn of Praise* (*Lobgesang*) is a symphonic cantata, and cannot be regarded as a purely instrumental work. Thus only the symphony — opera excepted — is missing from the opulent wreath of his creations" (Schumann 1965: 180).

	Number	Composition date	Publication date
<i>C minor</i>	1	1824	1831
<i>Reformation</i>	5	1830-32	1868
<i>Italian</i>	4	1833	1851
<i>Lobgesang</i>	2	1840	1840
<i>Scottish</i>	3	1841-42	1842

**Table 1: Mendelssohn’s five mature symphonies.**

Contrary to Thomas Schmidt-Beste’s claims, the chronological distance of the *Scottish* Symphony from Mendelssohn’s *Bildungsreise* does not necessarily mean that he no longer understood it as a “Scottish” work.<sup>38</sup> But it *does* suggest that his conception of “Scottishness” was intimately related to his new role as Prussian *Kapellmeister*. Indeed, the period in which Mendelssohn composed the *Scottish* Symphony corresponds directly with his appointment to the Prussian court. First called to *Sansoucci* by Friedrich Wilhelm IV in early 1841, Mendelssohn arrived in Berlin in July, and began composing his symphony in the fall, finalizing the work in January of 1842. Thus, although certainly inspired in Mendelssohn’s youthful “Scottish” sketch, the composition is perhaps best characterized as a “Prussian” symphony; the first major instrumental work to be completed during his tenure as a representative of the Prussian state.<sup>39</sup>

Re-contextualizing the *Scottish* Symphony as a Prussian symphony opens a number of new avenues for political interpretation of the work, including a re-interpretation of his decision to publicly dedicate it to Queen Victoria (see Figure 2.1). As with the “Scottish” origins of the

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<sup>38</sup> Schmidt-Beste argues that the *Scottish* Symphony was not necessarily *heard* as “Scottish” until the 1850s.

<sup>39</sup> Mendelssohn’s first Prussian commission was *Antigone*, which premiered in October of 1841. He began composing the *Scottish* Symphony immediately thereafter.

**SYMPHONIE**

N<sup>o</sup> 3.

*componirt und*

*Ihrer Majestät*  
**der Königin VICTORIA von England**  
*zugeeignet*  
*von*

**FELIX MENDELSSOHN-  
BARTHOLDY.**

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**PARTITUR.**

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*Op. 56.      Eigenthum der Verleger.      Pr. 5 Thlr. 45 Ngr.*

*Leipzig, bei Breitkopf & Härtel.*  
*Lyon, bei Benacci & Peschier. London, bei Ewer & Co*

6823

*Eingetragen in das Vereinsarchiv.*

Figure 2.1: The title page of Mendelssohn’s *Scottish Symphony* (1842), “composed and dedicated to her majesty Queen Victoria of England by Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy.”

symphony itself, Mendelssohn's correspondence has encouraged an understanding of this dedication as a reflection of the composer's personal affinity for Great Britain, and his fondness for the British Queen. "...Prince Albert had asked me to go to him on Saturday at two o'clock," reported the composer to his mother following the London premiere of the *Scottish* Symphony in 1842,

so that I might try his organ before I left England. I found him alone; and as we were talking away the Queen came in, also alone, in a simple morning dress. She said she was obliged to leave for Claremont in an hour and then suddenly interrupting herself, exclaimed, "But goodness! what a confusion!" for the wind had littered the whole room, and even the pedals of the organ...with leaves of music...The Queen said several times that she hoped I would soon come to England again and pay them a visit, and then I took leave...It was a delightful morning! I must add that I asked permission to dedicate to the Queen my A minor symphony, as having been the ostensible object of my visit to England, and because the English name would suit the Scottish symphony so charmingly... (Hensel 1882: 168-171).<sup>40</sup>

Yet, despite the affable tone of his letter, a great deal of evidence indicates that Mendelssohn's decision to dedicate his *Scottish* Symphony to Queen Victoria had less to do with personal

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<sup>40</sup> ...Prinz Albert hatte mich auf den Sonnabend um halb zwei zu sich einladen lassen, damit ich vor meiner Abreise seine Orgel noch probieren möchte, ich fand ihn ganz allein, und wie wir mitten im Gespräch sind, kam die Königin, ebenfalls ganz allein, im Hauskleid — sie müsse in einer Stunde nach Claremont abreisen sagt sie; "aber mein Gott, wie sieht es hier aus," feste sie hinzu, indem sie sah, dass der Wind von einem grossen ungebundenen Notenheft alle Blätter einzeln auf das Pedal der Orgel...und in die Ecken geworfen hatte...Nun und dann sagte sie: "Ich hoffe, Sie werden uns bald wieder in England besuchen," und dann zog ich ab...Es war ein lustiger Morgen. — Noch habe ich nachzutragen dass ich mir die Erlaubnis ausbat, der Königin die A Mol Symphonie zuzueignen, weil die doch eigentlich die Veranlassung meiner reise gewesen und weil der englische Name auf das schottische Stück doppelt hübsch passt... (Hensel 1908: 226-230).

sentiment than diplomatic obligation. As Eric Werner recounts, Mendelssohn's audiences with the Royal couple were instigated by Friedrich Wilhelm IV, not the composer.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the meetings appear to have been as much about statecraft as music. "After dinner came Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy," wrote Queen Victoria in her journal

He is very pleasing & modest, & is greatly protected by the King of Prussia. He played first of all some of his "Lieder ohne Worte," after which his Serenade & then he asked us to give him a theme, upon which he could improvise. We gave him 2: "Rule Britannia" & the Austrian National Anthem.<sup>42</sup> He began immediately, & really I have never heard anything so beautiful, the way in which he blended them together & changed over from one to the other... At one moment he played the Austrian National Anthem with the right hand, he played "Rule Britannia" as the bass with his left! (Nichols 1997: 138-139).

Like his interweaving of "British" and "German" anthems during his Royal audience, Mendelssohn's dedication of his "Prussian" symphony to Queen Victoria was an act of cultural diplomacy; a gesture emphasizing — and reinforcing — the historical alliance between Prussia and Great Britain.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> According to Werner, "the King of Prussia had given Felix a letter of recommendation, in his own hand, to Prince Albert. The latter then invited him to visit him in Buckingham Palace" (Werner 1963: 382).

<sup>42</sup> Joseph Haydn's musical response to *Rule Britannia*, the Austrian *Kaiserhymn* would have represented the entire German Confederation, including Prussia, which did not yet have an anthem of its own. As Jost Hermand relates, Hoffmann von Fallersleben's *Lied der Deutschen* had been set to Haydn's tune as early as 1841, but the song was not officially appropriated by the German state until 1922 (Hermand 2002).

<sup>43</sup> I have touched on this alliance in Chapter 1, and explore it more fully below.

## **PART II — The Scottish narrative: the *Scottish* Symphony and the *Waverley* Novels**

Re-contextualizing Mendelssohn's *Scottish* Symphony as a "Prussian" work — and perhaps even a vehicle for cultural diplomacy between the Prussian and the British monarchies — demands a politicized hearing of the significance of his "Ossianic Manner." As I discuss in greater detail below, one such political interpretation would be to understand the work as a characterization of an "exotic" national identity; a sonic portrait of Scottish cultural roots. In this chapter, I strive to supplement this hearing of the *Scottish* Symphony with an additional interpretation: through a comparison of the narrative trajectory of Mendelssohn's composition with those of the "Scottish" *Waverley* Novels of Sir Walter Scott, I argue that Op.56 was intended less as a statement of "exotic" alterity than as an affirmation of the power of Christian-German modernity to *assimilate* difference; a Prussian "politics of reconciliation" in which alterity was not so much revived as it was *historicized*; in which "others" were incorporated into the present by relegating their "otherness" to the past. My argument proceeds in two steps. First, I take a detailed look at the *Scottish* Symphony as a musical narrative, demonstrating how it can be understood to embody a storyline similar to that outlined in Sir Walter Scott's paradigmatic historical novel *Waverley*. Then I outline the political implications of this narrative for both the Prussian state politics and Mendelssohn's own perception of Jewishness.

### **The narrative of the *Scottish* Symphony**

The narrative trajectory of the *Scottish* Symphony can be separated into two interrelated sections: a first section, including the *Andante con moto* and the *Allegro un poco agitato*

(movement 1), and a second section, including the *Vivace non troppo* (movement 2), the *Adagio* (movement 3), and the *Allegro vivacissimo* and *Allegro maestoso assai* (movement 4) (see Table 2). While the first section of the symphony relates a story of conflict and resolution in the natural world, the second section retells this narrative in *human* terms, developing and expanding upon the overall trajectory of the preceding material.

Natural world (narrated)	Human world		
<i>Andante con moto</i> and <i>Allegro un poco agitato</i>	<i>Vivace non troppo</i>	<i>Adagio</i>	<i>Allegro vivacissimo</i> and <i>Allegro maestoso assai</i>

**Table 2: The narrative of the *Scottish Symphony*.**

The “natural” narrative that opens Mendelssohn’s symphony is related in a single, self-contained movement, one in which remembered images of landscapes, seascapes, and, ultimately, a storm, are evoked by a narrator (see Table 3). The movement opens with the “performative acts of narration” of the *Andante con moto*; a nostalgia-laden introduction characterized by “recitative gestures” in the violins that would seem to represent a bardic voice (m.17), and perhaps even an Ossianic harp (m.58, Figure 2.2) (Grey 1997; Taylor 2011). The ensuing sonata-allegro-form memory (the *Allegro un poco agitato*) is played out in the natural world. In the exposition of the *Allegro*, three main thematic groups (m.64; m.99, and m.181), suggest landscapes or seascapes. In the development, the approach of a storm (m.230) threatens to disturb the serenity of these natural panoramas,<sup>44</sup> but is quickly assuaged by the return of themes one and three in the recapitulation. In the coda, meanwhile, the developmental storm

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<sup>44</sup> With this aspect of the symphony in mind, Thomas Grey has characterized Mendelssohn’s work as a series of *tableaux vivants* (Grey 1997).

Allegro un poco agitato. ♩ = 100. (65) 5

The musical score for Figure 2.2 shows the conclusion of the *Andante con moto* section. It features multiple staves for strings, woodwinds, and piano. The tempo is marked *Allegro un poco agitato* at 100 bpm. The score includes various dynamics such as *dim.*, *pp*, and *ten.* (tenu). The strings play a characteristic "harp" pattern. The section concludes with a double bar line and repeat signs.

Figure 2.2: The conclusion of the *Andante con moto*. Note the Ossianic “harp” in the strings.

The musical score for Figure 2.3 depicts the storm section of the *Allegro un poco agitato*. It features a complex texture with multiple staves for strings, woodwinds, and piano. The dynamics are highly varied, ranging from *p* to *sf*, with frequent markings for *cresc.* (crescendo) and *dim.* (diminuendo). The tempo is *Allegro un poco agitato*. The score shows a dense, stormy texture with many dynamic markings.

Figure 2.3: The storm of the *Allegro un poco agitato*.

returns with renewed force, attacking with chromatic swells in the strings (m.451, Figure 2.3) and thunder and lightening in the timpani and violins (m.467).<sup>45</sup> The entire narrative is rounded off by a restatement of the opening *Andante* melody, bringing the drama back into the realm of bardic memory.

Narrator	Narrative				Narrator
<i>Andante con moto</i>	<i>Allegro un poco agitato</i> Expo.	Dev.	Recap.	Coda	<i>Andante con prima</i>
narrative invocation	land/seascapes	storm threatens	land/seascapes	storm	invocation

**Table 3: The “natural” narrative of the *Scottish* Symphony, section 1.**

While the first movement of the *Scottish* Symphony can be heard as a narrative of conflict in the natural world, the body of the work can be understood to describe a parallel series of events in a human community, chronicling mobilization for — and, ultimately, engagement in — bellicose conflict (Table 4). This narrative begins in the *Vivace non troppo*, where staccato tremolos in the strings bespeak a bustling crowd; the pentatonic, syncopated clarinet melody a “folky” atmosphere (m.8, Figure 2.4). Preparations for war begin almost immediately thereafter: in the *Vivace*, the pastoral feeling of the opening theme alternates with a march-like motive (m. 75), eventually giving way to it entirely; in the *Adagio*, fortissimo outbursts in the tutti (mm.41; 69; 106) would seem to constitute a passionate call to arms. Both movements push forward to the bellicose confrontation of the *Allegro vivacissimo*,<sup>46</sup> where a chromatic ascent in the bass and

<sup>45</sup> The threat of the storm is overcome by the celebratory reappearance of theme two, although this triumph is dampened by the return of the *Andante*.

<sup>46</sup> Mendelssohn’s original title for this movement was *Allegro guerriero*, an overt allusion to its bellicose character.

Vivace non troppo.  $\text{♩} = 126$ .

Flute: *a 2.*

Clarinet in B:

Bassoon: *a 2.*

Oboe: *a 2.*

Violin I: *in F.*

Violin II: *in F C.*

Viola: *in F C.*

Cello: *in F C.*

Bass: *in F C.*

Piano: *arco pp*, *cresc. dim.*, *pp*, *sempre assai leggero staccato*

Figure 2.4: The human community of the *Allegro non troppo*.

Flute: *p*, *dim.*, *pp*

Clarinet in B: *p*, *dim.*, *pp*

Bassoon: *p*, *dim.*

Oboe: *p*, *dim.*

Violin I: *p*, *dim.*

Violin II: *p*, *dim.*

Viola: *p*, *dim.*

Cello: *p*, *dim.*

Bass: *p*, *dim.*

Piano: *sf*, *p*, *dim.*, *pp*

Figure 2.5: The battle scene of the *Allegro vivacissimo*.

bare octaves in the winds can be heard to depict the “clang of metal on metal; sword on shield” (Figure 2.5).<sup>47</sup>

<i>Vivace non troppo</i>	<i>Adagio</i>	<i>Allegro vivacissimo</i>	<i>Allegro maestoso assai</i>
Portrait of the human community; mobilization for battle	Evocation of the communal spirit	The battle	Communal celebration

**Table 4: The human narrative of the *Scottish Symphony*.**

As the culmination of the narrative action of the preceding two movements, the *Allegro vivacissimo* is the climax of the “second half” of the *Scottish Symphony*; the human analogue of the storm in the opening *Allegro un poco agitato*. But, unlike the storm of the first movement, the conclusion of this human conflict presents a semantic riddle. It is not simply that the battle, which fades out into a dirge-like lament in the clarinet and bassoon, entails a dramatic sense of loss.<sup>48</sup> The celebratory *Allegro maestoso assai* that follows it is stylistically divorced from much — if not all — of the preceding material. A rousing four-part homophonic chorus of bass, viola, horns (in D), bassoons, and clarinet, this coda would seem to indicate the creation (or imposition)

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<sup>47</sup> This description is quoted in Taylor 2011: 271.

<sup>48</sup> A similar sense of loss is evident in the battle scene of the *Eroica*.

Allegro maestoso assai. ♩ = 104.

marcato assai la melodia  
mf

in A.  
mf

marcato assai la melodia  
mf

in D.  
pp

divisi  
mf

mf

Figure 2.6: The *Männerchor* opening of the *Allegro maestoso assai*. As Mercer-Taylor details, clarinets, bassoons, horns in D, violas, and basses can be heard as “voices”; the timpani, cellos, and horns in A, “accompaniment” (Mercer-Taylor 1995).

of a very different community than that described in the *Vivace non troppo* and the *Adagio*; a collective that Mendelssohn likened to a German *Männerchor*, or male choir (Figure 2.6).<sup>49</sup>

What do these musical events mean? How are they “Scottish?” Operating under the assumption that Mendelssohn’s symphony was intended as a celebration of cultural “roots” akin to later works like *Ma Vlast* or the *New World Symphony*, previous scholars have responded to

<sup>49</sup> During rehearsals of the *Scottish Symphony* in March, 1842, Mendelssohn wrote concertmaster Ferdinand David that “Der Eintritt des letzten A-Dur 6/8 (the *Allegro maestoso assai*) is ohne Zweifel jetzt hundertmal besser instrumentiert...Klingt die Melodie jetzt noch immer nicht ganz klar heraus, so lass die Hörner stärker markieren. Und hilft auch das nicht, so autorisiere ich Dich hiermit feierlich, der drei Paukenwirbel in den ersten 8 Takten wegzulassen, aber diese letzte Mittel nur in der höchsten Not! Ich hoffe es braucht das nicht und klingt jetzt ordentlich deutlich und stark wie ein Männerchor (so möchte ich nämlich und deswegen würde ich mich am Ende auch von der Pauke losreißen, so leid mir’s täte)” (Eckhardt 1888:171). Martin Witte (1974) and Peter Mercer-Taylor (1995) both make reference to this passage.

these questions by highlighting locations where Mendelssohn employed “exotic” and “primitive” musical language, including the Aeolian (i-III-v) progressions and “storm topos” of the *Allegro un poco agitato*, and the pentatonic melody and scotch snaps of the *Vivace non troppo* (Todd 2008; Gelbart 2013). Although valuable for an understanding of Mendelssohn’s compositional technique, these analyses are problematic in two fundamental ways: first, they fail to fully take into account Mendelssohn’s oft-voiced discomfort with *Volkstümlich* musical representations — and folk music in general —, a skepticism that only grew more pronounced in his later years.<sup>50</sup> Second, and equally importantly, they do not explain the overall narrative of his symphony. Indeed, if the *Scottish* Symphony was intended as a symbolic revival of the Scottish past, why did Mendelssohn conclude it with a scene of mourning and a German *Männerchor*?<sup>51</sup> In this chapter, I argue that the *Scottish* Symphony can be heard to tell a very different story about the social role of alterity than the late-nineteenth-century “nationalist” works with which it has previously been associated. Like the *Waverley* Novels of Sir Walter Scott, I assert, this story was

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<sup>50</sup> As Gelbart suggests, Mendelssohn consistently disparaged folk musics, Scottish and otherwise. A particularly entertaining sample of this perspective is contained in an 1829 letter from Scotland, dated August 25: “No national folk music for me! Ten thousand devils take all folksiness!...a harper sits in the hall of every reputed inn playing incessantly so-called folk melodies; that is infamous, vulgar, out-of-tune trash, with a hurdy-gurdy going *at the same time!* It drives one to distraction, and has unfortunately given me a toothache...Anyone who, like myself, cannot endure Beethoven’s national songs, should come here and listen to them bellowed out by rough, nasal voices, and accompanied with awkward bungling fingers, and not grumble. As I write these lines, the fellow in the hall is playing this: (musical notation) and varying it; and intertwined the hurdy-gurdy is playing a religious song in Eb. I’m going mad and must leave off writing till later” (Quoted in Gelbart 2013: 4).

<sup>51</sup> It could be argued, of course, that Mendelssohn’s scene of mourning is simply a recognition of the loss entailed in war, and that his concluding *Männerchor* was intended to represent a ubiquitous (or even Scottish) sense of celebration, rather than a specifically “German” one. The interpretation I present here temporarily suspends these hearings.

less about reviving difference than *reconciling* it with Protestant modernity. To illustrate this point, I first turn to the *Waverley* Novels, literary texts that provide insight into the nature and political implications of Mendelssohn's composition.

### **The Scottish narrative of Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* Novels**

Among the first successful experiments in what would later be known as the "historical novel," Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* Novels focus largely on recounting episodes from the failed eighteenth-century Scottish Uprisings.<sup>52</sup> Often told from the perspective of an English protagonist, the trajectory of these narratives centers around the juxtaposition, and ultimate reconciliation, of English and Scottish worlds: after describing Scottish alterity through "Romantic" English eyes, Scott brings Scottish rebels and English patriots into bellicose conflict, concluding with their defeat and (re)integration into the British community.<sup>53</sup>

Sir Walter Scott tells his stories using narrative techniques that bear notable similarities to those used by Mendelssohn in his *Scottish* Symphony. The first of these similarities regards narrative voice: as in Mendelssohn's music, Scott's narrator is absent from the story being told, *describing* historical events in the third person, and often framing this narrated past within long

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<sup>52</sup> The two major Scottish Uprisings or "Jacobite Risings" occurred in 1715 and 1745. They were aimed at restoring the Stuart Kings to the Scottish throne, a goal that implied the annulment of the Acts of Union of 1707, which had joined Scotland and England in a single United Kingdom.

<sup>53</sup> This narrative summary is based largely on *Waverley* and *Rob Roy*. Exceptions to the rule include *The Bride of Lammermoor*, which can be understood as a cautionary inversion of the tale. When Scottish and English families do not reconcile, tragedy ensues.

rhetorical introductions and conclusions.<sup>54</sup> Additional similarities can be identified in the subject of the stories that the two artists tell: as with the second section of the *Scottish Symphony*, Scott's novels focus less on heroes than on *communities*, using individuals as narrative devices for capturing the "many-sided picture of the everyday life of the people, the joys and sorrows, crises and confusions of average human beings" (Lukács 1962: 39).<sup>55</sup> And like the two sections of Mendelssohn's symphony, Scott's novels stress the connection between this community and the natural world, emphasizing, in typically Romantic fashion, the way in which the horizons of the Scottish landscape and the Scottish people were indelibly fused.<sup>56</sup>

A synopsis of the paradigmatic *Waverley* Novel, *Waverley: Or 'Tis Sixty Years Since* (1814) showcases the narrative similarities between Mendelssohn's *Scottish Symphony* and Scott's literary oeuvre in greater detail. Set on the eve of the 1745 Scottish Uprising, Scott's novel opens with a geographical description foreshadowing the larger trajectory of the work: Waverley, the London-bred son of an English aristocrat, is assigned to military duty in the

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<sup>54</sup> *Waverley* is introduced by a lengthy discussion as to how and why the author chose the main character's name, and concludes with an extended moralizing commentary on an actual portrait; a literally framed synopsis of the action of the novel and its implications for the future. The massive scholarly prologue of Scott's smash-hit *Rob Roy*, meanwhile, performs a similar function, establishing both subjective and chronological distance from the story itself.

<sup>55</sup> This is particularly clear in Scott's *Waverley*, where the purported hero (of the same name) is swept along by the dramatic events incurred by the warring communities that surround him, demonstrating about as much internal conviction as the name "Waverley" would imply. But it is also quite evident in the titular character of *Rob Roy*, the Scottish bandit of the same name, who, although a constant presence in the *minds* of the reader, makes only a few brief appearances over the course of the tale.

<sup>56</sup> As James Reed writes: "His (Scott's) most convincing and enduring characters are simply not conceivable apart from the world they inhabit...locality appears as a context of moral issues, not merely as an attractive sense of action, meditation or soliloquy. It is the known place and the historic date which concentrate the argument" (Reed 1980: 20).

Scottish Highlands where, taken by the romanticism of his adventure, he defects to the Jacobite cause. Scott's geographically-oriented introduction provides an entrée into the human drama of the Scottish secessionist movement. As a participant in the Uprising, Waverley is witness to the mobilization of the Highland tribes, and falls in love with Flora Mac-Ivor, whose ballad, "There is Mist on the Mountain" evokes the proud history of the Scottish chieftains in an impassioned call for national independence.<sup>57</sup> The narrative culminates, meanwhile, in a strangely anticlimactic battle scene: fighting alongside the Scots at the Battle of Prestonpans, Waverley helps to defeat the vastly superior English army. But rather than commemorate this triumph, Scott concludes his tale by celebrating Waverley's return to his "English" roots: in the wake of the Scottish capitulation of 1746, the young man is pardoned by the British state, and reconciles his personal Scotland-England dichotomy by marrying a Scottish wife.

As detailed in the chart below (Table 5), the trajectory of Mendelssohn's *Scottish* Symphony is close enough to that of *Waverley* to merit a speculative interpretation of the work as a musical translation of Scott's novel.<sup>58</sup> The parallelisms between the two "human" narratives seem particularly overt: the pentatonic melodies and scotch snaps of the *Vivace non troppo* can be heard to represent "Highlanders"; the lyrical melody and emotive orchestral outbursts of the *Adagio* an evocation of the glorious "Scottish" past akin to Flora Mac-Ivor's bardic call to arms;

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<sup>57</sup> "Awake on your hills, on your islands awake,/ Brave sons of the mountain, the frith, and the lake!" sings Flora, concluding with the stanza: "Be the brand of each chieftain like Fin's in his ire!/ May the blood through his veins flow like currents of fire,/ Burst the base foreign yoke as your sires did of yore,/ Or die like your sires, and endure it no more!"

<sup>58</sup> The fact that Berlioz' Op.1, *Waverley: grande ouverture*, was inspired by Scott adds a degree of validity to this claim.

<i>Waverley</i>	<i>Scottish Symphony</i>	
The English officer Waverley ventures into the Scottish Highlands (the “exotic” north) and defects to the Jacobite cause	<b>Section I</b> (natural world)	<i>Andante con moto</i> and <i>Allegro un poco agitato</i> — land- and seascapes; storm
The Scottish Highlanders mobilize for war against the English	<b>Section II</b> (human world)	<i>Vivace non troppo</i> — portrait of human community; mobilization for battle
Waverley falls in love with Flora Mac-Ivor, who sings him a Scottish ballad		<i>Adagio</i> — evocation of the communal spirit
The battle of Prestonpans; a temporary victory for the Jacobites, but not enough to reverse the trajectory of history		<i>Allegro vivacissimo</i> — the battle
Celebratory reconciliation of Scots and English; marriage of Waverley to a Scottish woman		<i>Allegro maestoso assai</i> — communal celebration

**Table 5: Narrative similarities between *Waverley* and the *Scottish Symphony*.**

the bellicose dissonances of the *Allegro vivacissimo*, the Battle of Prestonpans. More significant than these details for my argument, however, are the more general parallelisms between Mendelssohn’s and Scott’s treatment of difference. Indeed, while the Scottish rebels portrayed in the body of Scott’s *Waverley* ultimately capitulate to the United Kingdom, the “exotic” community described in the *Vivace non troppo* and *Adagio* of Mendelssohn’s symphony are silenced by the *Allegro vivacissimo*; replaced at the end of the work by the *Allegro maestoso assai*. In both cases, difference is recognized — even celebrated —, but in the past tense; as an historical experience.

### **PART III — The *Scottish* Symphony and the Prussian politics of reconciliation**

As demonstrated in the exegesis above, the *Scottish* Symphony is not only “Scottish” in the sense that it paints a picture of exotic places and people(s). Like the *Waverley* Novels of Sir Walter Scott, it also conveys a “Scottish” narrative in which difference is ultimately overcome; in which the historical alterity of the *Vivace non troppo* and *Adagio* give way to “harmony” of the *Allegro maestoso assai*. But what does this narrative mean in the context of Prussian politics? The central argument of this chapter is that, like Scott’s *Waverley* Novels, the message of the *Scottish* Symphony embodied a Restoration-era “politics of reconciliation” central to the Christian-German monarchical world that Mendelssohn represented. On the level of state politics, I argue, this narrative reinforced the inevitability of the Prussian order, emphasizing the ability of the state to resolve its internal conflicts and to pursue its colonial aspirations. On the level of Jewish identity, meanwhile, it served to promote a model of integration in which Jews could become fully “modern” (that is, Christian and German) while retaining a sense of *historical* singularity.

#### **The politics of the Prussian state**

As I touch upon briefly in Chapter 1, the Prussian state that Mendelssohn represented during the 1840s was preoccupied with asserting itself as a world power, while avoiding the revolutionary extremes that had characterized early-nineteenth-century French- and German-speaking Europe. The answer to this challenge, argued Friedrich Wilhelm IV and his advisors, was a United Kingdom-inspired Christian-German state. A compromise between traditional religious and monarchical structures and nascent Republican ideals, they asserted, this new

“Prussian” order would be the “end of history,” serving to reconcile the demands of Prussia’s diverse citizenry and, ultimately, place Prussia in a leadership role in both German-speaking Europe and the colonial arena.

The political messages attributed to the *Waverley* Novels by twenty- and twenty-first-century scholars provide clues as to both Scott’s popularity in Restoration-era German-speaking Europe and the “Prussian” message of the *Scottish Symphony*. Indeed, beginning with Georg Lukács (1936), Scott’s novelistic oeuvre has been understood as a tacit endorsement of the conservative “middle way”<sup>59</sup> charted by the United Kingdom; a literary allegory for the reconciliation of England, Ireland, and Scotland in the 1801 Acts of Union.<sup>60</sup> Although set largely during the Scottish Uprisings, runs this interpretation, Scott’s historical novels did not so much condone Scottish radicalism<sup>61</sup> as reinforce the inevitability of the status quo, placing the

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<sup>59</sup> “Paradoxically,” notes Lukács, “Scott’s greatness is closely linked with his often narrow conservatism. He seeks the ‘middle way’ between the extremes and endeavors to demonstrate artistically the historical reality of this way by means of his portrayal of the great crises in English history” (Lukács 1962: 33).

<sup>60</sup> In some ways, the allegory of the *Waverley* Novels is similar to the “marriage trope” identified by Raymond Knapp in his work on American musicals (2009): like the farmers and the cowmen in Oklahoma, the Scots and Englishmen of *Waverley* and *Rob Roy* end their conflictive relationship in marriage, putting the past behind them in a literal and figurative “British Union.”

<sup>61</sup> “It is no accident that this new type of novel (the historical novel) arose in England” writes Lukács. “We have already mentioned, in dealing with the literature of the eighteenth century, important realistic features in the English novel of this period, and we described them as necessary consequences of the post-revolutionary character of England’s development at the time, in contrast to France and Germany. Now, in a period when the whole of Europe, including its progressive classes and their ideologists, are swayed (temporarily) by post-revolutionary ideology, these features in England must stand out with more than usual distinctness. For England has now once more become the model land of development for the majority of continental ideologists, though of course in a different sense than the eighteenth century” (Lukács 1962:32).

United Kingdom in the harmonious present; the Scottish Uprisings safely in the past (“Sixty years since”) (Lukács 1936; Duncan 2011).

The particularly “German” conclusion of the *Scottish* Symphony indicates that, like the *Waverley* Novels, it too can be understood to model a “middle way”; a narrative in which a celebrated subaltern group is ultimately integrated into the established order. Indeed, as Peter Mercer-Taylor (1995) has suggested, the instrumental *Männerchor* that concludes the *Scottish* Symphony would have been heard by Restoration-era audiences as a particularly powerful symbol of German nationalism; an analogue to the part songs that Mendelssohn wrote for the Leipzig Gutenberg Festival (1840),<sup>62</sup> two of which were based on Lutheran chorales, all of which

Figure 2.7: The melody of the *Allegro maestoso assai* (above) and that of *Vaterland in deinen Gauen*, one of four *Männerchor* part songs that Mendelssohn wrote for the Leipzig Gutenberg Festival of 1840. See Mercer-Taylor (1995) for a detailed analysis of the similarities between the tunes.

celebrated the relationship between “German” nationality, “German” modernity, and “German” Protestantism. The most famous of these songs, *Vaterland in deinen Gauen*, is a case in point (Figure 2.7). Set to the lyric to “Hark the Herald Angels Sing” in 1855, this melody originally

<sup>62</sup> See Bonds (1997) and Garratt (2010) for more on the Gutenberg Festival, which was also the occasion for the debut of the *Lobgesang*.

accompanied verses celebrating Gutenberg “the German man” and his role in “lighting the torch” of Protestantism:

Vaterland in deinen Gauen/ Brach der gold'ne tag einst an/ Deutschland, deine  
Völker sah'n/ seinen Schimmer nieder tauen./ Gutenberg der deutsche Mann/  
zündete de Fackel an...<sup>63</sup>

If the *Männerchor* of the *Allegro maestoso assai* is heard to embody this kind of nationalist message, the narrative conclusion of the *Scottish* Symphony implies not only that “exotic” difference must be left in the past, but that the Prussian present — the Christian-German monarchical order — is the end of history.

A hearing of the *Scottish* Symphony as a statement of the power of the Christian-German Prussian state to assimilate “otherness” is reinforced by the political events surrounding its composition, including the *Kölner Wirren* (1837-40) and the establishment of a Prussian-Anglican Bishopric in Jerusalem (1842). The first of these events, the *Kölner Wirren* (Cologne Turmoil), would seem a particularly good impetus for a work about reconciliation. A conflict in many ways parallel to the Scottish Uprisings, the *Wirren* involved groups of radicalized Catholics that threatened to secede from Friedrich Wilhelm IV's state, claiming allegiance to Papal, rather than Prussian, law.<sup>64</sup> During Wilhelm III's reign, Prussia had attempted, unsuccessfully, to suppress this secessionist movement by force. In 1840, however, Friedrich Wilhelm IV and his court turned to symbolic appeasement, instating a new, and effectively powerless, Papal representative for the region, and offering to help reconstruct the Cologne

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<sup>63</sup> “Fatherland, in your districts/ came the golden daybreak/ Germany, your people saw it/ shimmering downwards, thawing/ Gutenberg the German man/ lit the torch...

<sup>64</sup> I relate the story of the *Kölner Wirren* and the Cologne Cathedral in greater depth in Chapter 4.

Cathedral, a project that Rhineland Catholics had struggled to jumpstart for decades. These efforts effectively mirrored the narrative trajectory of the *Scottish* Symphony: recognizing (and honoring) the historical difference of Rhineland Catholics, Friedrich Wilhelm IV granted them their history (their Gothic Cathedral), but not their individual sovereignty.

Prussia's colonial ambitions in the Near East are another possible source of inspiration for Mendelssohn's symphonic narrative.<sup>65</sup> Eager to compete on the world stage, Prussia had long aspired to overseas colonies, and acted on the ambition in 1841, petitioning the British Crown to establish a Prussian-Anglican bishopric in Jerusalem.<sup>66</sup> As with the *Kölner Wirren*, the synchronicity of the composition and publication of Mendelssohn's symphony and Friedrich Wilhelm IV's diplomacy is suggestive. If, as I argue above, Mendelssohn's work is understood as a diplomatic gift from the Prussian King to his British counterparts, it would seem probable that his music was intended to underwrite the effort to establish a British-supported "German" presence in the colonial arena; to assert the "manifest destiny" of Protestant monarchy on a global level.

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<sup>65</sup> In *Colonial Fantasies*, Susanne Zantop (1997) has argued convincingly that the eighteenth-century German fascination with exotic peoples — particularly Americans — was related to both a German self-perception as a colonized community, and a desire for colonial territories.

<sup>66</sup> It is worth mentioning that the first Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem, Michael Solomon Alexander, had been born into a Prussian Jewish family.

## The politics of “Jewishness”

The Prussian state that Mendelssohn served while writing his *Scottish Symphony* was concerned with both Catholic insurgency and colonial expansion, factors that I have taken into account in the preceding analysis. But the more general engagement of Mendelssohn’s musical narrative with the relationship between a minority group (Scots or otherwise) and Protestant modernity (Prussian or British) also suggests that the *Scottish Symphony* has something to say about Mendelssohn’s approach to “Jewishness”; that, in a manner akin to Scott’s novels, it can be heard to reflect an effort at allegorically bridging the chasm between the “Jewish” past and the Christian-German monarchical present. Here, I want to suggest that this approach involved an understanding of Jewishness in which Jewish alterity was celebrated — but as a *historical* identity; one that had been *overcome* — but not erased — in the modern era.<sup>67</sup>

Sir Walter Scott’s approach to “Scottishness” provides a valuable point of departure for this discussion. This approach was Janus-faced: on the one hand, Scott’s work played a central role in the revival of Scottish culture, “inventing” traditions surrounding Highland dress, linguistics, and history that continue to represent “Scottishness” today (Ranger 1983). On the other, he was a pronounced apologist for — and perhaps even an enabler of — British imperialism, solidly framing Scottish culture as a historical tourist attraction (Lee 1997; Duncan 2011). From a contemporary perspective, these two aspects of Scott’s work seem contradictory.

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<sup>67</sup> This approach may be best understood in Hegelian terms. As Hegel wrote in his *Philosophy of History*: “Philosophy, as occupying itself with the True, has to do with the *eternally present*. Nothing in the past is lost for it, for the Idea is ever present; Spirit is immortal; with it there is no past, no future, but an essential *now*. This necessarily implies that the present form of Spirit comprehends within it all earlier steps. The grades which Spirit seems to have left behind it, it still possesses in the depths of the present” (Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz 1995: 218).

But this was not necessarily the case in the Restoration-era world in which he lived. Indeed, as intimated above, Scott was not so much interested in promoting a sense of Scottish independence from Great Britain (a “revolutionary” step with the potential of destabilizing the British political order), as he was in *integrating* Scots into the modern world; showing the ways in which “historical” Scottish identity was compatible with the “modern” Protestant state.

My contention in this chapter that the *Scottish* Symphony reflects an approach to “Jewishness” very similar to Scott’s take on “Scottishness” in the *Waverley* Novels. A first indication of this parallelism comes to the fore in the understanding of Jewish identity voiced by the Mendelssohn family. Indeed, as evidenced in the narratives told by Mendelssohn’s father, Abraham, the Mendelssohns understood their family history as a story of social “progress.” Leaving behind a Jewish community that “had become petrified...foreign, ignorant, and uncultured” (Hensel 1882: 3), ran this story, Moses Mendelssohn chose to participate culturally in the modern world. His children, meanwhile, had taken the logical next step, abandoning the “obsolete” trappings of Judaism entirely, and paving the way for the socio-cultural prominence of Felix and Fanny. As Abraham wrote to Felix with regards to their forefathers:

My father’s father was named Mendel Dessau. When his son, my father, went out into the world, when he began to become known, when he made the noble decision — which can never be praised enough — to pull himself and his brethren up from the deep wretchedness into which they had sunk by spreading a higher learning, he felt that as “Moses Mendel Dessau” it would be too difficult to develop the necessary close relationship with those who then possessed this higher learning: so he called himself “Mendelssohn,” without fearing that this would displease his father...As “Mendelssohn”

he severed himself irrevocably from an entire class — the best of which he raised up along with himself — and joined a different community... (Sposato 2006: 35).<sup>68</sup>

Sir Walter Scott's depiction of the Highlanders reflects a similar stress on sociocultural

“progress.” “There is no European nation,” writes Scott in the postscript to *Waverley*

which, within the course of half a century, or little more, has undergone so complete a change as this kingdom of Scotland...the destruction of the patriarchal power of the Highland chiefs...the total eradication of the Jacobite party which, averse to intermingle with the English, or adopt their customs, long continued to pride themselves upon maintaining ancient Scottish manners and customs —, commenced this innovation. The gradual influx of wealth, and extension of commerce, have since united to render the present people of Scotland a class of beings as different from their grandfathers, as the existing English are from those of Queen Elizabeth's time... (Scott 2011: 363).

If the Highland chiefs in this passage are replaced by Rabbis and the English by Prussians, Scott's story could be the story of the Mendelssohns, a family that, within scarcely three generations, had emerged from the ghetto to occupy sociocultural positions of great influence and power.

But, as with Scott, Mendelssohn's understanding of progress did not imply an eradication of his “ethnic” past. Quite to the contrary: like Scott's “Scottish” protagonists, this history remained an important — even a foundational — aspect of this composer's identity. The well-trodden debate over Felix's use of the double name “Mendelssohn Bartholdy” serves as an apt point of departure for exploring this parallelism. This discussion runs as follows: according to

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<sup>68</sup> Abraham continued this narrative in a letter to Fanny on the day of her confirmation: “Given the scant value I place on all (religious) forms, it goes without saying that I felt no inner calling to choose for you the Jewish, the most obsolete, corrupt, and pointless of them (all). So I raised you in the Christian, the purer (form) accepted by the majority of civilized people... (Sposato 2006: 16).

Eric Werner, Mendelssohn's decision to omit the name "Bartholdy"<sup>69</sup> during his 1829 visit to London was a reflection of his antipathy towards "Christianity", and an embrace of his Jewishness (Werner 1963). For Jeffrey Sposato, the omission had simply been an error of the British press, and the young man was, like other converts, intent on being as Christian as possible (Sposato 1998; 1999). Here, I want to suggest that the most accurate understanding of Mendelssohn's subjectivity may lie between these two extremes.<sup>70</sup> While the twenty-year-old Mendelssohn may have omitted his "Christian" name, the mature *Kapellmeister* and *Generalmusikdirektor* consistently signed with both "Mendelssohn" and "Bartholdy" (Mendelssohn tended to sign Felix M.B., or simply F.M.B.), an indication that he did not see his ethnic heritage and his Protestant identity as mutually exclusive, but as two markers of identity intimately related to one another.

Mendelssohn's understanding of the relationship between the last names "Mendelssohn" and "Bartholdy" is powerfully intimated in the narrative of the *Scottish* Symphony. Like the "exotic" community whose history he told in the *Vivace non troppo* and *Adagio* of his work, Felix understood his "Jewish" Mendelssohn family name as the dominant component of his *historical* identity, and commemorated it appropriately. But, as indicated in overall trajectory of the work, the composer did not perceive this Jewish alterity to have survived in the present. Rather, like the triumphant *Allegro maestoso assai* with which he concluded the *Scottish* Symphony, he saw the "end of history" as a world in which exotic difference had fallen away.

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<sup>69</sup> Abraham had adopted the patronymic Bartholdy after his conversion to Protestantism in 1822. The name was first assumed by Mendelssohn's maternal uncle (Jakob Solomon) when he became Prussian *Consul-General* to Rome in 1814.

<sup>70</sup> Leon Botstein, Michael P. Steinberg — and even Jeffrey Sposato himself — have made similar claims.

Mendelssohns had become Bartholdys; full participants in the modern Christian-German order.<sup>71</sup>

Less than an assertion of difference, then, Mendelssohn's decision to retain his illustrious "Jewish" family name was a statement of his powerful commitment to modern Prussian society; a demonstration of the capacity of the "other" to join the societal choir.

### Revisiting the coda

The argument I have made above has hinged largely on the concluding *Allegro maestoso assai* of the *Scottish* Symphony, an aspect of the work that I have heard to represent the "end of history." By concluding his symphony with this "Germanic" choral melody, I have argued, Mendelssohn relegated the alterity of his opening movements (the *Vivace non troppo* and the *Adagio*, in particular) to the past, reinforcing the ultimate triumph of Christian-German modernity. This move was coherent with the composer's conservative stance with respect to Prussian monarchical politics, and his advocacy of Jewish assimilation.

That said, I think it necessary to end my hermeneutic discussion of the *Scottish* Symphony with a caveat, for if the *Allegro maestoso assai* occupies a central place in Mendelssohn's musical narrative, it is also its most dubious — and least convincing — component. Part of the perceived weakness of this ending, of course, can be attributed to our

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<sup>71</sup> It may be worth understanding Mendelssohn's approach as an outgrowth of the Hegelian thought of Jewish thinkers like Eduard Gans. "The way in which the Jewish world will merge into the European follows from the above-mentioned principle," wrote Gans in 1822. "To merge does not mean to perish [*aufgehen ist nicht untergehen*]. Only the obstinate, self-centered independence of the Jews will be destroyed, not the element which becomes a part of the whole; serving the totality; this element shall lose nothing of its independence or substance. The larger entity [which will embrace all Judaism] shall be the richer for the new ingredient, not the poorer for the lost contrast." (Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz: 216-217).

distance from Restoration-era musical aesthetics: Mendelssohn's "instrumental chorus" may sound kitschy to contemporary aesthetic sensibilities, but it may not have been perceived this way by contemporaries, who seemed to have been genuinely moved by this kind of *Männerchor* style. Nonetheless, it is also worth considering that Mendelssohn himself was ambivalent about the Christian-German world order that he represented, and that he — consciously or unconsciously — wrote a conclusion that fell short of complete "triumph." Heard in this way, Mendelssohn's symphony is a much more complex statement with respect to Prussian state and identity politics; the (perhaps ironic) declaration of a cultural representative that must, at least outwardly, tow the party line. In the analyses that follow — particularly Chapters 3 and 4 — I explore this, more critical, aspect of Mendelssohn's musical message in greater depth and detail.

### **CHAPTER 3 — THE POLITICS OF APPROPRIATION: MENDELSSOHN'S INCIDENTAL MUSIC TO *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*, OP.61**

Like the historical novels of Sir Walter Scott, the dramatic oeuvre of William Shakespeare enjoyed international popularity in the early nineteenth century. Mixing the sacred and the profane, the high and the low, comedy and tragedy, Shakespeare's work provided an alternative to the neoclassical aesthetic that had dominated eighteenth-century stages, and was embraced by Romantics who, with their newfound concern for history and personalized expression, understood it as both a "classic" of *Wellliteratur* and a model for the production of new art. Accordingly, translations and stage productions proliferated, many of them setting the groundwork for the Shakespeare traditions we are familiar with today.<sup>72</sup>

Early-nineteenth-century musicians joined thespians, artists, and literary figures in their excitement over Shakespearean drama. As evidenced in Rossini's *Otello* (1816), Bellini's *I Capuleti e I Montecchi* (1830),<sup>73</sup> and Wagner's *Das Liebesverbot* (1834), opera composers were particularly taken by the promise of Shakespeare's work, whose "Romantic" themes were already well known by contemporary audiences. Schubert's songs, Berlioz' symphony *Romeo and Juliet* (1839), and — the subject of this chapter — Mendelssohn's incidental music (1843) to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, reflect the degree to which Shakespeare also influenced and inspired composers working in other musical genres.

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<sup>72</sup> A powerful eighteenth-century Shakespeare revival preceded that of the nineteenth-century, but its achievements were largely overshadowed by those of the Romantic era. The German-speaking preference for the Schlegel-Tieck translations of Shakespeare's oeuvre, as opposed to the C.M. Wieland translations that preceded them, is a case in point (Paulin 2003).

<sup>73</sup> Although no doubt inspired by Shakespeare's play, Bellini's opera was based on earlier texts.

Given the popularity of Shakespeare within early nineteenth-century European circles, Felix Mendelssohn's decision to write incidental music for a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Op.61) would seem appropriate to the times. But it also raises some important questions. First, and foremost, there is the question of the choice to write incidental music, especially given the prominent role of Mendelssohn's youthful *Overture* (Op.21) in pioneering the concept of program music. Second, there are the grounds for selecting *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a decidedly secondary work that had little (if any) presence on early nineteenth-century European stages. Finally, there are a series of issues to be resolved with respect to the interpretative decisions implicit in Mendelssohn's musical setting, the most glaring being the strong emphasis on supernatural characters and actions.

In this chapter, I argue that these and other questions can be answered by approaching *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Op.61 as a form of musical engagement in the cultural politics of Friedrich Wilhelm IV's Court. Situating Mendelssohn's music within the burgeoning body of scholarship dedicated to the "Prussian" incidental music produced during the 1840s (Steinberg 2004a; Toews 2004; Geary 2014), I demonstrate how Mendelssohn's composition can be heard to respond to the exigencies of Prussian nationalism, comprising, like his incidental music to *Antigone* (1841), an act of both cultural appropriation (Geary 2014) and political commentary (Steinberg 2004a).

The chapter proceeds in three central sections. In a first section, I compare Mendelssohn's *Overture* (Op.21) with his mature incidental music (Op.61) in order to discuss some of the questions raised by Mendelssohn's later oeuvre. In part two, I respond to these queries by contextualizing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* within the Prussian project of cultural

appropriation promulgated by Friedrich Wilhelm IV and his court. The chapter concludes with two political interpretations of Mendelssohn's incidental music, the first as a text underwriting the Prussian state, the second as a critique of it.

## **PART I — Mendelssohn's incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream***

I begin my exploration by uncoupling Mendelssohn's incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Op.61) from the *Overture* (Op.21) that he wrote some sixteen years earlier. This distinction appears straightforward in a temporal and generic sense: the *Overture* Op.21, written in 1826, is a single piece of program music; the incidental music of 1843 (Op.61) is a set of fourteen pieces, including the *Overture* and thirteen additional songs, intermezzos, and melodramas, intended to accompany a staged rendition of Shakespeare's comedy. Yet, for a variety of reasons (not the least of them ideological),<sup>74</sup> the contextual circumstances of these two works' composition, and the particularities of their meaning, remain conflated in the musicological imagination. The first task of this chapter is to untangle them.

The conflation of Op.21 and Op.61 by contemporary scholars is perhaps best represented in the work of Larry Todd. According to Todd, whose principal academic interest was Op.21, Mendelssohn's Op.61 is an expansion of the *Overture*; a compilation of "miscellaneous pieces" that "elaborated Felix's earlier reading of the play" (Todd 2003: 463), and whose primary scholarly value is to provide a window into the programmatic intentions of Mendelssohn's earlier work. Although Todd's early publications (Todd 1993) left the methodological grounding for this interpretation unspecified, he clarified it a decade later with musical analysis, demonstrating the

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<sup>74</sup> Music scholars have tended to assume a deprecatory attitude towards incidental music.

ways in which a descending tetrachordal motive central to the structure of the *Overture* reappeared in a “kaleidoscope of variations” in many of the movements of the incidental music (Todd 2003: 460).

While persuasive in purely musical terms, Todd’s understanding of Op.61 as an outgrowth of Op.21 presents a fundamentally incomplete portrait of Mendelssohn’s incidental music. The issues raised by Todd’s analysis are twofold. First, and most immediately apparent, it assumes that Mendelssohn’s pieces are merely a “miscellaneous” aggregation of musical fragments; a series of set pieces without a structural logic independent from the *Overture*. Second, and related, it glosses over the substantial differences between the content of these set pieces and the *Overture*, overlooking the new and creative ways in which Mendelssohn’s incidental music reworks aspects of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

As I demonstrate in the following analysis, these two oversights obscure a more complete understanding of Mendelssohn’s Op.61. Beginning with a plot summary of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, my analysis demonstrates the independent structural integrity of Mendelssohn’s incidental music, and then explores the ways in which it creatively contributes to the narrative of Shakespeare’s comedy.

### ***A Midsummer Night’s Dream***

In contemporary popular culture, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is generally remembered as the ancestor of works such as Mozart’s *Così fan tutte* and Schnitzler’s *Reigen*; a sex comedy in which plot is driven by the improper alignment of lovers and the subsequent exchange of partners. As with its tragic counterpart, *Romeo and Juliet*, however, Shakespeare’s play can also

be read as a story of resolution on larger social — and even cosmological — levels. Indeed, while *Romeo and Juliet* employs the story of lovesick teenagers as a parable for the illness of Veronese society, the plot of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is structured in a series of concentric circles, each of which articulates a narrative trajectory of conflict and resolution: in the fairy world, the fairy Queen Titania and fairy King Oberon fight over custody of a young boy (a “changeling”); in the monarchical world, King Theseus has wooed the Amazon Queen Hippolyta and has brought her back to Athens to marry her; in the aristocratic world, four lovers are enamored with the “wrong” people; and in the plebeian world, a small group of actors attempts to ape out the tragedy of the lovers Pyramus and Thisbe.

The action of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is not only the product of misaligned love interests within each of these four concentric spheres, but the disastrous consequences when these spheres loosen their orbits and collide. The play begins in the mortal world with the maid Hermia, whose elopement with Lysander has been forbidden by King Theseus, and who tries to evade her arranged marriage to Demetrius, Helena’s love interest, by escaping to the woods (Act I). The plot thickens when this “earthly” conflict intersects with drama in the supernatural world. Intent on punishing his wife, Titania, the fairy King Oberon casts a spell that causes her to fall in love with the first thing she sees (Act II). But he also decides to meddle in mortal affairs, ordering his henchman, Puck, to enchant Demetrius in such a way as to end the lovers’ dispute (Act II). Puck’s mischievous participation incites a fierce comedy of errors on multiple cosmic planes: in fairyland, Titania falls in love with Bottom, the plebeian actor, who has been transformed into a donkey (Act III). In the mortal world, meanwhile, the enchantment of the lovers produces a violent squabble (Act III). Following this chaotic climax, a second set of

supernatural interventions reorder the cosmos (Act IV): Titania and Oberon make amends, the appropriately-paired lovers join Theseus and Hippolyta in their marriage ceremony (Act V), and Bottom returns to his human form to play his role as protagonist of Pyramus and Thisbe (Act V).

### **The *Overture* and the incidental music**

In his youthful *Overture*, Op.21 Mendelssohn strives to encapsulate the entire narrative content of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in a single concert overture, integrating programmatic episodes from the comedy within the narrative trajectory of sonata form. This goal is achieved through the presentation of multiple themes — six in all — each of which is related through a transformation of a descending tetrachord. In his analysis, Larry Todd has identified these themes as follows: the opening I-V-iv-I “dream” motive (m.1), the scampering E minor “fairy” motive (m.8), the soaring “court” motive (m.62), the chromatic “lovers” motive (m.130), the braying “Bottom” motive (m.194), and the hunting horn/Theseus’ court motive (m.222). Among the ingenious aspects of the *Overture* is the way in which these themes serve double duty as both structural and programmatic markers: the “dream” motive, for example, is present in both the exposition and recapitulation, but also frames the work at the end of the coda, implying the “dreamlike” quality of the entire narrative. The E minor “fairy” motive, meanwhile, dominates the development section, representing the journey of the lovers from the Athenian court into the supernatural woods, and then back again into the human world (Todd 1993).

Like his *Overture*, Mendelssohn’s incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* can be heard as a programmatic synopsis of Shakespeare’s comedy, a fact made clear by the twentieth- and twenty-first-century impulse to isolate the overture and intermezzi of the work as

a kind of orchestral suite.<sup>75</sup> That said, Op.61 is fundamentally different from Op.21 in both form and content: while Op.21 is intended as a concert overture, Op.61 fuses program music with musical genres that are intertwined with the staged performance of a written text. While Op.21 paints a general synopsis of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Op.61 develops and enriches it act by act — and often scene by scene —, expanding Shakespeare's ideas in new, and often unexpected, ways.

The first, and perhaps most immediately noticeable, difference between in Op.21 and Op.61 regards the way in which the music relates to Shakespeare's text. Indeed, as demonstrated in Table 6, Op.61 is less of a synopsis of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* than an integrated part of the drama itself; an organic interweaving of fourteen set pieces<sup>76</sup> into the action of the comedy. The function of these set pieces is directly correlated with genre: the intermezzi that precede each act are programmatic, serving double duty as narrative synopses and ancillary scenes. The melodramas and songs, in contrast, are much like the music that might be expected in a modern-day cartoon or musical: the melodramas comprise short snippets of melody and/or gestural sounds, many of which are overtly diegetic, some of which can be heard as an effort at “coloring” the mood of the scene. The songs are musical settings of text taken directly from locations in the manuscript in which fairies are described as “singing” and “dancing.”

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<sup>75</sup> It is debatable whether Mendelssohn would have approved of this practice.

<sup>76</sup> The incidental music includes 5 intermezzi, 7 melodramas (including 2 dance numbers), and 2 songs.

	<b>Plot</b>	<b>Intermezzi</b>	<b>Melodramas</b>	<b>Songs</b>
		Overture		
<b>Act I</b>	Worldly characters and conflicts introduced			
		Scherzo (No.1)		
<b>Act II</b>	Supernatural characters and conflicts introduced		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Melodrama/ Elfenmarsch (No.2)</li> <li>• Melodrama (No. 4)</li> </ul>	“Bunte Schlangen” (No.3)
		Intermezzo (No.5)		
<b>Act III</b>	Climax of conflicts		Melodrama (No.6)	
		Notturmo (No.7)		
<b>Act IV</b>	Resolution of conflicts		Melodrama (No.8)	
		Hochzeitsmarsch (No.9)		
<b>Act V</b>	Celebration		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Melodrama (No. 10)</li> <li>• Funeral March/Ein Tanz von Rümpeln (No.11)</li> <li>• Melodrama (No.12)</li> </ul>	Finale (No.13)

**Table 6: The structure of the incidental music to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Op.61.**

The musical structure of Op.61 indicates an approach to the thematic content of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* that is fundamentally different than Mendelssohn’s *Overture*. Two aspects of this structure are particularly salient: the first is the role of the intermezzi, which serve double duty as both programmatic synopses of, and narrative additions to, Shakespeare’s comedy. The second is Mendelssohn’s conspicuous emphasis on the supernatural events and characters in the play, a characteristic exemplified in the role of the incidental music’s melodramas and songs, which are almost entirely devoted to this aspect of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and which develop it in directions that are left unexplored in the *Overture*.

## The intermezzi

The first structural aspect of Op.61 deserving of note are the intermezzi that Mendelssohn uses to introduce the acts of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. On the one hand, these miniatures can be heard as a synopsis of the narrative and affective arc of Shakespeare's comedy. The *Overture*, which introduces the main characters of the drama, seems intended as an analogue to Act I; the elfin *Scherzo*, the supernatural world introduced in Act II; the *Intermezzo* No.5, the conflicts of Act III; the *Notturmo*, the resolution of conflicts in Act IV; and the *Hochzeitsmarsch* the celebratory conclusion of Act V.<sup>77</sup> When contextualized within Shakespeare's text, however, it becomes clear that the intermezzi also perform a creative function intimately tied to the staged drama, reinterpreting — and sometimes adding — contextual elements, characters, and even entire scenes.

The following summaries describe how each intermezzo doubles as both an abstract synopsis akin to the *Overture* and a specific “scene” or “characterization” intimately related to the staged drama.

***Scherzo*:** On an abstract level, the *Scherzo* that immediately precedes Act II of Mendelssohn's incidental music serves as a “stand in” for Act II, foreshadowing the collision of the human characters introduced in Act I with the supernatural forces that determine the plot of Acts II, III, and IV. At the same time, however, the set piece can be heard as the musical depiction of a specific scene: the argument between Titania and Oberon that causes the elves to “creep into acorn cups and hide them there” (Act II:i:30-1). Mendelssohn portrays this scene in a great deal

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<sup>77</sup> It is worth noting that this narrative arc is quite different than that of the *Overture*.

Figure 3.1: A gust of wind followed by falling leaves — or perhaps the elves’ reaction to Titania’s and Oberon’s fight (*Scherzo*).

of detail: a jocular, syncopated melody in G minor can be heard to represent elves; the breathless flute solos, fairies; the ominous swells in the strings, the wrath of the fairy monarchs. Among Mendelssohn’s many interpretive touches is the placement of the conflict in the forest: the ominous swells can easily be heard as gusts of wind; the ensuing pitter-patter the sound of falling leaves.

**Intermezzo (No.5):** In abstract terms, the nervous — even hysterical — aura of the second intermezzo (No.5), which precedes Act III, can be heard to represent the overall trajectory of the

plot of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which is just about to reach its conflictive climax on all cosmological planes. But, to an even a greater extent than the *Scherzo*, the set piece is also the extension of a concrete scene, one in which Hermia awakes from a nightmare to find that her

**Nº 5. INTERMEZZO.** 79

Hermia. Dich muss ich, oder meinen Tod ereilen. *Hermia.* Either death, or you, I'll find immediately.  
(Nach dem Schluss des zweiten Aktes.) (After the end of the second act.)

Allegro appassionato.

Allegro appassionato.

Figure 3.2: “Hermia searches everywhere for Lysander, and eventually loses herself in the woods.”

lover, Lysander, has wandered off into the night. On one level, the jumpy A minor melody and weepy countermelody of the intermezzo would seem to capture Hermia’s mood. The description in Mendelssohn’s score,<sup>78</sup> however, indicates that Mendelssohn also intended to depict something that Shakespeare only implies: Hermia actually searches for her lover in the woods and loses herself there. The music, then, is not only about emotional anxiety, but also about the

<sup>78</sup> “Hermia sucht Lysander überall, und verliert sich endlich im Walde.”

sylvan environment in which Hermia is lost; the rustling branches; the lurking beasts; the unfamiliar sounds.

**The *Notturmo*:** On an abstract level, Mendelssohn's *Notturmo* represents the turning point of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; the moment in the comedy in which the conflicts set up in Act I, and actualized in Acts II and III, begin to resolve. But, as is indicated by the repetition of the



Figure 3.3: The *Notturmo* horn theme.

*Notturmo* theme in the melodrama that follows (No.8), Mendelssohn's set piece is also a creative addition to Shakespeare's play; a musical portrait of Oberon, a character who receives no musical treatment in the *Overture*, or during the first three acts. Having just ordered the reversal of the spell on Lysander (Act III), and on the verge of reconciling with Titania (Act IV), Oberon appears to be a peacemaker at this point in Shakespeare's comedy, and Mendelssohn portrays him as such with soaring, regal theme in the horns.

**The *Hochzeitsmarsch*:** Mendelssohn's fourth intermezzo (No.9), the famous *Hochzeitsmarsch*, is perhaps his most creative addition to Shakespeare's text. Abstractly speaking, the music is a kind of "happy ending" brought on by the calm of the *Notturmo*; the sonic equivalent of the celebratory festivities at resolution of the play. As with intermezzos 1 and 2, however, Mendelssohn's *Hochzeitsmarsch* is also a very clear musical *scene*; an actual (as opposed to metaphorical) wedding march. Like Hermia's wanderings in the forest, the scene is not entirely

Mendelssohn's idea: Theseus opens *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with a discussion of his impending marriage with Hippolyta (although he places it four days in the future, not one), and, after stumbling upon the lovers in the woods, he clearly announces that they will be married with



Figure 3.4: Courtly fanfares and galloping horses in the *Hochzeitsmarsch*.

them (Act IV: 2:184-5). That said, Shakespeare does not actually include a wedding scene in his comedy, and the public “wedding march” of the intermezzo, with its processional grandiosity — including what can be heard as courtly fanfares, galloping horses, and graceful bridesmaids — is largely Mendelssohn's invention.

## The melodramas and the songs

Like the intermezzi, the melodramas and songs of Mendelssohn's incidental music creatively shape the textual content of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in both thematic and structural ways. On a thematic level, these set pieces serve to elaborate the elfin theme of the *Overture*, expanding Mendelssohn's characterization of the supernatural. On a structural level, meanwhile, they divide the Tieck-Mendelssohn production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* into two unequal halves: a worldly half (Act I), from which melodrama is conspicuously absent; and a "supernatural" half (framed by the two elfin songs, Nos.3 and 13), in which melodrama is a constant presence.

If Mendelssohn's focus on the supernatural in his melodramas and songs is reminiscent of Op.21, the complexity of its characterization is not. Indeed, while Mendelssohn's boyhood youthful *Overture* is limited to a rather jocular — perhaps impish — portrayal of elves, the incidental music is diverse in both affect and genre, ranging from the benevolent to the devilish: on the benevolent side of the spectrum is the instrumental music for Oberon, the fairy King; on the devilish side, the melodramas portraying his mischievous henchman, Puck. The instrumental music and songs that Mendelssohn provides for the fairies/elves connects these two poles, changing in affect and genre depending upon the nature of the scene.

On the benevolent side of Mendelssohn's "supernatural" music is the triadic theme that represents Oberon, the fairy King. First identified as a depiction of Oberon in Act IV (during the melodrama, No.8), and fully enunciated in the *Notturmo* between Acts III and IV, Oberon's music is heard at moments in which the balance of the cosmos is on the verge of restoration: the *Notturmo* (No.7) follows the reversal of Lysander's spell, which eventually leads to the

reconciliation of the lovers; its reappearance in the melodrama accompanies the release of the spell on Titania, and the subsequent rapprochement of the fairy monarchs (see Figure 3.5).

The musical score is presented in a standard format with multiple staves. The top two staves are vocal lines, and the bottom two are piano accompaniment. The score is divided into two main sections: *Allegro molto* and *Andante tranquillo*. The *Allegro molto* section includes the instruction "(Titania erwacht.) (Titania awakes.)" and the beginning of Oberon's dialogue. The *Andante tranquillo* section includes the instruction "senza Sordino" and the continuation of the dialogue between Oberon and Puck. The score is published by Edition Peters, with the number 6056.

Figure 3.5: Oberon restores order in the *Andante tranquillo* of melodrama No.8.

At the opposite spectrum of Oberon’s supernatural “dream” music are the melodramas that Mendelssohn devotes to Puck, Oberon’s henchman, a “shrewd and navish sprite” that preserves something of the devilish quality implied by his epithet, Robin Goodfellow. More than “melodies” per se, Mendelssohn gives Puck musical gestures, most of them chromatic, or outlining diminished chords. Some of these gestures sound comical: in Melodrama No.2 the sprite can be heard launching off in the ascending strings to put “a girdle around the world in forty minutes”; in Melodrama No.4, he winds chromatically around Lysander, enchanting him, and then flitting away. But many of the musical gestures associated with Puck also have a nasty

— and even destructive — undertone. In Melodrama No.6, for example, Puck seems to take musical delight in torturing his enchanted victims, dragging Bottom “through bog, through bush, through brake, through brier” to the undulating chromatic accompaniment of the strings, and leading Lysander and Demetrius “up and down” through the woods with similar scalar passages. In the aftermath of each exploit, the little devil celebrates, laughing hysterically in the flutes and the oboes (see Figure 3.6).

The image shows a page of a musical score for Melodrama No. 6. It features vocal lines for Lysander and Demetrius, and piano accompaniment. The score includes dynamic markings like 'pizz.', 'arco', 'f', and 'dim.', and stage directions such as '(Beide ab.)', '(Lysander kommt zurück.)', and '(Re-enter Lysander.)'. The lyrics are in German and English. The piano part has a chromatic accompaniment. The score is published by Edition Peters, number 6056.

Figure 3.6: Puck leads Demetrius and Lysander “up and down” and then breaks into hysterical laughter (Melodrama No.6).

While both Oberon and Puck have a large presence in Mendelssohn’s incidental music, the most pervasive “supernatural” music in the score are the set pieces representing elves and/or fairies, which run the gamut between the affective extremes of Oberon and Puck, and often include both. The *Elfenmarsch* (No.2) is representative of the lighthearted side of this music,

preserving the breathless, scurrying quality of the *Overture*'s elf theme, as well as its orchestration in the high winds and strings (and its E minor tonality). But, as is reflected in the two songs included in Op.61 (Nos.3 and 13), the elf music of Mendelssohn's incidental music can have more ominous undertones as well. As I will explore in greater depth later in this chapter, the elfin invitation to dreamland in these compositions pulls strongly towards a more ambiguous musical space, one that suggests that the elves, like Puck, preserve something of their "ghostly" spirit origins and, as such, are not to be fully trusted.

## **PART II — The nationalist implications of *A Midsummer Night's Dream***

As I have established above, Mendelssohn's incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Op.61) is a fundamentally different work than his youthful *Overture* (Op.21). Rather than a "miscellaneous" collection of set pieces elaborating Mendelssohn's childhood synopsis of Shakespeare's comedy, the composition is perhaps best understood as an alternate reading of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, one whose structural logic engages with this dramatic work in new interpretative ways, including the addition of new scenes, and an increased, and more diverse, emphasis on supernatural forces.

Hearing Mendelssohn's incidental music as an independent work shines light on the composer's close engagement with Shakespeare, and his ability to balance fidelity to literary text with musical creativity (especially in the case of the intermezzi). But it also brings up a series of important questions to which music scholars have yet to provide nuanced answers: what motivated Mendelssohn to return to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and reinterpret it in a piece of incidental music? Equally importantly: how can the content of this mature interpretation be

accounted for, particularly its scenic “additions” and its stress on the multiple potentialities of the supernatural?<sup>79</sup>

The central premise of this chapter is that answers to these (and other) questions lie in Mendelssohn’s investment in the project of cultural appropriation spearheaded by the Prussian state. In the following, I outline this argument in two parts: first, I explore the state project of dramaturgic revival that gave birth to Mendelssohn’s music to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, using to the literary work of Mendelssohn’s collaborator, Ludwig Tieck, to demonstrate the ways in which Shakespeare’s comedy was understood as a model for an emergent school of “German” literature. Then, I turn to Mendelssohn’s incidental music, arguing that the composer’s stylistic references to the contemporary operas of Carl Maria von Weber — principally *Der Freischütz* — were an effort at realizing the “Germanization” of Shakespeare’s oeuvre advocated in literary circles.

### **The Prussian nationalist context**

In introducing Mendelssohn’s incidental music to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, scholars often make mention of the fact that the work was composed to accompany Ludwig Tieck’s staging of Shakespeare’s comedy at the Prussian court. Yet, despite an increasing scholarly interest in the politics of the music that Mendelssohn wrote for Tieck’s projects immediately preceding and following *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Op. 61 is rarely associated with the Prussian cultural agenda. Indeed, while Tieck-Mendelssohn productions like *Antigone* (1841) and *Oedipus at Colonus* (1845) have been heard as Hellenistic vehicles for exploring the role of

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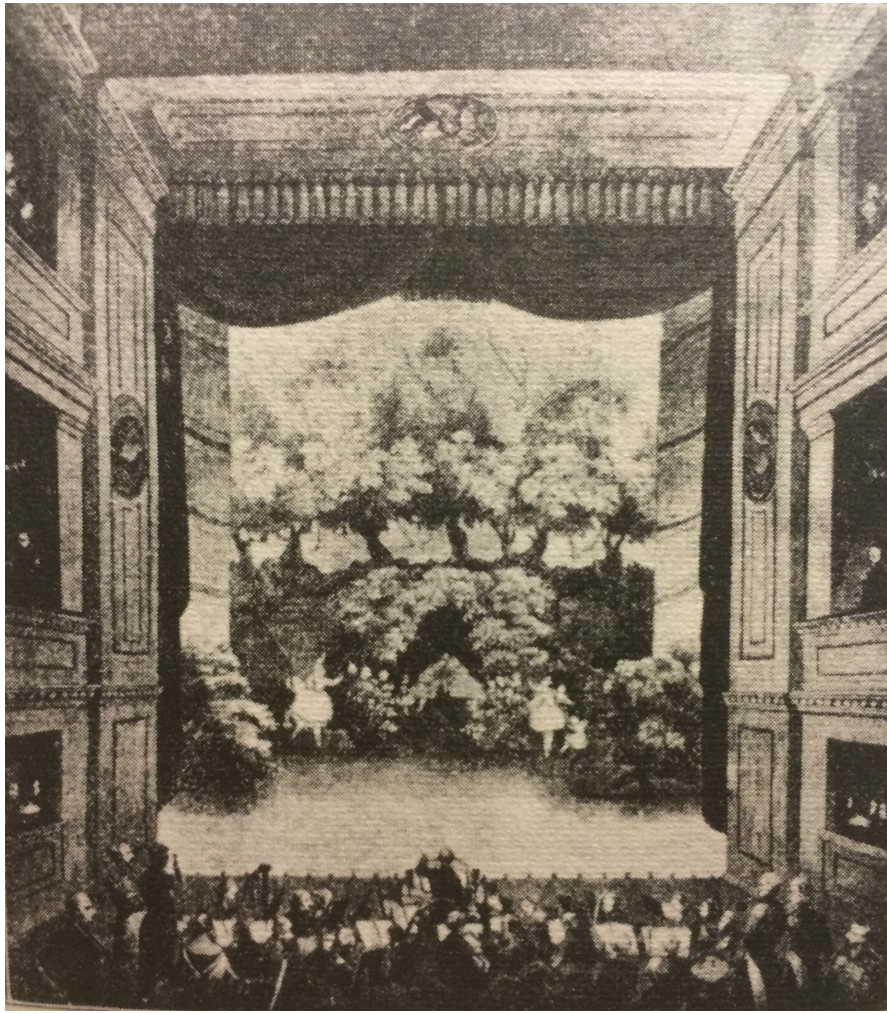
<sup>79</sup> Krummacher (1974) provides a point of departure with respect to some of these issues.

the governmental and religious institutions in the modern Prussian state (Steinberg 2004a; Geary 2014), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has never been the subject of this kind of political interpretation.

A more detailed look at the context of the Tieck-Mendelssohn staging of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, however, suggests that the 1843 production was as closely tied to the cultural politics of the Prussian state as their stagings of *Antigone* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. A product of the collaborative efforts of artists in Prussian employ,<sup>80</sup> *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was one in a series of “national” theatrical productions that, following approval by the King and his censors at royal showings at the *Sansoucci* palace (see Figure 3.7), were released to public theaters for the cultural edification of the Prussian “nation.” Like its Greek theatrical siblings, then, this Shakespearean production appears to have been motivated by a desire to appropriate the comedy for the Prussian stage, and more broadly, the “German” cultural tradition. The nationalist approach to Shakespeare taken by Prussian theater director Ludwig Tieck strongly supports this thesis. A popular author of German-language prose well known for his leadership in the early-nineteenth-century Shakespeare revival, Tieck understood Shakespeare’s oeuvre as a model for a new “German” literary school, and worked assiduously to make it available to his German-speaking peers (Zeydel 1931; 1935; Paulin 2003). One aspect of this project involved the literal translation of the Shakespearean oeuvre, a goal brought to fruition in Schlegel’s complete German-language Shakespeare, which Tieck edited and published. Another was to translate Shakespearean techniques into German ones, an objective exemplified in Tieck’s *Shakespeares*

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<sup>80</sup> These included the Prussian Dramaturge, Ludwig Tieck, the Prussian General Music Director Felix Mendelssohn, and the Prussian “Intendant” Karl Theodor von Küstner.



**Figure 3.7: The Tieck-Mendelssohn staging of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Sanssouci, 1843. Reprinted in Nüssel (1967). Image in the public domain.**

*Behandlung des Wunderbaren*,<sup>81</sup> an analytical essay that presented “German” authors with Shakespeare-derived tools for incorporating supernatural elements into their work.<sup>82</sup>

Ludwig Tieck’s efforts at “Germanizing” Shakespeare did not stop, however, with literary translation and analysis. Indeed, Tieck incorporated Shakespeare into a great number of his nationalist literary creations. In some cases, as with poems like the *Sommernacht* (a rewriting of

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<sup>81</sup> *Shakespeare's Treatment of the Supernatural* (1796).

<sup>82</sup> These techniques included the use of narrative frames, the setting of events in a distant place, the use of dreamlike sequences, the fusion of horror and comedy, and the employment of music.

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* in which a young Shakespeare is blessed with artistic creativity by the Fairy Queen), or *Dichterleben* (a fictionalized Shakespeare biography modeled on Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*), this integration was merely thematic. But, as V.C. Hubbs (1969) has shown, Shakespearean principles are also evident in Tieck's literary fairytales, or *Kunstmärchen*, some of the most generically "Germanic" exemplars of this literati's work, and the central reason for his celebrity in the German-speaking world. Tieck's most famous *Kunstmärchen*, *Der blonde Eckbert*, is a case in point. The story of a knight who spirals into insanity following the revelation of his wife's past to a family friend, this tale contains all of the elements outlined in *Shakespeares Behandlung des Wunderbaren*, including a story within a story (the wife's narrative is told within Eckbert's), a distant location (Eckbert's wife travels deep into the woods to live with a sorceress), dreamlike sequences (the border between Eckbert's dreams and conscious thought is perpetually blurred), and the use of music (the song, *Waldeinsamkeit*,<sup>83</sup> serves as a reminder of the wife's past).

### **The musical "Germanization" of the Shakespearean model: the Weberian style**

The nationalist context of the 1843 staging of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, combined with Tieck's literary approach to the Shakespearean oeuvre, suggests that Mendelssohn's incidental music was also intended as a tool of cultural appropriation, a thesis that places new light on his artistic approach to the work. Indeed, many of the riddles regarding Mendelssohn's musical decisions can be at least partially resolved by hearing them in "nationalist" terms. In

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<sup>83</sup> This term, which was of Tieck's invention, became a central trope of the Romantic era, perhaps best known by musicians through Robert Schumann's *Eichendorff-Liederkreis* Op.39.

addition to being a logical outgrowth of the *Zauberspiel* tradition,<sup>84</sup> his choice to compose music exclusively for supernatural characters and scenes can be understood as a means of emphasizing the “Germanic” qualities of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, particularly the importance of magic and dreams to the German idealists. His lavish emphasis on the sylvan world in the *Overture* and the *Intermezzo* (No.5), meanwhile, can be interpreted not only as a nod to the Athenian wood, but as a means of stressing the “Germanic” identification with forests, a symbol that, as Simon Schama relates, held particularly powerful national connotations for Restoration-era German speakers (Schama 1995; Meyer 2003).<sup>85</sup> But perhaps the most substantive way in which this nationalist understanding reformulates normative conceptions of Mendelssohn’s incidental music is by reframing one of the nagging critiques with respect to the style of the work: its powerful reliance on Weberian musical tropes.

That Mendelssohn’s incidental music to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* borrows heavily from the operas of Carl Maria von Weber is almost a musicological cliché.<sup>86</sup> In his analysis of the *Overture*, for example, Larry Todd emphasizes the influence of *Oberon* on Mendelssohn’s Op.21, arguing that the young composer’s participation in the Berlin premiere of Weber’s opera sparked his interest in the fairy world of Shakespeare’s comedy and inspired him to write the famous scampering elf motif. Mendelssohn’s references to Weber, however, are much more

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<sup>84</sup> Mendelssohn’s work may be understood as a descendent of Mozart’s *Zauberflöte*, itself an extension of a much longer German-language tradition of magical *Singspiele*.

<sup>85</sup> As Schama details, the story of the frustrated Roman attempts at conquering the peoples of the Teutoburg Forest became emblematic for nineteenth-century German nationalists, who emphasized the alterity and solidarity of these Germanic tribes, and conflated them with modern-day German-speakers.

<sup>86</sup> As I explore in Chapter 6, this cliché provided fodder for National Socialist ideologues, who saw it as proof of Mendelssohn’s creative impotence.

widespread than the elf theme, and are hardly limited to *Oberon*. Indeed, far more than *Oberon*, which, Todd's thesis aside, bears only superficial resemblance to the plot of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*,<sup>87</sup> Mendelssohn seems to have drawn inspiration from *Der Freischütz*, an opera that is referenced throughout Op.61, particularly in the *Intermezzo* (No.5) and the *Notturmo* (No. 9).

In a manner similar to the stylistic reliance of his sacred music on Bachian and Haendelian models (a Mendelssohnian tendency discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4), Mendelssohn's gestures to Weberian style have caused more than one musician to debate the "sincerity" and/or "authenticity" of his artistic muse. Understanding the incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as an effort at "Germanizing" Shakespeare's comedy reframes this concern. Indeed, heard in nationalist terms, Mendelssohn's references to Weber are less an effort to imitate a style as a tactic aimed at citing a symbol of German identity; a means of associating *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with the Prussian stage.

Few musical works represented the Prussian stage like *Der Freischütz*. Arguably "the first opera to achieve the status of a national emblem" (Taruskin 2010:191), Weber's masterpiece was one of only a handful of German-language operas at the time of its Berlin premiere in 1821, and this, combined with its *Volkstümlich* music and plot, made it an ideal vehicle for "German" nationalism. By the 1840s, the national iconicity of Weber's opera had reached monumental proportions: although seen with a degree of ambivalence by Wilhelm III, who was concerned that the "reformist" messages of the work might be appropriated by Republican agitators, the

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<sup>87</sup> In Weber's *Oberon*, Oberon pledges to reconcile with Titania if he can find a pair of mortal lovers who are faithful to one another. Most of the opera is dedicated to identifying, and testing the faithfulness of, these lovers.

years leading up to the premiere of the Tieck-Mendelssohn production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* were crammed with “Weberian” activity:<sup>88</sup> in 1840, Berliners celebrated the 200th performance of *Der Freischütz* in the Prussian capital; in 1841, the opera was premiered in Paris as an example of “German” art; and in 1843 — largely at the behest of Richard Wagner who, although certainly no friend of the Prussian state, was a figure of growing cultural influence — Weber’s body was “repatriated” from London to an appropriately “German” resting place in Dresden.

The sheer “national” popularity of *Der Freischütz* alone would have made it a prime candidate for citation by a composer striving to write music for a “Prussian” production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. A closer examination of the ways in which Mendelssohn used these citations, however, indicates that he may have intended them not only to associate Shakespeare’s work with a national icon, but to “Germanize” its content; to imbue it with a particularly “national” atmosphere. On a very general level, this thesis is supported by the similarities in the narratives of the two works, both of which focus on the plight of young, lovesick protagonists who get “lost in the woods”; both of which involve the intervention of supernatural beings and magical incantation.<sup>89</sup> More specifically, two particular moments in Op.61 would seem to indicate that Mendelssohn wanted his audience to associate the events of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* directly with the plot and ambience of *Der Freischütz*: the *Notturmo* (No.7), the moment

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<sup>88</sup> Wilhelm III’s death, combined with the nationalist furor stimulated by the Rhine Crisis, released a new wave of “German” chauvinism, and allowed for a rehabilitation of Weber’s work.

<sup>89</sup> *Der Freischütz* tells the story of a young hunter who, desperate to win the hand of his beloved in a traditional shooting contest, sells his soul to the Devil in exchange for magic bullets.

of Oberon-induced peace after the storm of the imbroglio, and the *Intermezzo* (No.5), in which Hermia searches in vain for her lover, Lysander.

Both of these citations involve the power of the “German” forest, drawing on *Der Freischütz* to reflect the variegated potentials of the sylvan landscape. The *Notturmo*, for its part, seems directly inspired in the benevolent sounds of the *Waldhörner* (forest horns) in Weber’s *Overture*, a depiction of forest mysticism closely associated with “German” musical tradition by the 1840s, and which serves to transform Oberon’s “Athenian” wood into a decidedly “German”



Figure 3.8: The *Waldhörner* (in C and F) from the Overture of *Der Freischütz*.



Figure 3.9: Mendelssohn’s *Notturmo* theme.

one. The *Intermezzo*, meanwhile, would seem to draw on the negative, supernatural connotations of Weber’s *Wolfsschlucht* scene, a moment in which Max, the protagonist of *Der Freischütz*, descends into a forest gulch in order to forge diabolical magic bullets.

The image shows a page of a musical score for the scene 'Wolfsschlucht' from Weber's opera 'Der Freischütz'. The score is written for voice and instruments. At the top, there are staves for woodwinds (Flute, Oboe, Bassoon) and strings. The vocal parts are for Caspar and Samiel. Caspar's line includes the lyrics: 'ich bringe neue Opfer dir. Mein Jagdgesell, er naht,'. Samiel's line includes: 'Nein! Welche?' and 'Welche?'. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (pizz., arco), articulation (accents), and performance directions (a 2., p.).

Figure 3.10: Weber's *Wolfsschlucht* scene, a probable inspiration for Mendelssohn's *Intermezzo* No.5 (compare with Figure 3.2).

Although Mendelssohn's harmonic schema does not have the pathos of Weber's F# minor/C minor juxtaposition, the textural similarities between Mendelssohn's set piece and Weber's scene are manifold: like Max in the *Wolfsschlucht*, Hermia shivers through a minor-mode world of pulsating string tremolos and fractured melodic lines, which bounce confusedly from one instrument to the other. And the sobbing melody in the cellos echoes Max's lament (Act I, No.3 *Allegro con fuoco*) in which he foresees his pact with the Devil. By citing these and other elements from Weber's *Der Freischütz* in his incidental music, Mendelssohn associates *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with the "German" stage tradition, performing an act of cultural appropriation underwritten by the Prussian state.

### **PART III — *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as political commentary**

As I argue above, the Prussian court context in which *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was produced indicates that Mendelssohn's music was part of a nationalist project of cultural appropriation; a production that Germanized a work of *Weltliteratur*. But it also suggests the possibility that the Tieck-Mendelssohn staging of Shakespeare's comedy was intended as political commentary; a means of conveying a specific set of messages related to the Prussian state. Inspired in the work of Michael P. Steinberg (2004a), who has argued convincingly for a hearing of *Antigone* as both a form of advocacy and critique of Friedrich Wilhelm IV's policies, I present two political readings of Mendelssohn's contributions to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the first of which interprets this composer's musical portrayal of monarchical figures as a form of advocacy for the Prussian state, the second of which understands his pronounced emphasis on the ambivalent aspects of the supernatural as a form of political critique.

I begin my hermeneutical analysis by hearing Mendelssohn's incidental music as a "monarchical fairytale"; a cultural text underwriting the benevolent power of Friedrich Wilhelm IV's Protestant monarchy. On a general level, this reading is suggested by the trajectory of Shakespeare's comedic plot, which can in many ways be understood as affirmative reworking of Sophocles' *Antigone*. Indeed, like Sophocles' Creon, who must assert the primacy of Theban law against Antigone's will, the kings of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Theseus and Oberon, are forced to defend their realms against the insubordination of Hermia and Titania, female

protagonists who question the established sociopolitical order.<sup>90</sup> But where Sophocles' Creon fails in his efforts, bringing shame on himself and his kingdom, Shakespeare's monarchs triumph, demonstrating their capacity to rule well and wisely: Theseus, who carries a stick as big as Creon's (he tells Hermia that she must marry Demetrius, die, or become a nun),<sup>91</sup> doesn't actually use it, and ultimately succeeds in appeasing her and her father. Oberon, who does in fact punish his rebellious wife, Titania, does so in a playful way (he has her fall in love with a donkey), one that leads her to return the changeling and declare her loyalty to him.

Mendelssohn's musical representations of Theseus and Oberon can be heard to reinforce this pro-monarchical reading of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* through both characterization and omission, emphasizing the ability of Kings to reconcile conflict, and secure the natural order of things. In the first of these monarchical depictions, the *Notturmo*,<sup>92</sup> Mendelssohn depicts Oberon as a harbinger of peace; a king whose regal triadic calm (in the horns and bassoons) confidently overcomes harmonic instability, returning with redoubled force to guide his subjects (the woodwinds and the strings) in tranquil harmony. The musical depiction of Theseus and his court in the *Hochzeitsmarsch* (*Wedding March*), is equally — if not more — confirming of the

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<sup>90</sup> As in *Antigone*, the underlying conflicts of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are notably gendered: in the supernatural realm, the fairy queen Titania openly spites her husband, Oberon, by adopting a male heir; on the royal level, the Amazon queen Hippolyta resists Theseus' advances; on the plebeian level, the young Hermia defies the state's authority, vowing to marry the man she loves, rather than the one her father has chosen for her.

<sup>91</sup> Creon imprisons Antigone and threatens to kill her. Antigone's suicide obscures whether he actually intends to act on this threat. See Steinberg (2004a).

<sup>92</sup> Mendelssohn's placement of the *Notturmo* between Oberon's decision to reverse the love spell on Lysander (Act III:ii) and his annulment of the spell placed on his wife, Titania (Act IV:i), emphasizes his role in precipitating the happy reconciliation of the mortal lovers, and successfully resolving the dispute over the changeling.

monarchical order. Inaugurated by a regal flourish in the trumpets, this public display of social consonance begins with a triumphant march in C major (episode 1), followed by a statement of



Figure 3.11: Oberon resolves conflict, guiding his subjects forwards in tranquil harmony.

military might (episode 2),<sup>93</sup> and a serene depiction of peace and calm (episode 3). Omission is a central part of both of these characterizations. Indeed, in waiting to musically depict Oberon and Theseus until the conclusion of the play, Mendelssohn effectively ignores the complicity of these two *dramatis personae* in generating the conflicts that they resolve, absolving Oberon of his role in the conflict with Titania, and Theseus of his involvement in the collision of earthly and

<sup>93</sup> As I mention earlier, the dotted rhythms in the strings of this episode would seem to indicate cavalry; the blaring trombones, calls to arms.

supernatural worlds.<sup>94</sup> What remains is fairy-tale-like caricature: Oberon and Theseus bring stability and concord to their realms — and, ultimately, the comedy as a whole; “happy endings” precipitated by their ability to marry (literally and figuratively) the desires of their subjects with the prerogatives of governance.

Given the outward circumstances in which the Tieck-Mendelssohn production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was first performed, the interpretation of Mendelssohn's score outlined above makes a great deal of sense. As an employee of the Prussian court, Mendelssohn would have had a vested interest in paying tribute to monarchical authority, not only as a means of expressing his allegiance to Friedrich Wilhelm IV himself, but also as a demonstration of his investment in the “Prussian” Christian-German monarchical ideal. By emphasizing the benevolence of Theseus and Oberon in his incidental music, then, Mendelssohn would not only have been showing deference to his patron, but also contributing to the “Germanization” of Shakespeare's work.

That said, both contextual and musical considerations indicate that a more complex hearing of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* may more accurately reflect the socio-cultural *Zeitgeist* of the 1840s, especially among the class of artisans to which Mendelssohn and his colleagues belonged. On a contextual level, it is important to recognize the degree of political ambivalence — and, in many cases, outright dissent — that pervaded the Prussian court, a circumstance that suggests that, like many of his contemporaries, Mendelssohn used his art to enunciate critical

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<sup>94</sup> No music accompanies Oberon as he argues with Titania in Act II, and Puck, not Oberon, is held musically responsible for the mischievous enchantments ordered by his master in Acts II and III. Similarly, Theseus' clash with Hermia — along with the rest of the first act — is notably absent from Mendelssohn's score.

sentiments that could not be expressed openly. On a musical level, meanwhile, it is still necessary to fully account for the specifics of Mendelssohn's emphasis on — and diversification of — the supernatural elements of Shakespeare's drama. In the following, I argue that these contextual and musical elements are interrelated: Mendelssohn can be heard to use the supernatural in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a vehicle for political critique, emphasizing the power of the artist class, and destabilizing the monarchical Prussian order.

The first indication that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* can be heard as musical critique is related to political context: although *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was produced for the Prussian state, the commission came at a time in which the initially positive relationship between Friedrich Wilhelm IV and the Prussian intelligentsia was in crisis. Indeed, while the death of Wilhelm III had awoken hope for German political reform, the “new” Prussian state had proved itself to be much like the old one. Writers, in particular, protested loudly — and were summarily punished: in 1841, medic and politician Johann Jacoby caused a stir with his *Vier Fragen beantwortet von einem Ostpreussen* (*Four Questions Answered by an East-Prussian*), a pamphlet that advocated constitutional reform, and nearly cost its author his Prussian citizenship; the following year (1842), the Republican sentiments of Hoffmann von Fallersleben's *Unpolitische Lieder* (*Unpolitical Songs*) deprived him of his university chair in Breslau. Most interesting for the present discussion, perhaps, were the vitriolic political satires begun by Heinrich Heine on his visit to Prussia in 1842, both of which had Shakespearean subtitles: *Deutschland: Ein Wintermärchen* (*Germany: A Winter's Tale*) (1846) and *Atta Troll: Ein Sommernachtstraum* (*Atta Troll: A Midsummer Night's Dream*) (1843). Heine, who had been allowed to return to Germany

with the repeal of Wilhelm III's extradition order, was banned from Prussia for a second time in 1845.

Mendelssohn was famously circumspect in his political views, and mention of “revolutionary” figures like Heinrich Heine are noticeably absent from his correspondence. But there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that, had his social position been different, he may have been more vocal in his opposition to Friedrich Wilhelm IV's agenda. Perhaps most telling in this regard is Mendelssohn's ambivalence about his role at the Prussian court, especially in the months preceding his decision to begin work in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Indeed, although he does not appear to have made any public remarks about his feelings, Mendelssohn was deeply frustrated by life in Potsdam/Berlin, and this sentiment came to a head in the fall of 1842 when, evidently beside himself, he demanded a private audience with Friedrich Wilhelm IV and requested to be released from his duties. When the king refused, Mendelssohn asked for a second meeting (Oct. 26) — with unexpected results: rather than release Mendelssohn from state service, Friedrich Wilhelm IV decided to give him a new title (*Generalmusikdirector*) and additional tasks (Nov. 22).<sup>95</sup> Some two weeks later, Mendelssohn announced that he would begin work on incidental music to Ludwig Tieck's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The close correspondence between Mendelssohn's efforts to resign from Prussian service and his decision to begin work on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* suggests that political critique may very well have been on his mind. His previous choice of artistic programming had certainly not lacked in political double-entendre: contemporary sympathies for Creon aside,<sup>96</sup> *Antigone*

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<sup>95</sup> These events are documented in detail in Todd (2003): 442-445.

<sup>96</sup> As Michael P. Steinberg notes, the Hegelian reading of *Antigone* portrayed Creon as a tragic hero (2004a).

(1841) is still a tragedy about a headstrong monarch who defies the will of the people, and who is banished for his crimes. Nor were his subsequent court productions entirely benign: *Athalie* (1843) is the story of a bloodthirsty queen fated to be overthrown; *Oedipus at Colonus* (1844) is the last chapter in life of a former king who, although admirable in certain respects, has nonetheless killed his father, married his mother, and fathered children who will eventually bring shame on his city. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* of course, is a radically different kind of production from any of those mentioned above, both in genre and in subject matter. But comedy can be as biting as tragedy, and it is worth hearing Mendelssohn's setting as a political commentary, especially given the harsh climate in which it was staged.

### **The supernatural as a vehicle for political critique**

Mendelssohn's musical emphasis on the supernatural elements of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* — particularly Puck and the elves — suggests an interpretation of the work as political critique, one in which the worldly, monarchical order is destabilized; the source of agency shifted from the scepters of kings to the grubby hands of the “artist,” Puck. In this reading, the celebratory revels at Theseus' court (Act V) are not the “end” of the dream, but merely a part of it; less a resolution of conflict than another hallucinatory episode brought on by forces outside of monarchical control. The political implications of such a reading are diametrically opposed to the “monarchical fairy tale” outlined above: Friedrich Wilhelm IV's Christian-German politics of reconciliation are exposed as farce, and the “artist” is given the last word.

The first aspect of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to suggest such a radically subversive reading is the relationship between the human and the supernatural in Shakespeare's text itself.

Indeed, while putatively a comedy, the majority of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is devoted to exploring moments of nightmare-like disorientation brought on by the intersection of these two cosmic spheres: the lovers “dream” that they are in love with the “wrong” people; Bottom “dreams” he has transformed into an ass; Titania “dreams” she has fallen in love with Bottom the donkey. More disturbing still, is the ambivalent resolution of these supernaturally-induced events. In one of the most famous lines in the play, Demetrius exclaims “Are you sure that we are awake? It seems to me that yet we sleep, we dream” (Act IV:i:192-194), and this could very well be understood as the overarching message of Shakespeare’s work, for it is never entirely clear whether the disenchantment precipitated in Act IV and celebrated in Act V is not also a fantastical mirage. In this sense, the concluding scene of the comedy is particularly telling: following the wedding celebrations, Theseus retires to bed, handing over the stage to the whim of Puck and the elves.

The idea of the supernatural as “reality,” a presence capable of manipulating the human world at its whim, is reinforced in the two songs that frame the supernatural “half” of Mendelssohn’s incidental music. The first of these, “Bundte Schlangen,” for its part, emphasizes the “darker” aspects of the supernatural, presenting an image of elfin enchantment quite different than from the syncopated “scampering” of Mendelssohn’s childhood overture. Sung by Titania’s fairies, “Bundte Schlangen” is a lullaby intended to lull the elf queen to sleep, and Shakespeare’s text emphasizes how effective the little sprites will be at fending off the “spotted snakes,” thorny hedgehogs,” and “blind worms” that might threaten her. On one level, Mendelssohn’s song follows Shakespeare in contrasting the dangers of the forest with the safety of the elfin world: the creepy, squirming sextuplets in the flutes and violins of the A minor verses can be heard to

represent nocturnal “creatures”; the A major choruses (“lullaby, lullaby etc.”), the soothing presence of the fairies. But two aspects of the song suggest that Mendelssohn intended to send a more ironic message: the first is Mendelssohn’s setting of “so good night” at the end of each chorus, a phrase that plunges into A minor with a descending bass line (A-E) and the nightmarish return of the squirming sextuplets. The second is the repetition of this foreboding phrase in the song’s coda, now set to the words “all is well” (“Alles gut!”). Indeed, Mendelssohn’s music seems to overtly contradict Shakespeare’s text; to imply that all is *not* well in fairyland; that the midsummer night’s dream is a midsummer nightmare.

77

The musical score consists of several staves. The top two staves are for the piano accompaniment, with a descending bass line in the left hand. The middle two staves are for the Corni, marked *pp*. The bottom two staves are for the vocal line, labeled "Erster Elfe." The lyrics are: "Al - les gut! nun auf und fort! ei - - ner hal - te" and "Hence a - way! now all' is well: One a - loof stand". The piano part includes markings for *pp*, *arco trem.*, and *cresc. dim.*

Figure 3.12: “All is well” accompanied by a descent from major to minor mode in “Bunte Schlangen,” No.3.

If the first of Mendelssohn’s songs emphasizes the darker side of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, the second (No.13 *Finale*) reinforces the predominance of fairy/elfin powers over human

agency. On one level, the *Finale*, which ends with a restatement of the I-V-iv-I “dream” progression that opens and closes the *Overture*, can be heard as an expansion of Mendelssohn’s childhood work; a kind of coda rounding off the musical narrative. The structure of melodrama No.12, in which the E minor elf melody of the *Overture* interrupts the end of the *Hochzeitsmarsch* theme, however, indicates that more is at stake in this last set piece than structural balance. Indeed, rather than a “coda” to the celebratory reconciliation of the *Hochzeitsmarsch*, Mendelssohn’s *Finale* seems to be the “real” conclusion to the play; an assertion that Oberon, Puck and the elves — not Theseus and the lovers — are the protagonists, and the dictators, of the narrative action; the creators of the dream. One by one, Mendelssohn recapitulates the melodies assigned to these supernatural characters: the elves “bless” Theseus’ court with a mixed mode (A minor/A major) song similar to “Bundte Schlangen”; Oberon appears accompanied by the *Notturmo* theme, and, following a chromatic descent into sleep (in the basses), the “honest” Puck “makes amends” to the accompaniment of the “dream” theme.

As explored earlier in this chapter, Mendelssohn’s emphasis on the supernatural in these and other instances in his incidental music can be understood in purely nationalist terms as a form of “Germanization” of Shakespeare’s comedy; perhaps even a practical technique for facilitating its production on the Prussian stage. But, as the hermeneutic analysis above shows, it can also be heard as a form of political commentary and critique. In highlighting some of the darker aspects of “dreams,” Mendelssohn can be heard to criticize the project of the Prussian state, insinuating that Friedrich Wilhelm IV’s project of Prussian national creation was a kind of “nightmare”; a failed venture in which all was *not* well. In reinforcing the importance of supernatural characters, meanwhile, he can be heard to question the efficacy of Friedrich

Wilhelm's reign, implying that, like the Kings Theseus and Oberon, the Prussian state was only superficially in control; its sovereignty subject to a "higher" authority.

Who, precisely, did Mendelssohn have in mind to run the show? Building on my discussion of this composer as a cultural diplomat (Chapter 2), I want to suggest that Mendelssohn and his artist colleagues understood *themselves* as the agents of change in the Prussian political universe. Servants — and guardians — of the established order, this intelligentsia saw itself in a role akin to Puck and the elves; obligated to fulfill King Friedrich Wilhelm IV's desires, but on their own terms; in ways that *they* felt best forwarded the interest of the "German" nation. The Tieck-Mendelssohn production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was a case in point. Empowered by monarchical authority to represent the state, Tieck and Mendelssohn worked their artistic magic, creating a production that both underwrote and critiqued the Prussian order of things.

## **CHAPTER 4 — THE POLITICS OF RELIGION: MENDELSSOHN’S PRUSSIAN SACRED MUSIC**

Over the course of his short life, Felix Mendelssohn wrote a great deal of sacred vocal music — including oratorios, cantatas, psalm settings, and anthems — in Protestant and Catholic styles. This fact in-and-of itself is not necessarily noteworthy: many, if not most, early-nineteenth-century composers wrote this kind of sacred music. But Mendelssohn’s Jewish heritage has contributed to a fraught reception history for these works, particularly with regard to the composer’s personal religious affiliation, and the “sincerity” of his belief: was Mendelssohn’s music an expression of “authentic” faith? A mere “imitation” of Christian music? Was he communicating a covertly — or even overtly — “Jewish” message?

Vexation about Mendelssohn’s sacred music can be largely traced to Richard Wagner, whose claim that “Jews” were incapable of authentic participation in German culture was widely influential, especially after the second publication of *Das Judentum in der Musik* in 1869. In the century-and-a-half since the first publication of Wagner’s infamous pamphlet (1850), musicians and music scholars have responded to these claims in a variety of ways: nineteenth-century biographers, many of them personally connected to Mendelssohn or the Mendelssohn family, eagerly emphasized the sincerity of Mendelssohn’s Lutheran faith, and by association, the authenticity of his music. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, meanwhile, several notable scholars leaned in the opposite direction, hearing oratorios like *Elijah* as works reflective of Mendelssohn’s “Jewish” ethnic and religious background. Contemporary discussions of Mendelssohn’s oratorios (*Elijah* in particular), for their part, have tended to search for a happy

medium between these two poles, understanding Mendelssohn's sacred work as an effort to balance his Jewish heritage with the Protestant faith that he embraced and championed.

While important and fascinating, efforts at hearing Mendelssohn's sacred music as a reflection of his religious belief system and practices are problematic on two levels. First, and most concretely, there is no longer much debate about Mendelssohn's religious affiliation: an (over)abundance of non-musical evidence unearthed by scholars over the last two decades suggests that Mendelssohn had little exposure to Judaism and Jewish practices, and, in this sense, lived a very "Christian" life. Perhaps more importantly, however, the very idea of "religion" as a belief system and/or a set of practices does not capture the full significance of confessional affiliation for Mendelssohn and his contemporaries. Indeed, as recent scholarship has shown, confessional allegiance in Restoration-era German-speaking Europe was not merely about faith, but was a structuring fact of modern life inseparable from class, nation, and political creed. In short: given the Restoration conception of "religion," Mendelssohn's sacred music may say more about his public relationship with the emerging German "nation" than his personal relationship with God.

By focusing on the sacred music that Mendelssohn wrote for Friedrich Wilhelm IV during the mid 1840s, this chapter strives to shift hermeneutic emphasis from the implications of such compositions for his religious beliefs and practices to his political engagement with the Prussian state. Following a brief exploration of the stakes of "religion" in the reception history of Mendelssohn's music, the chapter proceeds in three interrelated sections. In the first section, I outline the characteristics of Mendelssohn's "Prussian" sacred musical style, and demonstrate the ways in which it references historical models, including Bach, Haendel, and Palestrina. In the

second section, I explore the significance of this religious-themed historicism for Restoration-era German nationalism, and compare it to contemporaneous artistic endeavors, including August Reichensperger's reconstruction of the Cologne Cathedral and Philipp Veit's "religious" paintings. In the third section, meanwhile, I conclude by suggesting that some of Mendelssohn's sacred music — particularly the *Sechs Sprüche* — may have been inspired by British (Anglican) models, and speculate as to the political and personal implications of this possibility.

### **PART I — Mendelssohn and sacred music: religion as politics**

For many post-Holocaust scholars, the central concern surrounding Mendelssohn's sacred music has been its level of "Jewishness"; the degree to which Mendelssohn's knowledge of Judaic traditions and his involvement in the Jewish community shaped the sacred music that he wrote. The fiery interchange between Jeffrey Sposato, Michael P. Steinberg, and Leon Botstein in the late 1990s, is a case in point (Sposato 1998; Botstein 1999; Sternberg 1999). This discussion began with Sposato: denouncing Eric Werner's mid-century depiction of Mendelssohn as a "Jewish" composer as "creative writing," Sposato claimed that Mendelssohn — who had been converted to Lutheranism at the age of eight — had little direct tie to Judaism, and that his oratorios reflected the christological perspective of a "typical *Neuchrist*."<sup>97</sup> Not only had Mendelssohn been disinterested in creating "Jewish" oratorios, wrote this scholar, he seemed to be invested in distancing himself from Judaism, and practicing Jews.

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<sup>97</sup> Sposato's work focused on historiographic documentation: Mendelssohn, he argued, was *not* a practicing Jewish person. He had been raised by a pantheistic father and converted to Lutheranism at the age of 8. He was probably not circumcised; he certainly did not have a Bar Mitzvah; nor did he appear to have associated with observant Jewish people.

Two central arguments were used to refute Sposato's claims. The first, stated eloquently by Michael P. Steinberg, was that Mendelssohn's approach to "Jewishness" was more complex than outright rejection; that it represented a "subtle negotiation between Jewish and Christian spheres of culture and memory during the formation of the modern German world — and that much at a cultural historical moment, moreover, when the boundaries of all three of these were evolving and unpredictable" (Steinberg 1999: 43). Leon Botstein, for his part, countered Sposato with a defense of Eric Werner. Werner's scholarship had been sloppy, he conceded, but it had also come at a fraught moment: a historian forced into exile by the National Socialists, Werner had set out on a crusade to reverse the damage done to Mendelssohn's legacy by anti-Semitic propaganda, a dramatic context that could (at least partly) account for his scholarly errors (Botstein 1998).

The firestorm of critique engendered by Sposato's work can be at least partially attributed to the complexity of defining "Jewishness." But it is also related to a complex history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Mendelssohn reception. This story begins, of course, with Richard Wagner's infamous *Das Judentum in der Musik*, an article that claimed that Mendelssohn was unable to compose truly German music because of his Jewish heritage. Adherents to this narrative aside, two central reactions emerged to Wagner's vitriolic argument: the first reaction, forwarded by Mendelssohn's earliest biographer, Adolph Lampadius, and the Mendelssohn family itself (most notably Mendelssohn's nephew, Sebastian Hensel, who published *Die Familie Mendelssohn* in 1879), was to emphasize Mendelssohn's devout Lutheranism, and by implication, the purity and authenticity of his Christian music. The second response, meanwhile, was to appropriate Mendelssohn's Christian-themed sacred music as

“Jewish” music, a tactic that emerged during the 1920s and surfaced again in the work of post-Holocaust scholars like Eric Werner and Jack Werner.<sup>98</sup>

Sposato’s work was valuable in that it pointed up the essentialist tendencies of Mendelssohn scholarship during the early twentieth century and immediate post-war era. But, as the title of his subsequent book (*The Price of Assimilation: Felix Mendelssohn and the Nineteenth-Century Anti-Semitic Tradition*) indicates, it continued to engage with one of the basic tenets of this body of scholarship: the assumption that Mendelssohn’s sacred music could be heard as a reflection of the composer’s personal religious beliefs and practices. The central argument of this chapter is that hearing Mendelssohn’s music in this way is to fundamentally misunderstand the meaning of “religion” for German-speaking (and particularly Prussian) people during the Restoration era, a period in which religious affiliation was intimately tied to socio-political concerns that are not immediately apparent to a twenty- or twenty-first-century sensibility.

The idea that Mendelssohn’s sacred music can be heard as a form of engagement in socio-political issues beyond personal faith and doctrinal/denominational allegiance is supported by a recent body of historiographic literature that reexamines the meaning of religion to Restoration-era life. Indeed, as scholars like Christopher Clark (2004), Celia Applegate (2005), and Jonathan Sperber (2013) have argued, religious affiliation took on a fundamentally *nationalist* significance in the decades following the Congress of Vienna, serving as a stand-in for the Prussia-Austria divide, a metaphor for the debate over the “German” national future (Protestant-led *Kleindeutschland* vs. Catholic-led *Großdeutschland*), and a substitute for political

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<sup>98</sup> See Chapter 6 for a more complete discussion of this reception history.

parties, which were largely prohibited following the revolutionary student uprisings of the mid-1830s. But it is also evident in a reexamination, and recontextualization, of the Wagnerian text with which so much Mendelssohn scholarship has engaged — explicitly or implicitly — over the past 150 years.

That Wagner's *Das Judentum in der Musik* spawned a tradition of anti-Semitic literature — and even, perhaps, served as a model for the genre — is well established, and has been discussed at great length elsewhere.<sup>99</sup> That the text, which infamously claimed that Mendelssohn's and Meyerbeer's "Jewishness" prohibited them from writing authentically "German" music, was merely about "Judaism" or "music," however, merits further exploration. Several contextual factors deserve mention in this regard. First is the politically significant moment at which Wagner chose to publish his vitriolic piece: 1850, the year in which the *Märzrevolution* was definitively quashed, the national constitution repealed, and the Prussian monarchical order restored. The second is the positioning of Wagner vis-a-vis the two central composers he defamed: Wagner, a political exile, banned from Prussia for his revolutionary activities (and his financial debts), launched an attack on Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer, the descendants of families closely allied to the Prussian crown, both of whom were central to the "official" musical establishment; *Generalmusikdirektors* of Prussian sacred music and Prussian opera, respectively.

But it is not merely the context of Wagner's *Das Judentum in der Musik* that indicates that Mendelssohn's "Jewish" background was a stand-in for a larger political concern. More importantly, perhaps, Wagner was not the first to use the metaphor. Rather, like the idea for the

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<sup>99</sup> See, for example, Jens Malte Fischer (2000a and 2000b).

*Fliegende Holländer*, which the young composer had premiered some seven years previously (1843),<sup>100</sup> the idea of Mendelssohn as a “Jewish” musician unable to capture the German “soul” — indeed, even the vocabulary with which Wagner described this “Jewishness” — had been articulated previously by a fellow German exile, Heinrich Heine, in a (not so veiled) attack on the Christian-German Prussian establishment. “Heaven forbid,” wrote Heine in a review of the 1842 performances of Mendelssohn’s *Paulus* and Rossini’s *Stabat Mater*,<sup>101</sup>

that I appear to want to reproach such a meritorious master as the composer of *Paulus*, and least of all to question the Christianity of the aforementioned oratorio because Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy is a Jew by birth. But I cannot refrain from mentioning that, at the age at which Mendelssohn began to be a Christian in Berlin (he was baptized at thirteen), Rossini had already left, and plunged entirely into the world of opera... Thus he did not need to academically reconstruct the spirit of Christianity, much less to slavishly copy Haendel or Sebastian Bach... I find that with respect to talent, there is a great similarity between Mr. Felix Mendelssohn and Ms. Rachel Felix, the tragic artist. In both,

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<sup>100</sup> Wagner’s version of the flying Dutchman legend was likely inspired in the (satirical) tale recorded by Heine in *The Memoirs of Mister von Schnabelewopski* (1833).

<sup>101</sup> Der Himmel bewahre mich, gegen einen so verdienstvollen Meister wie der Verfasser des *Paulus* hindurch einen Tadel aussprechen wollen, und am allerwenigsten wird es dem Schreiber dieser Blätter in den Sinn kommen, an der Christlichkeit der erwähnten Oratoriums zu makeln, weil Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy von Geburt ein Jude ist. Aber ich kann doch nicht unterlassen, darauf hinzudeuten, dass in dem Alter, wo Herr Mendelssohn in Berlin das Christentum anfing (er würde nämlich erst in seinem dreizehnten Lebensjahr getauft), Rossini es bereits verlassen und sich ganz in die Weltlichkeit der Opernmusik gestürzt hatte... da brauchte er wahrlich den Geist des Christentums nicht erst wissenschaftlich zu konstruieren, noch viel weniger Händel oder Sebastian Bach sklavisch zu kopieren... Ich finde in talentsicher Beziehung eine grosse Ähnlichkeit zwischen Herrn Felix Mendelssohn und der Mademoiselle Rachel Felix, der tragischen Künstlerin. Eigentümlich ist beiden ein grosser, strenger, sehr ernsthafter Ernst, ein entscheidendes, beinahe zudringliches Anlehnen an klassische Muster, die feinste, geistreichste Berechnung, Verstandesschärfe und endlich der gänzliche Mangel an Naivität. Gibt es aber in der Kunst eine geniale Ursprünglichkeit ohne Naivität? Bis jetzt ist dieser Fall noch nicht vorgekommen (Heine 1867: 339-340).

there is a large, strong, very grave, seriousness; a decisive, perhaps even pushy, reliance on classical models; the finest, most ingenious calculations, sharpness of mind, and, accordingly, a complete lack of naïveté. Is it possible to have originality without naïveté in art? There hasn't been a case of it yet (Heine 1867: 339-340).

With typical sarcasm, Heine uses Mendelssohn's "Jewishness" as a vehicle for decimating *Paulus*, perhaps the best-known work of Prussia's new *Kapellmeister*, and a potent symbol of Restoration-era Prussian cultural life.

As Wagner's and Heine's writings demonstrate, Mendelssohn's perceived "Judaism" and/or "Jewishness" was not merely a question of religious belief, practice, or even ethnicity (Heine, after all, was a convert himself). At stake was a larger question of political allegiance.<sup>102</sup> Indeed, for both cultural critics, Mendelssohn and his music represented Friedrich Wilhelm IV's Prussian state; a political entity whose Christian-German ethos had transformed the German-speaking world into a metaphorical *Wintermärchen* (winter fairy tale), and had driven them into exile. The denigration of Mendelssohn's sacred music so potent in Heine's review, then, was less about Mendelssohn's "Jewishness," or the authenticity of his sacred music per se,<sup>103</sup> than the viability of the political system that he and his music represented; code for a Christian-German worldview that, according to a vocal minority, was being artificially imposed on the German-speaking Europe.

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<sup>102</sup> Schumann's 1837 review of *Les Huguenots* contributes to reinforcing both the political nature of religious affiliation during the Vormärz era, and the relative insignificance of Mendelssohn's Jewish background for the perception of his music. In his review, Schumann characterizes *Les Huguenots* as an irreverent farce: "too much for a good Protestant." His counterexample is *Paulus*.

<sup>103</sup> This is not to claim that Heine's critique of Mendelssohn was unrelated to Jewishness. Felix's filial relationship to Moses Mendelssohn made his affiliation with Friedrich Wilhelm IV's government all the more conspicuous in Heine's eyes.

## **PART II — The politics of Mendelssohn’s “historicist” Prussian sacred music**

Like the reactions it inspired, Felix Mendelssohn’s sacred music was intensely politically charged, and this is particularly true for the commissions that he wrote to accompany the newly reformed “Prussian” church service during the final years of his life. These compositions, which include settings of four psalms, a German *Te Deum*, and a series of anthems, are political on two levels: first and most transparently, each of the pieces was commissioned by Friedrich Wilhelm IV in an effort to create a specifically “Prussian” religious tradition. Less self-evident is the degree to which they represent aesthetic experiments in “historical” sacred music closely related to German nationalism. In the following, I outline the nationalist motives for the commission of Mendelssohn’s “Prussian” sacred works, and then explore the ways in which Mendelssohn used historical models in order to express particularly “German” ideals.

### **The politics of Friedrich Wilhelm IV’s “Prussian” sacred music**

In the spring of 1843, following several years of discussion and debate among Friedrich Wilhelm IV and his advisors, Felix Mendelssohn began to fulfill his sacred duties to the Prussian Court, embarking on the composition of music for the newly reformed “Prussian” church service. Over the next several years,<sup>104</sup> the composer wrote a significant amount of “Prussian” sacred music, including settings for four psalms (published posthumously as Op.78 and Op.91), a *Te Deum* (“Herr Gott dich loben wir”), and a series of anthems later published as the *Sechs Sprüche* Op.79 (1848).

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<sup>104</sup> Mendelssohn officially resigned from his duties as *Kapellmeister* in 1844, but continued to accept commissions from the King.

### *Sechs Sprüche*

Frohlocket, ihr Völker	1843/45	Op.79/1 (1848)
Herr Gott, Du bist unsre Zuflucht	1843	Op.79/2
Herr, gedenke nicht unsre Übeltaten	1844/45	Op.79/4
Um unsrer Sünden	1844	Op.79/6
Erhaben, o Herr, über alles Lob	1846	Op.79/3
Lasset uns frohlocken	1846	Op.79/5

### **Psalms**

Psalm 2	1843	Op.78/1 (1848)
Psalm 98	1843	Op.91 (1851)
Psalm 43	1844	Op.78/2
Psalm 22	1844	Op.78/3

### **Example of the liturgical music for New Year's Day, 1843**

1. Introit	Psalm 98 – “Singet dem Herrn” (Op.91)
2. Organ part	“Hallelujah” chorus from <i>Messiah</i>
3. Chorale harmonization	“Wachet auf” from <i>Paulus</i> (Op.36)
4. Harmonization	“Allein Gott in der Höh” (unpublished)
5. Gradual	“Herr Gott, du bist unsre Zuflucht” (Op.79/2)
6. Te Deum	“Herr Gott, dich loben wir” (unpublished)

**Table 7: Sacred compositions written by Mendelssohn for the Prussian church service. Partially excerpted from Brodbeck (1992).**

Mendelssohn’s commission was intimately tied to Friedrich Wilhelm IV’s revisions to the “Prussian” church service, a controversial series of changes begun by his father, Wilhelm III, which were intended to create a more participatory “national” religious life. Music was central to this effort. In an attempt to restore the German liturgical tradition — a set of practices that had been indelibly weakened by the Enlightenment —, Wilhelm III had devised a Prussian *Agende* comprising an eclectic patchwork of musical works, including a Swedish *Agnus Dei*, a Gregorian *Offertory* and a series of melodies written by Dmitri Bortniansky (Director of the Imperial

Chapel of St. Petersburg), C.F. Zelter, and Eduard Grell (Zelter's student). His son took these reforms further, launching a new liturgical format, and advocating for a more coherent musical framework (Dinglinger 1982; Brodbeck 1992; Barclay 1995).

Friedrich Wilhelm IV's musical alterations to the Prussian *Agende* were intended to address two interrelated issues: congregational participation and the creation of a "Prussian" sacred musical style. With the evident intention of building a "harmonious" religious community, his revised liturgy suggested a whole array of new opportunities for music-making and collective song: worshippers would listen to a choral rendition of a psalm at the beginning of the service, sing a verse before the Hallelujah, and join the choir in the responses. The music that would be played and sung, for its part, would be appropriately "religious" and appropriately "German." As the principal vehicle for liturgical meaning was the word, vocal (*a capella*) music would take precedence over instrumental music, and those biblical texts that were sung would be set clearly, so as to be understood by the congregation. Equally importantly, the style of this music would be rooted in the past. As Friedrich Wilhelm IV put it, Mendelssohn would need to "wrest the old, partly traditional, from oblivion and shape it to the needs of the present" (cited in Brodbeck 1992:3). The King's advisor, Bunsen, clarified: "that means (choruses in) Gregorian style, with compositions in church styles, old and new" (cited in Dinglinger 1982: 102).

The music that Mendelssohn wrote for Friedrich Wilhelm IV's revised liturgy closely followed the template set out for him by the Prussian court: a large portion of the works are *a capella*, with little, or no, instrumental accompaniment; many seem self-consciously "simplified," as though Mendelssohn intended to make them accessible to — and perhaps even singable for — a general Prussian audience. Most notable in the pieces that Mendelssohn wrote

for performance during “Prussian” church services, however, is the degree to which they adhere to historical styles. Indeed while some of the compositions could be considered exercises in “contemporary” church music, most seem to be reworkings of Bachian, Haendelian, and, most interestingly, Renaissance — or even Medieval — musical models.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, one of the principal historical models apparent in Mendelssohn’s Prussian sacred music style is the work of J.S. Bach, a feature particularly notable in his “German” *Te Deum*, or *Herr Gott, dich loben wir*. Intended for collective singing at the end of each service (it was, in effect, sung at the conclusion of the Christmas and New Years services of 1843), this seven-minute choral piece simultaneously elaborates and simplifies Bachian stylistic features. The elaboration is largely formal: an elongated chorale, Mendelssohn’s *Te Deum* is a set of choral “variations” on five separate texts, each of which involves a degree of antiphonal singing. The musical language within Mendelssohn’s chorale-inspired form, meanwhile, is noticeably simplified: indeed, although modal, the hymn is harmonically uninventive, remaining in C major/A minor for the entirety of the work. And the melody, is repetitious: phrases return over and over again in a manner that is unusual for Bach — or, for that matter, Mendelssohn.

As omnipresent as J.S. Bach in Mendelssohn’s Prussian church music is the shadow of Haendel, in the form of both oratorio excerpts (Mendelssohn programmed choruses from *Messiah* on both the Christmas Day and New Year’s services of 1843) and original compositions. Mendelssohn’s setting of Psalm 98, which was performed as the Introit on Christmas Day, 1843, is a case in point. This setting, which juxtaposes an eight-voice *a cappella Allegro* and *Andante* with two orchestrally accompanied choral movements, is Haendelian throughout: the imitative counterpoint of the opening *a cappella* movements, while not without a Mendelssohnian flair, is

reminiscent of Baroque compositional techniques. The massive scale of the concluding choruses, meanwhile, could very well be mistaken for that of a Haendel oratorio, especially towards the end of the last movement, when fortissimo, homophonic choral exclamations (“und die Völker mit Recht”) alternate with triumphant interjections in the horns and woodwinds.

While Bachian and Haendelian models are central to Mendelssohn’s Prussian sacred music, its most notable aspect is a reliance on musical techniques that can best be understood as references to Renaissance — or even Medieval (or as Bunsen put it, “Gregorian”) — styles. In his analysis of the a cappella Psalms eventually published as Op.78 (Psalms 2, 22, and 43), for example, James Garratt has pointed to the appearance of stylized plainchant and psalm tones, chains of *falsobordone*-like root position triads, and responsorial passages reminiscent of Allegri’s *Miserere* (mm.27-30 of Op.78 No.3) (Garratt 2002).<sup>105</sup> But perhaps the most overt use of such “ancient” musical techniques in Mendelssohn’s Prussian music can be identified in the series of six a cappella anthems commissioned and composed between 1843-46, and posthumously published as the *Sechs Sprüche*, Op.79 (1848).

The *Sechs Sprüche*, which were designed to be sung at intervals during the Prussian church service, can be divided into two categories: the three penitential anthems, which seem an effort to reconstruct an “ancient” *a cappella* style, and the three celebratory anthems, which take *a cappella* principles in contemporary — and decidedly Romantic — directions.<sup>106</sup> The historical

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<sup>105</sup> A similar “historical” tendency can be identified in the powerfully modal feel of *Herr Gott, dich loben wir*.

<sup>106</sup> This classification follows Garratt’s analysis (2002).

bent of the penitential anthems of Op.79,<sup>107</sup> is evident in both the texture and the harmony of the miniatures. Texturally, each of the songs seems to reference Renaissance — and perhaps even “Gregorian” — tropes: No.2 alternates between unison, psalm tone-like recitation, strict chordal homophony, and imitative counterpoint; No.4 is largely responsorial, with a thickly imitative final cadence; No.6 is entirely homophonic, almost chant-like. Harmonically, meanwhile, the anthems are decidedly modal, clearly avoiding major and minor key areas and “logical” chord progressions: No.2, which vacillates between D minor, D major, and F major, opens with a melody in A Phrygian (see Figure 4.1); No.4 alternates between D minor antecedents and F major consequents (with a similar tendency towards A Phrygian); No.6 throws off the yoke of E minor with powerful enunciations of B minor, A major, and C major. And all share a surplus of elaborate cadential 4-3 suspensions: No.4 has no fewer than three of them over the course of 24 bars.

Although the three celebratory anthems of the *Sechs Sprüche*<sup>108</sup> do not share the “historical” melodic or harmonic qualities of their penitential counterparts (each of the miniatures is in a solidly major key, and the quality of both melodies and their harmonizations is patently Romantic), the textural attributes of these anthems also show the influence of “ancient” musical models, albeit in modern form: No.1 alternates homophonic passages with short bursts of imitative polyphony; No.3 is imitative throughout; No.5 opens with a complex canon in all voices, which recedes into homophonic phrase endings. Moreover, the lavish attention to

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<sup>107</sup> No.2 *Herr Gott, du bist unsre Zuflucht*, No.4 *Herr, gedenke nicht unsre Übeltaten*, and No.6 *Um unsre Sünden*.

<sup>108</sup> No.1 *Frohlocket ihr Völker*, No.3 *Er haben, o Herr über alles Lob*, and No.5 *Lasset uns frohlocken*.

### 2. Am Neujahrstage.

Andante.

Componirt 1843.

Herr, Gott, du bist uns-re Zuflucht für und für.  
 Herr, Gott, du bist uns-re Zuflucht für und für.  
 Herr, Gott, du bist uns-re Zuflucht für und für. E-he denn die Ber - ge  
 Herr, Gott, du bist uns-re Zuflucht für und für. E-he denn die Ber - ge wor - den,  
 Herr, Gott, du bist uns-re Zuflucht für und für. E-he denn die Ber - ge wor - den,  
 Herr, Gott, du bist uns-re Zuflucht für und für. E-he denn die

E-he denn die Ber - ge wor-den, und die Er - de und die Welt er-schaf-fen wor - den,  
 E-he denn die Ber - ge wor-den, und die Er - de und die Welt er-schaf-fen wor - den,  
 wor - den, e-he denn die Ber - ge wor-den, und die Er-de und die Welt er - schaf-fen wor - den,  
 - he, e-he denn die Ber - ge wor-den, und die Er-de und die Welt er - schaf-fen wor - den,  
 den, e-he denn die Ber - ge wor-den, und die Er-de und die Welt er - schaf-fen wor - den,  
 Ber - ge, e-he denn die Ber - ge wor-den, und die Er-de und die Welt er - schaf-fen wor - den.

M. B. 109.

1 (51)

bist du Gott von E-wig-keit zu E-wig-keit. E.he denn die Welt, die Welt er.schaf.fen  
 bist du Gott von E-wig-keit zu E-wig-keit. E.he denn die Welt, die Welt er.schaf.fen  
 bist du Gott von E-wig-keit. E.he denn die Ber-ge worden, und die Welt, die Welt er.schaf.fen  
 bist du Gott von E-wig-keit zu E-wig-keit. E.he denn die Ber-ge, e.he denn die Welt er.schaf.fen  
 bist du Gott von E-wig-keit zu E-wig-keit. E.he denn die Ber-ge, e.he denn die Welt er.schaf.fen

wor-den, bist du Gott von E-wig-keit zu E-wig-keit. Hal-le-lu-ja, Hal-le-lu-ja!  
 wor-den, bist du Gott von E-wig-keit zu E-wig-keit. Hal-le-lu-ja, Hal-le-lu-ja!  
 wor-den, bist du Gott von E-wig-keit zu E-wig-keit. Hal-le-lu-ja, Hal-le-lu-ja!  
 wor-den, bist du Gott von E-wig-keit zu E-wig-keit. Hal-le-lu-ja, Hal-le-lu-ja!

M.B.109.

Figure 4.1: Am Neujahrstag, the first of the penitential *Sechs Sprüche*.

cadences gives a sense of historicity: all three of the celebratory anthems share elaborate, suspension-laden endings that, while not precisely akin to Renaissance *a cappella* style, imply the past in modern language.

### **PART III — The politics of musical historicism**

The centrality of historical models to the sacred music that Mendelssohn wrote for Friedrich Wilhelm IV is in many ways congruent with the “historicist” inclinations of the composer, and the tendency in this body of work towards reliance on Renaissance and Medieval tropes can thus be seen as a natural extension of his previous engagements with the Baroque styles of J.S. Bach and Haendel. Given the political context of Mendelssohn’s commissions, however, the use of “Catholic” musical techniques like repeated “psalm tones,” “chanting” unison passages, and Palestrina-like imitative counterpoint raises important questions as to the symbolism of the sacred music he wrote for the Prussian church: how did a return to pre-Protestant musical aesthetics relate to the nationalist ambitions of Friedrich Wilhelm IV? To Mendelssohn’s own understanding of “German” identity? In the following, I answer these questions in two steps. First, I outline the importance of Bach and Haendel to Prussian nationalism. Then I explore the political implications of what James Garratt has called the “Protestant Palestrina style” through comparison of Mendelssohn’s sacred compositions with the work of contemporary plastic artists August Reichensperger and Philipp Veit.

That Bachian models play a prominent role in the sacred music that Mendelssohn wrote for Friedrich Wilhelm IV comes as little surprise, for, as Celia Applegate and others have suggested, the revival of J.S. Bach’s music during the early nineteenth century was intimately

ted to Prussian nationalism; a movement inspired by literary figures like J.N. Forkel — and, later, musicians — who reinvented “der alte Bach” as an essentially “German” character. Raised in a family central to the preservation of J.S. Bach’s legacy,<sup>109</sup> and mentored by two of the most prominent J.S. Bach advocates, Friedrich Zelter and A.B. Marx, Mendelssohn came of age at the heart of this cultural-nationalist movement, and, appropriately enough, launched his public career with a re-staging of the *St. Matthew Passion* (1829) for the Prussian establishment.<sup>110</sup> The centrality of Bachian language in Mendelssohn’s Prussian liturgical music, then, is coherent with this revivalist trend; politically significant both on the level of Lutheran symbolism and Prussian political allegiance.

Like his citation of Bachian models, Mendelssohn’s references to Haendelian language also make a great deal of sense within the context of the Prussian nationalist impulse that shaped Friedrich Wilhelm IV’s liturgical reforms. Indeed, as with J.S. Bach, Haendel was increasingly understood by early-nineteenth-century German-speakers as a “national” figurehead, a perception that was greatly facilitated by Mendelssohn himself, who was instrumental in “discovering” oratorios like *Israel in Egypt*, and introducing them to German-speaking audiences.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, as scholars like Celia Applegate have argued, the Haendelian style was

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<sup>109</sup> Mendelssohn’s great aunt, Sara Itzig Levy, a student of C.P.E. Bach and a leading collector of early-eighteenth-century music, was among the earliest of the J.S. Bach enthusiasts, and a founding member of the *Singakademie*. It was Sara’s sister (Bella Salomon, Mendelssohn’s grandmother) who gave Mendelssohn a transcription of the full score of the *St. Matthew Passion* in 1824 (Applegate 2005:14-17).

<sup>110</sup> The then-prince Friedrich Wilhelm and his future cultural advisors Humboldt and Bunsen were both in attendance at the event.

<sup>111</sup> *Israel in Egypt* was premiered for German-speaking audiences at the Lower Rhine Music Festival of 1833.

understood as the music of public — and, above all, *royal* — spectacle; the emotive, *vocal* counterpart to J.S. Bach’s dry, instrumental, intellect; the sound of the public music festival and public court ceremony. Haendelian models, then, were particularly apt for imitation in the construction of an eminently public, vocal, and courtly “German” ceremony, which is precisely what Friedrich Wilhelm IV and his advisors hoped to achieve with their revision of the Prussian *Agende*.

As outlined above, the “German” Protestant ethos associated with the Bachian and Haendelian references in Mendelssohn’s Prussian sacred music seems entirely appropriate to Friedrich Wilhelm IV’s effort to create a “national” church ceremony. That said, it does not seem to apply to the most notable “historical” aspect of his work: the clearly Renaissance- and Medieval-inspired features of *a cappella* pieces like the Op.78 Psalms and the *Sechs Sprüche* (Op.79), characteristics that would seem to hark back to Italianate, Catholic repertoires with little immediate connection to Prussian nationalism.

In his groundbreaking work on early-nineteenth-century Palestrina reception, James Garratt explains this phenomenon on aesthetic and religious levels by ascribing it to the influence of the “Protestant Palestrina revival,” a movement that advocated the restoration and (re)creation of “serious and solemn” Prussian church music based on “ancient” *a cappella* Italian models. Spearheaded by C.F. Zelter (in Berlin) and Thibaut (in Heidelberg), relates Garratt, this revival had been a big part of Mendelssohn’s youth, and may perhaps even have been at the root of his attraction to J.S. Bach. Like the Bach revival, the Palestrina revival was motivated as much by ethical concerns as by aesthetic ones: rarely performed outside of Italian-speaking Europe, very little was known about Palestrina’s music aside from its emphasis on clear text setting and the

predilection for homophonic textures and antiphony.<sup>112</sup> More important for Zelter and Thibaut, then, were the implications of Palestrina's role in the Counter-Reformation: in a manner similar to the *Pope Marcellus Mass*, Palestrina-like sacred music could stop the tide of "revolutionary" change in the German-speaking world, saving the Church from obsolescence, and modeling ideal "Protestant" collective behavior (Garratt 2002).

In many ways, an understanding of the Renaissance/Medieval tendencies of Mendelssohn's Prussian sacred music as an effort at reviving a "Palestrina style" makes a great deal of sense: not only had Mendelssohn composed several similar *a cappella* works under Zelter's tutelage,<sup>113</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm IV's closest advisors, Bunsen and Humboldt, had both been members of Zelter's *Singakademie*, and were clearly quite familiar with — and enthusiastic about — the notion of reviving "ancient" Italian music. That said, Garratt's conception of this style as an effort at religious reform is in need of substantial politicization: just like the revised Prussian *Agende* itself, the idea of fusing Protestant and Catholic traditions in a modern "Prussian" liturgical music was ripe with extra-religious — and overtly nationalist — symbolism; a cultural act that embodied multiple potential paths to German national unity, including cultural appropriation and cultural fusion. In the following, I explore these political implications by comparing Mendelssohn's approach to historical "Catholic" music to the work of two of his artistic peers: the architect August Reichensperger, and the painter Philipp Veit.

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<sup>112</sup> The most well-known "Palestrina" composition of the period, Allegri's *Miserere*, was a misattribution.

<sup>113</sup> *Mitten wir im Leben sind*, Op.23 is the prime example.

## **August Reichensperger and the politics of cultural appropriation**

The first of the political implications that can be heard in Mendelssohn's integration of "Catholic" musical styles into Friedrich Wilhelm IV's Protestant "Prussian" liturgy is that of cultural appropriation; an annexation and integration of Catholic heritage parallel to the geopolitical occupation of the Catholic Rhineland by the Prussian Empire. In this sense, perhaps no cultural project is more appropriate for comparison with Mendelssohn's musical revival than the (re)construction of the Cologne Cathedral, a project undertaken by Prussian architect August Reichensperger at almost precisely the same time that Mendelssohn was commissioned to write his liturgical music (1842), and which clearly demonstrates the political stakes of religious symbolism for the Prussian state in which both artists lived.

The chronology of their (re)constructions aside, the parallels between the objects of Reichensperger's and Mendelssohn's historico-artistic interests are noteworthy. Like the "ancient" *a cappella* styles that Mendelssohn reconstructed in his choral *Psalms* and *Sechs Sprüche*, the Cologne Cathedral was a ruin; an architectonic victim of the Reformation that had remained in embryonic form since the sixteenth century, and about which very little, if anything, was known. In a manner akin, perhaps, to the notated fragments of Allegri's *Miserere* that appeared in print in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a set of "plans" for the Cathedral were (conveniently) "discovered" in the aftermath of the Wars of Liberation (Figure 4.2), but these documents provided less of a guide than an impetus for the (re)construction of the past; fuel for a burgeoning Romantic fascination with the potential of the "fragment" and the "ruin" (Rosen 1995).

At root in both Mendelssohn's and Reichensperger's artistic reconstructions, then, was less an impulse to accurately reproduce a historical object, than a desire to emulate a historical



**Figure 4.2: Plans for the west facade of the Cologne Cathedral, Meister Arnold c.1280. Image in the public domain.**

*process*; a “medieval” and/or “ancient” manner of collective behavior embodied in singing (in Mendelssohn's case) and building (in Reichensperger's) that could encourage socio-political reform. The political multivalence of this “process” is particularly well illustrated in the case of the Cologne Cathedral: while adherents to the Enlightenment doctrines of Goethe and Görres argued that the (re)construction of similar architectonic wonders could encourage the establishment of a sense of “German” nationality based on secular artistic achievement, Rhineland secessionists saw (re)construction as an embodiment of traditional Catholic values, and, equally importantly, a statement of independence from Prussian occupation.

As Michael J. Lewis (1993) argues,

Reichensperger's genius lay not only in his ability to imagine a “Gothic” Cathedral from a pile of ruins and a few thirteenth-century sketches, but to reconcile the two political groups that struggled to harness its symbolic potential. This

reconciliation took place at a moment of particularly high drama between the Rhineland and the Prussian government: incensed by the incarceration of the Archbishop of Cologne following a debate over Papal authority (the Archbishop had decided to override Prussian intermarriage laws in favor of Catholic ones), the leaders of the Rhineland threatened to secede from the Empire. The Prussian response was twofold: to replace the former Archbishop with a Cardinal, and to offer to match the funds raised by the local *Dombauverein* — a strongly Catholic, and chronically underfunded, organization — in its efforts to rebuild the Cologne Cathedral. Two years later (1842), and largely thanks to the intercessions of Reichensperger, who strongly pushed for the capitulation of the more radical constituents of the *Dombauverein* to those with more moderate, reconciliatory views, Cologne’s new cardinal and the Prussian king laid the cornerstone for the Cologne Cathedral to the strains of Beethoven’s *Fifth Symphony* (Lewis 1993: 35-37).

To claim that the historically-inspired “Catholic” musical reconstructions that Mendelssohn included in his Prussian church music constituted an act of cultural appropriation comparable to the Prussian annexation of the Cologne Cathedral would be overstating the case. That said, the story of Reichensperger’s architectonic historicism does shine light on the powerful political implications that the incorporation of historical Catholic symbols had for the Prussian state during the period that Mendelssohn was affiliated with it as *Kapellmeister* and *Generalmusikdirektor*. Indeed, beyond a contribution to Protestant religious reform, Mendelssohn’s work can be heard to participate in a calculated project of cultural statesmanship; one in which Catholic musical symbols were appropriated by the Prussian state in an effort to solidify and refortify the “Christian-German” order.

## **Philipp Veit and the politics of pan-Germanicism**

Of course, the symbolic import of historical “Catholic” symbols in Restoration-era German-speaking Europe was not semantically limited to inter-Prussian politics. Indeed, as scholars like Christopher Clark (2004) have explored, the international orientation of “Catholicism,” with its ultimate allegiance to the Pope rather than any single nationstate, allowed it to serve as a stand-in not only for loyalty to anti-Prussian factions like the Rhineland and the Austrian Empire, but to the Austro-Prussian *Großdeutschland* envisioned by radical Republicans like Hoffmann von Fallersleben; a German “nation” united by language and culture rather than monarchical authority or religious affiliation. Naturally, Mendelssohn the Prussian *Kapellmeister/Generalmusikdirektor* could not openly assert this kind of Republican sentiment (Fallersleben’s *Deutschlandlied*, after all, cost him his university professorship, and almost landed him in jail). But the use of Catholic symbols by his cousin, the painter Philipp Veit, suggests that he may have at least had a degree of sympathy with this political position.

The son of Mendelssohn’s aunt, Dorothea Mendelssohn Schlegel, and the protégé of the painter Caspar David Friedrich, Philipp Veit was a decade and a half older than his famous composer cousin, and the two did not cross paths until later in life. Nonetheless, both men seemed to have shared a similar fascination with religious historicism. Indeed, at around the same time that the young Mendelssohn began to engage with the J.S. Bach revival (the mid 1820s), Veit had emerged as a protagonist of the Nazarene movement, a group of utopian painters who, supported financially by Jakob Salomon Bartholdy, Mendelssohn’s uncle and the Prussian attaché to Rome, withdrew to a life of artistic monasticism in the Italian countryside, drawing inspiration from the religious art of the Middle Ages and the early Renaissance (Frank

2001; Grewe 2009; Vignau-Wilberg 2011). The Nazarenes' fascination with this historical Catholic art paralleled the Protestant Palestrina revival's belief that the recreation of historical styles could transform contemporary sociocultural behavior. The embodiment of authenticity and expressivity, claimed these young idealists, Catholic "hieroglyphs" could be rediscovered and recycled in contemporary artistic creations, encouraging purer forms of communication and spirituality (Grewe 2009).

Veit's masterpiece of 1836, a fresco entitled *The Introduction of Christianity into Germany by St. Boniface* shows the degree to which the Nazarenes' general conception of religious revitalization could be imbued with political content (Figures 4.3 and 4.4). The triptych, which comprises a central allegorical panel framed by two smaller portraits, is notable first and foremost for its approximation of fifteenth-century Catholic iconography. This is particularly the case in the central panel, in which St. Boniface marches through the German forest converting barbarians. The painting is an exercise in cultural contrast: on the left side of the Saint are symbols of the old Germanic world: an ancient bard sits slumped at his harp, emerging, as it were, from the stump of a felled oak tree; red-bearded men lurk in the shrubs; a naked forester poses with his axe. On the Saint's right side, meanwhile, are the symbols of the Christian enlightenment that he brings in tow: religion, in the guise of a Marian figure, radiates light from the center of the painting, placing a gentle hand on the scripture, and broadcasting the (antique) Tau Cross from her chest. To her right stand the allegorical figures of knighthood, architecture, and music; arts that children study in happy little clusters somewhere between the foreground and the a-perspectival cathedral that fills the background of the scene.



Figure 4.3: The centerpiece of Philipp Veit's *The Introduction of Christianity into Germany by St. Boniface* (1836). Image in the public domain.



Figure 4.4: Philipp Veit's depiction of *Germania* in *The Introduction of Christianity into Germany by St. Boniface* (1836). Image in the public domain.

Taken alone, the central panel of Veit's painting may seem pure religious allegory; a tale of German salvation through conversion to Catholicism, or at least the fusion of "barbarian" cultural attributes with more civilized ones. The depictions of "Italia" and "Germania" that frame the work, however, broaden its parabolic scope, irrevocably blurring the line between religious and political metaphor. Of particular note in this respect is the painting of "Germania"; a transmogrified Mary whose religious icons have been replaced with those of the *Großdeutsch* conception of nationhood (Figure 4.4).<sup>114</sup> Indeed, Veit leaves few symbols of the German Confederation and the Holy Roman Empire untouched in his painting: Germania's right hand, firmly clutching the *Reichsschwert*, points to a clause in the articles of the *Deutscher Bund* (perhaps a variation on Mary's gesture to biblical scripture); her right hand holds aloft a shield containing the Confederation's coat of arms; at the side of her right foot lies the *Reichskrone*. Veit's message seems clear: if Germany's past was marked by conversion to Catholicism, her future will be determined by her adherence to "Catholic" values of unity; the preservation of a nation that transcends the boundaries of monarchical fiefdom and confessional affiliation.

As with the comparison of Mendelssohn's "Catholic" music to August Reichensperger's reconstruction of the Cologne Cathedral, it would be somewhat of an overreach to claim that the sacred music that Mendelssohn wrote for the Prussian church was a covert — much less an overt — statement of pan-Germanicism. Not only would this kind of political message have been very

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<sup>114</sup> Of course, Veit's painting can be seen as an expression of support for the status quo (the German Confederation), and was probably intended to be understood this way, at least by more conservative audiences. The artist's participation in the *Nazarene* movement during the 1820s and, more importantly, his explicit support for the Revolution of 1848, leads me to suggest that a more utopian vision of national unity lay behind this orthodox exterior. I explore this claim in more detail at the conclusion of this chapter.

poorly received by Friedrich Wilhelm IV and his court, Mendelssohn's correspondence from the early 1830s (during his visit to Veit in Rome) demonstrate a strong aversion to Nazarene politics, which the young man seems to have found too radical for his taste. That said, Mendelssohn was a different person at 35 than he was at 21, and several aspects of his later life, including his penchant for the Free City of Frankfurt (where Veit lived), his very vocal frustration with the Prussian court, and his increasing interchange with "radicals" like Hoffmann von Fallersleben — and Veit himself —, indicate that his political ideals were changing, and suggest that he may, after all, have begun to consider throwing his weight behind the idea of a pan-Germanic *Großdeutschland*. The idea that sacred compositions like the *Sechs Sprüche* represent a fusion of Protestant and Catholic traditions, rather than an appropriation of one politico-religious denomination by the other is, in any event, worth considering.

#### **Part IV — Anglican music as a stylistic model**

Up until this point in my exegesis of the political significance of Mendelssohn's Prussian sacred music, I have more or less uncritically accepted James Garratt's assumption that the Renaissance/Medieval tropes used in this repertoire reflect an effort at replicating historical Catholic styles akin to those celebrated by the Protestant Palestrina revival. That said, Garratt's explanation has some critical gaps: while Mendelssohn wrote a great deal of Palestrina-style *a cappella* sacred music under Zelter's tutelage, he stopped experimenting with the idea almost immediately following the death of his mentor in 1832. More importantly, perhaps, the musical attributes of juvenile works like *Mitten wir im Leben sind* (1832), the last sacred *a cappella* composition Mendelssohn composed before his appointment as Prussian *Kapellmeister*, are only

tangentially similar to his compositions of the 1840s, especially the *Sechs Sprüche*, which are formally quite different, and contain little trace of the Baroque (Bachian and Haendelian) traits so central to the majority of Mendelssohn's previous sacred music. Could Mendelssohn have based the style of his Prussian sacred music on an alternative historical model? In the following, I contribute an additional dimension to Garratt's explanation by suggesting that Mendelssohn was not only "returning" to an approach with which he was already familiar, but also seeking out new models, particularly in the "ancient" music of the Anglican church, and perhaps specifically in the work of William Byrd.

At first blush, the idea of a British-inspired "Prussian" church music seems something of a *non sequitur*: as far as I am aware, there is little or no discussion of historical "British" music in Mendelssohn's correspondence, and this, combined with the general perception of the Tudor revival as a late nineteenth-century phenomenon, make for a difficult case. A closer look at the compositional context of Mendelssohn's late sacred work, however, begins to make the possibility of such "British" references increasingly plausible: not only was Mendelssohn progressively more involved in the British musical community towards the end of his life, his use of historical British music as a stylistic model would have resonated with Friedrich Wilhelm IV and his advisors, who saw the Anglican Church as a principal model for national religious reform. Moreover, as a brief examination of the publications of the London-based *Musical Antiquarian Society* shows, Mendelssohn's engagement as Prussian court *Kapellmeister* and *Generalmusikdirektor* corresponded directly with the first efforts to publicly revive the music of Tudor-era British composers; a revival in which the sixteenth-century compositions of Byrd's music played a central role.

The possibility that Mendelssohn would have looked to the “historical” British music as a model for his sacred “Prussian” compositions is supported, first and foremost, by the centrality of the Anglican Church to Friedrich Wilhelm IV’s vision for national religious reform. As recent scholarship has emphasized, the Restoration-era Prussian state saw the “British” church — an institution that, having successfully weathered the secularizing trends of the eighteenth-century, remained a powerful and unifying force in British national life — as a prototype for the state church that it was trying to build at home, and Friedrich Wilhelm IV’s plans for musical reform were part of a larger project to emulate this model. Indeed, as Prussian court preacher Friedrich Adolph Strauß implied in his memoirs, the concept of reintroducing music — particularly sung psalms — into the Prussian *Agende* had been borrowed directly from Anglican ceremony, one of the few Protestant liturgical traditions in which the practice had been preserved (Dinglinger 1982:103). The situation is suggestive with respect to the stylistic inspiration for Mendelssohn’s Prussian sacred music: was Mendelssohn emulating “ancient” Anglican music in step with other British-inspired religious reforms?<sup>115</sup>

Given that Mendelssohn was in fact interested in finding “British” models for his Prussian church music, his increasing involvement in the British musical community during the 1840s would have given him ample opportunity to do so. Building on his visits to London as a tourist and piano virtuoso in 1829, 1832, and 1833, Mendelssohn had made a series of six high-profile trips to London and Birmingham from 1837 to 1847, serving as artistic director for the Birmingham Festival (1837; 1840; 1846), and leading major ensembles including the

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<sup>115</sup> Brodbeck’s observation that Mendelssohn accepted Mrs. Bunsen’s invitation to attend Morning Prayer services at St. Peter’s in mid June 1844, and that he “carefully inscribed the Anglican chants in his pocket notebook,” is certainly suggestive (Brodbeck 1992: 30).

Philharmonic Society (1833, 1842; 1844) and the Sacred Harmonic Society (1842, 1844, 1847) in London (see Eatock 2008). The young composer's 1833 "discovery" of *Israel in Egypt*, and, more generally, his intensifying engagement with the Haendelian style, reflect the degree to which these trips exposed Mendelssohn to both the British musical community, and to British musical history, suggesting that a great deal of Mendelssohn's time in Great Britain was dedicated to exploring "new" canonical repertoire.

Indeed, Mendelssohn's close relationship to British musicians and musical institutions during the 1840s suggests that the composer may very well have been inspired by a nascent Tudor revival that swept the British musical community at this time. As Suzanne Cole (2008) has documented, part of this revival<sup>116</sup> consisted of private performances; but it also involved the edition and publication of a substantial number of historical scores, many of them underwritten by the *Musical Antiquarian Society*, an organization established for the purpose of publishing "the works of the early English composers...and of works illustrating the history and progress of music" (Turbet 1992). Run by a council of prominent English musical figures,<sup>117</sup> and boasting circulation to as many as 950 members per year, the *Society* managed to publish a wide range of "ancient" British music over the course of its eight years of formal existence (1840-48), including Henry Purcell operas [*Dido and Aeneas* (1841), *Bonduca* (1842), and *King Arthur* (1843)], songs, madrigals, and motets by Thomas Bateson (1846), John Bennet (1845), John Dowland (1843), Orlando Gibbons (1841), Thomas Morley (1842), Thomas Weelkes (1843), and

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<sup>116</sup> The revival was probably linked to similar trends in architecture: Augustus Pugin had redesigned Westminster Abbey in Gothic style following its destruction by fire in 1834.

<sup>117</sup> Council members included Sterndale Bennett, Henry Bishop, W.H. Calcott, George Hogarth, E.J. Hopkins, William Horsley, Charles Lucas, George Macfarren, Charles Neate, E.F. Rimbault, George Smart, Edward Taylor, and James Turle.

John Wilbye (1841), and the sacred music of William Byrd, including the *Mass for Five Voices* (1841), and the first book of the *Cantiones Sacrae* (1842) (Turbet 1992). Although Felix Mendelssohn was not a member of the *Society*, his association with several of its most prominent council members, including his close friend and mentor Ignaz Moscheles,<sup>118</sup> suggests that he was well aware of its activities, and probably had access to its publications.

The centrality of Anglican models for Prussian church reform, combined with Mendelssohn's probable exposure to "ancient" British music, begin to make a dubious proposition more palatable: it seems possible, if not probable, that Mendelssohn intended to (re)construct a historical, "Anglican" style of music for the revised Prussian *Agende*; a style that could aesthetically capture the British-inspired nationalist aspirations of the Prussian state. This hypothesis plays out particularly well in the case of the *Sechs Sprüche*. Perhaps Mendelssohn's most audacious experiment in constructing a "historical" musical ethos divorced from Bachian or Haendelian models, the *Sprüche* are clearly labeled as "anthems," a genre closely associated with the Anglican Church. Moreover, their "historical" style — particularly their use of imitative counterpoint — is reminiscent of the "ancient" British sacred music that Mendelssohn would have known from the publications of the *Musical Antiquarian Society*: the work of William Byrd; particularly the first book of the *Cantiones Sacrae*, which was published in 1842, the year before the composition of the first *Spruch* (see Figure 4.5).

The possibility that Mendelssohn used Byrd as a model for his Prussian sacred music adds a new set of dimensions to his political engagement as Prussian *Generalmusikdirektor*. On

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<sup>118</sup> Moscheles was appointed to the council in 1843, and served until the dissolution of the *Society* in 1848.

Si...on de\_ser...ta, de\_ser...ta fac...ta est.

Si...on de\_ser...ta, de\_ser...ta fac.ta est, Si...on

Si...on de\_ser...ta, de\_ser...ta fac...ta est, Si...on

Si...on de\_ser...ta, de\_ser...ta fac...ta est, Si...on

Si...on

Hie...ru...salem, Hie...

de\_ser...ta, de\_ser...ta fac...ta est; Hie...ru...sa-

de\_ser...ta, de\_ser...ta fac...ta est;.....

de\_ser...ta, de\_ser...ta fac...ta est;.....

de\_ser...ta, de\_ser...ta fac...ta est;.....

-ru...sa.lem, Hie...ru...sa.lem, Hie...ru...sa.lem,

-lem, Hie...ru...sa.lem, Hie...ru...sa.lem, Hie...ru...

Hie...ru...sa.lem, Hie...ru...sa.lem, Hie...ru...sa.lem, Hie...ru...salem, Hie...

Hie...ru...salem, Hie...ru...salem, Hie...ru...sa.lem,

Hie...ru...salem, Hie...ru...sa.lem, Hie...ru...sa.lem,

This ♯ is in the Original Copy: in Boyce's Collection it is omitted, with great propriety.



Figure 4.5: An excerpt from Byrd's *Civitas sancti tui* as published by the *Musical Antiquarian Society* in 1842.

the one hand, reference to this (late) Tudor-/early Elizabethan-era composer would have fit very nicely with the “nationalist” cultural history that Friedrich Wilhelm IV was so eager to construct: like his teacher, Thomas Tallis, Byrd would have been seen as a “British” equivalent of Palestrina,<sup>119</sup> and thus would have represented the legitimacy — perhaps even the superiority — of “Northern European” culture with respect to Italian culture. Joseph Kerman’s “discovery” of Byrd’s Catholic recusancy,<sup>120</sup> meanwhile, suggests that the composer’s musical language may have held a poignant symbolism for Mendelssohn, an artist who also found himself in the no-man’s-land of a transitional socio-political world.

For most historiographers who have analyzed Mendelssohn’s sacred music, this composer’s no-man’s-land has been understood as a religious one; a transitional space somewhere between the official Protestantism of the Prussian state and Judaism, whether understood as a cultural heritage or an ethnic community. Mendelssohn’s correspondence with his cousin, Philipp Veit, however, reflects the degree to which this “religious” struggle deserves to be understood in what, from a contemporary perspective, are political terms. Indeed,

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<sup>119</sup> “The compositions of Tallis, learned and *elegant* as they are,” writes Rimbault in the introduction to his edition of Byrd’s *Cantiones Sacrae*, quoting John Hawkins, “are so truly original, that he may justly be said to be the Father of the Cathedral style; and though a like appellation is given by the Italians to Palestrina, it is much to be questioned, considering the time he flourished, whether he could derive the least advantage from the improvements of the great man.”

<sup>120</sup> Kerman suggested that, despite his leading role in Queen Elizabeth’s Anglican Chapel Royal, Byrd expressed strong Catholic sympathies in his music.

responding to Veit's resignation from Frankfurt's Städel Museum in 1843, and his determination to leave German-speaking Europe altogether, Mendelssohn wrote<sup>121</sup>

Truly, this is the land of the Philistines, (cultural) atrophy and scandals, and who knows how many other terrible things — but it is still our Fatherland, and I gladly give it all my best. You once said, years ago, “now the artists can do nothing but guard the holy flame and assure it is not blown out.” So guard it now from the wind that threatens to blow it out; if you turn away and refuse to help, how many will be left who can, even with the best of intentions? (Suhr 1986: 119).

This remarkable piece of correspondence suggests that, more than a statement of personal religious belief, Mendelssohn's Prussian sacred music was an attempt to “guard the holy flame”: to affect (or at least maintain the ideals of) progressive socio-cultural change within the narrow confines of Friedrich Wilhelm IV's Christian-German cultural nationalism. Philipp Veit's decision to volunteer a reworked version of his *Germania* for use at the Frankfurter Congress of 1848-49 opens the possibility that Mendelssohn may have taken a very different approach to “guarding” had he lived to see the *Märzrevolution*.

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<sup>121</sup> Freilich, es ist das Land der Philister und der Verkümmern und Klatschereien, und was weiß ich, wie vieles Üblen noch – aber es ist doch unser Vaterland, und dem gönnte ich so gerne von allem Guten das Beste. Du hast mir einmal vor mehreren Jahren gesagt “jetzt könnten die Künstler nichts anders tun, als die heilige Flamme vor dem Verlöschen hüten.” So hüte sie denn vor all dem Wind, der sie ausblasen will; wen Du Dich abwendest und nicht hilfst, wie viele sind da, die es können, selbst beim besten Willen? (Suhr 1986: 119).

## CHAPTER 5 — BEYOND PRUSSIA: THE “GERMAN” POLITICS OF THE VIOLIN CONCERTO

Two exceptional formal events punctuate the first movement of Mendelssohn’s Violin Concerto Op.64. The first arrives in the opening bars of the *Allegro* when, in virtually unprecedented fashion, Mendelssohn omits the tutti exposition, calling on the soloist to introduce the first thematic group.<sup>122</sup> The second occurs at the transition between the end of the development and the onset of the recapitulation. Connoisseurs of concerto form will expect a return to the main theme in the tonic at this juncture, and Mendelssohn fulfills this expectation. But he does so in a very unusual, and historically unprecedented, way. Indeed, rather than simply conclude the development and recapitulate the main theme, Mendelssohn employs a solo cadenza — a device that had previously only been used at the end of sonata-allegro form —, to

Cadenza ad libitum.

ff f mf f

Tempo I

cresc. decresc.

a tempo

ff poco a poco di

mi nu en du al di

M.B. 18.

<sup>122</sup> The only previous concerti to omit the opening tutti sections had been written for the piano. They include Mozart’s Concerto in Eb, K.271 and Beethoven’s concertos Nos. 4 and 5.

18

The image displays a page of musical notation for Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto, page 18. It features a full orchestral score with staves for Violin, Piano, and Cello/Double Bass. The top section is a cadenza for the violin, marked *pp* and *argue*. The bottom section is the opening of the recapitulation, marked *cresc.* and *Vel. cresc.*. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Figure 5.1: The cadenza and opening bars of the recapitulation of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto.

add drama to the melodic and harmonic homecoming. Like its placement within the structure of the movement as a whole, this cadenza is exceptional for its time: beginning (in normative fashion) with spectacular shows of virtuosity, including a series of blinding runs and a chain of leaps spanning nearly four octaves, the solo eventually lapses into arpeggios that, slowly

diminishing in volume and speed, transform into accompanimental figures at the reentry of the tutti.<sup>123</sup> A show of individual violinistic brilliance not only paves the way for the orchestral collective, but entirely inverts the melodic and accompanimental roles introduced in the exposition.

In her compelling analysis of Mendelssohn's Op.64, Maiko Kawabata engages in a well-established musicological tradition of hearing concerti as metaphors for the relationship between the individual (soloist) and society (the tutti),<sup>124</sup> arguing that the trajectory of the Op.64 *Allegro* can be equated with that of a *Bildungsroman*. A story of "lyricism owned, lost, and reclaimed," asserts Kawabata, this movement reflects a process of growth in which the "soloist's identity is formed, departing from the brash singer of the opening, to become reborn and able to harmonize with society" (Kawabata 2001: 125-126).

In agreement with Kawabata's analysis, this chapter is based on a hearing of the *Allegro* in which Mendelssohn's soloist-hero engages productively with society. But rather than a narrative about the transformation of an individual within the social world, I argue that the trajectory of this opening movement depicts a *leader*; an authority who *cultivates* the larger community, boldly announcing the way forward in the exposition; supporting and nurturing in

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<sup>123</sup> A possible, although unlikely, precedent for this technique is the second movement of Berlioz' *Harold en Italie* (1834), in which the solo viola accompanies a procession of pilgrims. As I mention in Chapter 1, Mendelssohn was friendly with Berlioz, and was probably familiar with his symphony. But, given Mendelssohn's general disapproval of Berlioz' "eccentricity," it seems unlikely that he would have used the work as a model.

<sup>124</sup> In her "A Musical Dialectic from the Enlightenment" (1986), for example, Susan McClary argued for a hearing of Mozart's Piano Concerto in G major as a biographical narrative of the subjugation of the "other" (the piano) by social norms. Raymond Knapp's hearing of Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto, for its part, suggests that the composer was "passing" in imperial Russian society (2003).

the recapitulation. In this narrative, the individual is reborn — but so is the universe in which she moves.<sup>125</sup>

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In the previous chapters of this dissertation, I have heard the music that Mendelssohn wrote for the Prussian state as a reflection of Mendelssohn's engagement with Prussian politics. In this chapter, I employ the relationship between violin and orchestra in the *Allegro* of Mendelssohn's Op.64 as a metaphor for the ways in which Mendelssohn (the soloist) used his musical genius as a vehicle for shaping the "German" nation (the tutti) beyond the Prussian political agenda. I explore this idea on several levels: first, I am interested in the Concerto itself, and the ways in which it can be understood as a German work; a template for a concerto style that would "cultivate" the national community both musically and socially. But I also argue that the projects and social interactions surrounding Mendelssohn's composition were extensions of this leadership role. Indeed, during the years that Mendelssohn was working on his concerto, he was also deeply engaged in the construction of "German" conservatories in both Berlin and Leipzig, institutions designed to foment national musical life. Moreover, the Jewish backgrounds of Ferdinand David and Joseph Joachim, violinists central to the life of Mendelssohn's concerto and the music institutions that emerged contemporaneously with it, reflect Mendelssohn's protagonism in "Germanizing" his community of origin, highlighting — paradoxically — the

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<sup>125</sup> The delimitation of my analysis to the first movement of Mendelssohn's Concerto is intentional. As Kawabata explores, the overall arc of the work does not necessarily expand on the narrative of the *Allegro*, mixing two contradictory "plot archetypes": the *Bildungskonzert*, and the conventions of Spohr's violin concerti, which included a jocular concluding movement (Kawabata 2001: 128).

degree to which he was responsible for establishing enduring tropes about the identity of “Jewish” musicians and their music.

## **PART I — Leading the German community towards a “national” concerto style**

“The Germans have four violin concertos,” the violinist Joseph Joachim is purported to have said at his seventy-fifth birthday party,

The greatest, the most uncompromising, is Beethoven’s. The one by Brahms vies with it in seriousness. The richest, the most seductive, was written by Max Bruch. But the most inward, the heart’s jewel, is Mendelssohn’s (quoted in Steinberg 1998: 265).

Mendelssohn, who had been dead for more than half a century at the time of Joachim’s utterance (1906), would almost certainly have felt vindicated by his pupil’s remarks. Indeed, while the genesis of his Violin Concerto is often framed as a response to personal and artistic impulses, it was also clearly intended to lead German musicians and audiences away from the virtuosic repertoire that dominated the nineteenth-century stage; to establish a “serious” and “meaningful” concerto in the “German” mold.

The context of the composition of Mendelssohn’s Violin Concerto provides important indicators of the “Germanic” aspirations of the work. Written for violinist Ferdinand David, the first chair of the *Gewandhaus* orchestra and a close family friend (more about this below), the concerto was, from its inception, intended to forward the career of a “national” musician. The proximity of the work’s composition to Mendelssohn’s revival of Beethoven’s Violin Concerto, meanwhile, suggests that it was envisioned as a contribution to the German canon. Indeed, although first conceived in 1838, Op.64 was not completed until 1844, the year that Joachim —

then still a teenager — first performed Beethoven’s work (under Mendelssohn’s baton). And it seems likely that the astounding success of this performance encouraged Mendelssohn to finish his own concerto, which was premiered the following year (1845). Mendelssohn was intent on building a German canon of musical works, the newest components of which were to be his own.

While Beethoven’s concerto may have provided a stimulus for Mendelssohn’s Op.64 , the violin concertos of Louis Spohr are likely to have supplied its most significant musical model. A violin virtuoso-turned-composer whose popularity and influence were comparable to Mendelssohn’s during the 1830s and ‘40s, Spohr had made substantive contributions to the German music scene, including the German opera, the German secular oratorio, and the German symphony. But he was perhaps best known for his contributions to the violin literature, which included the pedagogical classic *Die Violinschule* (1838) and no less than fifteen violin concertos, many of which were very popular and widely played (Brown 1984). That Mendelssohn was aware of these concertos while writing his Op.64 is clear not only from the degree to which he and Spohr crossed paths (or at least shared them) during the 1840s, but because of their importance to Ferdinand David, who had studied with Spohr from 1823-24, and who regularly performed his work in Leipzig.

Much like Mendelssohn, Spohr was averse to the growing popularity of virtuosic “showpieces,” and his violin concertos were marked by an effort to transform the genre from mere “entertainment” into “a substantial and superior composition free from the artificial bravura practices of the time” (Swalin 1937:1). The emphasis of Mendelssohn’s Op.64 on melody over pyrotechnics, and its virtually unprecedented, unified form, suggest that his Concerto had a similar aim. Indeed, like Spohr’s concertos, which are notable for their tendency towards “the

The image shows a page of a musical score for Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto, Op. 64. It features multiple staves for different instruments: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, Bassoon, and Piano. The score is divided into two sections by a double bar line. The first section is marked 'Allegro' and the second section is marked 'Andante.' with a double bar line. The bassoon part is specifically noted with 'M.B. 1st, Andante.' and 'Vel. Bassi.'.

Figure 5.2: The integration of the *Allegro* and *Andante* of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto.

mild, the lovely, and the nostalgic” (Swalin 1937:1), the *Allegro* and *Andante* of Mendelssohn’s Op.64 are intensely vocal; in many ways a string of “songs without words.” Mendelssohn’s remarkable formal innovations, meanwhile, suggest a — perhaps Spohr-influenced — effort at reconciling virtuosity and serious “German” art: while the abandonment of double-exposition sonata form in Op.64 places the violin center-stage, the linkage of each of the concerto’s movements into a seamless whole reflects an effort at composing a “substantial” composition; perhaps one inspired by Spohr’s single-movement Violin Concerto No.8 (Op.47).<sup>126</sup> By joining the *Allegro* to the *Andante* with an ascending bassoon line (which affects a modulation from E minor to C major, see Figure 5.2), and transitioning between the *Andante* and the *Finale* by means of a short bridge, Mendelssohn can be seen as striving to “elevate” his concerto to the

<sup>126</sup> Kawabata suggests that Mendelssohn modeled his concerto on Spohr’s Seventh Concerto, Op. 38, with which it shares an overall tonal scheme (E minor — C major — E major), and a similar jocular concluding movement. David performed Spohr’s work at the *Gewandhaus* in the 1836-37 season.

level of the the “German” symphony; to imply that the concerto, too, could be an object of (serious) artistic contemplation.

In writing a serious, “German” concerto for a “German” virtuoso, Felix Mendelssohn was embodying the role of the soloist in his Violin Concerto, using his virtuosic abilities to direct national musical life.<sup>127</sup> But like the violin soloist in the recapitulation of the Allegro of Op.64, Mendelssohn’s effort at cultivation also involved “accompanying” the community that he led; stepping back, at least partially, from the limelight to let the “tutti” lead the way. Indeed, Op.64 was not simply written for a virtuoso (as Beethoven’s concerto had been), the compositional process also involved a dialogue with its dedicatee. The nature of this collaboration is reflected in some detail in the Mendelssohn-David correspondence regarding the concerto, a large portion of which, appropriately enough, is about the cadenza material. “I would really like your opinion,” writes Mendelssohn on Dec. 17, 1844

before I let (the score) irrevocably out to the public. Were I there, you would come over for an afternoon visit; instead I ask you to write me about it with precision. Above all: how do you find the altered and elongated cadenza? I like it much better; is it also playable and well written? The arpeggios should now begin in tempo and continue in four voices in the tutti, is that too tiring for the player? Is the diminuendo to the pianissimo comfortable? ...I (also) ask you to show Gade this part of the score and tell me what he

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<sup>127</sup> Kawabata stresses this aspect of Mendelssohn’s compositional process, emphasizing the emergence of a division of labor between composer and performer during the early nineteenth century.

thinks. Please don't laugh at me! I really am embarrassed, but I can't do any better, and keep making errors. (Eckhardt 1888: 225)<sup>128</sup>

David, for his part, was not shy about sharing his thoughts. In a letter to Mendelssohn on January 2, he writes

...I will be happy if you are not entirely unsatisfied with the changes I have made to the Violin Concerto. I have entered them in the principal voice in the part you will receive. I have also revised the abundant fingerings and bowings that I wrote in, then again eliminated them and written new ones... (Eckhardt 1888: 229)<sup>129</sup>

The degree to which David cooperated in the completion of Mendelssohn's score is reflected in a reply from the composer (written on an undated piece of paper), in which he requests that David take responsibility for the final edits on the Concerto before sending off the manuscript to the engraver (Eckhardt 1888: 230). Indeed, Mendelssohn ultimately sent the "tutti" off on its own: premiered in Leipzig in 1845, Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto took its first flight in the absence of the composer, with David as soloist and Niels Gade at the podium.

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<sup>128</sup> "Über all' das hätte ich nun gar zu gern Deine Meinung, ehe ich es der unwiderrufflichen Öffentlichkeit übergebe. Wäre ich dort, so kamst du mit einigen Nachmittagsvisiten los, so aber muss ich Dich bitten, schreibe mir recht genau darüber hierher. Also vor allen Dingen: ist Dir die veränderte und verlängerte Kadenz so recht? Mir gefällt sie viel besser; ist sie aber auch spielgerecht und recht geschrieben? Die Arbeiten sollen nun gleich im Tempo beginnen und vierstimmig bis in das Tutti fortgehen, das ist doch nicht zu ermüdend für den Spieler? Auch das Diminuendo bis zum pp macht doch bequem?... Ich bitte Dich, zeige doch auch Gnade diese Stelle in der Partitur und sage mir seine Meinung. Lacht mich auch nicht gar zu sehr aus! Ich schäme mich wirklich selbst, aber ich kann einmal nicht besser, und werde einmal das Tappen nicht los."

<sup>129</sup> Das Du mit den Änderungen in (Deinem) Violinkonzert nicht uneinverstanden bist, freut mich sehr. Ich habe sie in die Principalstimme, die Du vor dem Stich noch ein Mal erhältst, eingetragen. Ich habe sie auch sonst revidiert, viel Überflüssiges, was ich von Fingersatz und Bogenstrich hineingeschrieben hatte, wieder gestrichen und manches Neue hinzugesetzt...

## **PART II — Mendelssohn’s conservatories: cultivating German musical life through institutional reform**

As outlined above, Mendelssohn’s Violin Concerto can be understood as an effort to “cultivate” the German musical community; to demonstrate the potential for a German violin repertoire that, written in collaboration with German instrumentalists, would fuse virtuosity with “serious” art, thus elevating genres like the concerto to symphonic status. In the following, I explore how Mendelssohn’s “soloistic” efforts at cultivating the German community extended beyond musical composition to institutional reform. Indeed, at precisely the same time that Mendelssohn was writing his Op.64, he was also deeply engaged in establishing “German” music conservatories in Berlin and Leipzig; institutional structures that, like the Violin Concerto, were intended to model a “national” approach to music and music making. Here, I argue that the ultimate outgrowth of this engagement, the Leipzig Conservatory, reflected Mendelssohn’s hybrid conception of German nationhood; a “third space” that drew on pre-existing monarchical structures and ideologies while infusing them with a more Republican brand of cultural nationalism.

In referring to Mendelssohn’s conservatory projects as attempts at creating “hybrids” and a “third spaces,” I am using the language of Homi Bhabha, a theorist whose work on nation and identity has been broadly influential over the past two decades. Concerned with developing alternatives to the modern concepts of universalism, relativism, and multiculturalism — concepts that he understood to place difference under erasure — Bhabha proposed an understanding of politics as the intersection of multiple, and potentially antagonistic, identities; a “third space” of “hybridity” that “displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority,

new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom” (1990b: 211). Bhabha’s approach to the concept of “nation” was similarly duplicitous and process-oriented: rather than a fixed entity, he argued, the nation should be understood as a “narrative in the process of being written”; a “foundational fiction,” the origins of which are “as much acts of affiliation and establishment as they are moments of disavowal, displacement, exclusion, and cultural contestation” (1990a: 310).

The story of Mendelssohn’s engagement with the Berlin and Leipzig Conservatories fits particularly well into Bhabha’s nationalist framework: a cultural entrepreneur working within a German-speaking society still dominated by monarchical structures, Mendelssohn’s conservatory projects can be understood to embody a composite understanding of the German national future, one of whose basic principles was the acquisition of “German” culture. Before exploring the nature of this amalgam, I turn first to the history of the the Leipzig Conservatory and its seldom-explored relationship to Prussia.

### **A tale of two conservatories**

Generally speaking, Felix Mendelssohn is associated with a single conservatory — the Leipzig Conservatory — an institution that, founded in 1843, served as a model for most subsequent music schools in the Western world. That said, the story of the Leipzig Conservatory is inseparable from a second project: a “Prussian” music school in Berlin, the design and management of which was a central component of Mendelssohn’s contract with Friedrich Wilhelm IV, and one of the main reasons he was called to service by the Prussian state.

This tale of two conservatories begins in early April 1840, when Mendelssohn, then director of the *Gewandhaus* orchestra, wrote a letter to Saxon minister Paul von Falkenstein requesting that a state endowment allocated to supporting an “institution dedicated to art or science” be devoted to founding a school of music in Leipzig.<sup>130</sup> The request, which came on the heels of several years of negotiations among the directors of the *Gewandhaus* (Grotjahn 2005: 306), justified the idea of a music school on abstract terms, arguing that such an institution could teach Leipzigers to be better citizens: “If we had a good music school” writes Mendelssohn, that embraced all the aspects of the art and taught each from a unified viewpoint, as a means of achieving higher goals, then the practical and materialistic tendency which can be found even among our most accomplished artists might yet be effectively checked” (Mendelssohn 1997: 228).<sup>131</sup>

Good music education, argued Mendelssohn, would lead not only to elevated performance practice, but to “higher goals,” namely, the cultivation of Leipzig society.

Several months following Mendelssohn’s request to the Saxon King, the Prussian state intervened, offering the composer the Royal post of *Kapellmeister*, a job whose central duties included giving concerts and — more importantly with respect to this chapter — establishing a music conservatory. As Prussian minister von Massow reported to Friedrich Wilhelm IV in May of 1841:

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<sup>130</sup> The 20,000 Thaler endowment was left by a Leipzig merchant, Herr Blümner, and was to be matched by the Saxon King.

<sup>131</sup> Durch eine gute Musikschule, die alle verschiedene Zweige der Kunst umfassen könnte, und sie alle nur aus einem einzigen Gesichtspunkte als Mittel zu einem höheren Zwecke lehrte, auf diesen Zweck alle ihre Schüler möglichst hinführte, wäre jener praktisch-materiellen Tendenz, die ja leider auch unter den Künstlern selbst viele und einflussreiche Anhänger zählt, jetzt noch mit sicherem Erfolg vorzubauen.

...on the 11 of December of this year...I wrote to Mr. Mendelssohn, offering him the position of Director of the musical section of the Academy of Art...in the process, I mentioned that it is the intention of your Eternal Kingly Majesty to reshape the Academy, connecting it with other, partly pre-existent, partly to-be-created, institutions of musical education; and thus that you would have use of Mendelssohn's personal advice, and place him at the head of the institution in the future; moreover that it was your Eternal Kingly Majesty's will that he conduct a certain number of concerts with the Royal orchestra and opera...(Mendelssohn 1997: 284-5).<sup>132</sup>

Although Mendelssohn's decision to assume the role of Prussian *Kapellmeister* (1841) meant that he had to relinquish all Saxon titles — including his directorship of the *Gewandhaus* orchestra —, he remained actively involved in the Leipzig Conservatory, accepting the Saxon endowment in 1841, and eventually founding the institution (in absentia) in 1843. When plans for the Berlin Academy of Art collapsed in 1845, he moved back to Leipzig to teach on the faculty.

Mendelssohn's behavior during the period in which he founded the Leipzig Conservatory has been an enigma to most musicologists. As Leonard Phillip summarized in his dissertation on the institution

The years 1841-1844 mark a confusing and often unhappy period for both Mendelssohn and his biographers. The motivation for Mendelssohn's interest in the Berlin position is

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<sup>132</sup> ...am 11. Dec. v. J. in Ew. K. M. Allerhöchstem Auftrage dem Herrn Mendelssohn geschrieben, und ihm angeboten, dass er als Direktor der musikalischen Klasse der Akademie der Künste mit einem Gehalt von 3000 Thalern angestellt werden könne, dabei habe ich erwähnt, dass es die Absicht Ew. K. M. sei, die musikalische Klasse der Akademie umzugestalten, sie mit anderen, teils zu errichtenden musikalischen Bildungs-Anstalten in Verbindung zu setzen, herbei Sich seines, des p. Mendelssohn Rates zu bedienen, und ihn künftig an die Spitze dieser Anstalt zu stellen, ferner dass es der Wille Ew. K. M. sei, dass alljährig mit dem König. Orchester- und Opernpersonale eine noch zu bestimmende Anzahl von Konzerten unter seine Leitung gegeben würde...

not clear. Doubts about his ability to function happily in the Berlin musical environment proved to be well founded. His reluctance to sever ties with Leipzig, as well as the final securing of the financial underwriting of the school in Leipzig — at the very time he was breaking with Saxony — seem quite contradictory (Phillips 1979: 85).

The intention of the following exegesis is to show that this period in Mendelssohn's life was not so much “confusing and unhappy,” as a moment in which he attempted to negotiate between the desires of the monarchical power structure and the ideals of a more Republican cultural nationalism. In his work with the Academy of Art in Berlin and his successful establishment of the Leipzig Conservatory, I argue, Mendelssohn began the process of leading the way towards a new, hybrid, national narrative; one that fused Republican values with the existing dynastic model. To begin my argument, I first examine Mendelssohn's motives for establishing a conservatory in the first place. Then I compare the cities of Leipzig and Berlin and Mendelssohn's relationship to the kings that administered them.

### **The motives for Mendelssohn's conservatories: cultivating Germans**

As outlined in the introduction to this dissertation, Mendelssohn's decision to accept Friedrich Wilhelm IV's offer was at least partially influenced by his family's historical allegiance to the Prussian crown, and it is worth considering the degree to which members of the *Gewandhaus* (or other Leipzig and/or Saxon authorities) also exerted pressure with respect to the composer's involvement in the Leipzig Conservatory. The possible influence of these factors aside, however, a look at the founding documents of the two conservatories suggest that Mendelssohn's interest in public music education can be attributed to two central concerns: a practical desire to establish “national” musical institutions, and a more abstract impulse to

“elevate” the “German” community through *Bildung*, thus paving the way for socio-political reform.

At the most basic level, Mendelssohn’s proposals for the Berlin Academy of Art (1841) and the Leipzig Conservatory (1843) were a practical response to the fact that, the Vienna Conservatory aside, Vormärz-era German-speaking Europe had no official system of music education, and no unified standard for pedagogical practice. Accordingly, a large portion of the Mendelssohn’s proposals were dedicated to outlining a plan for the centralization of “German” music institutions and the standardization of a “German” music curriculum. “In order to bring a music school into existence in Germany, where up to now only isolated attempts have been made to provide a common basis for real artistry,” detailed the composer in his *Pro Memoria with Regards to the Founding of a Music School in Berlin* (1841),

...the various Royal organizations...must unite with the music school and, as members, accept a single aim and direction with greater or lesser modification. To these schools belong, for example:

The Training Institute for the Royal Orchestra

The Organ Institute

Training courses for singing, declamation, etc., which belong to the theater  
(and so far are only employed by the theater).

Moreover, the members of the Royal Band must be obliged to give instruction in the playing of their individual instruments. It would not be a mistake to designate a place for a library containing the necessary music (both old and new) as well as books (Phillips 1979:81-2).



**Figure 5.3: The Leipzig Music Conservatory circa 1850. Image held in the digitized Grieg Collection of the Bergen Offentlige Bibliotek.**

While curricular goals remained relatively vague in the *Pro Memoria*,<sup>133</sup> they were outlined in minute detail in the prospectus issued by the Leipzig Conservatory in 1843. Conservatory students, details this document, were to follow a three-year course of study including not only practical vocal/instrumental instruction, but also lectures in harmony, form and composition, conducting and playing from the score, and “theoretical” topics including the history of music in ancient and modern times, the aesthetics of music, and musical acoustics. Admission to the

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<sup>133</sup> Mendelssohn suggested a three-year course of study, and called for teachers of composition, solo voice, choral voice, pianoforte, aesthetics, and music history.

Conservatory was to be dictated by an entrance examination, and progress thereafter assessed by biannual juries (Mintz 2001: 116-117).

Clearly, part of Mendelssohn's motive for establishing conservatories in Berlin and Leipzig was an effort to make up for a lack of pedagogical infrastructure in German-speaking Europe. But the efforts of the composer may have also had an intellectual basis. Indeed, as Rebecca Grotjahn has stressed in her work on the Leipzig Conservatory, Mendelssohn (and the communities of intellectuals that surrounded him) saw the development of the Berlin Academy of Art and the Leipzig Conservatory as a step along the road toward a more abstract goal of instilling Germans with the "higher education" (*höhere Bildung*). In strictly musical terms, this "higher education" shared the objective of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto, advocating a "Germanic" understanding of music in which, as Mendelssohn outlined in his *Pro Memoria*,

technical accomplishment is dedicated to the expression of a higher thought...taught and learned with a recognition of the higher purpose to which artistic perfection is dedicated (Mendelssohn 1997: 291).<sup>134</sup>

That said, the idea of musically "educating" Germans also resonated with a *Bildung*-centric principle of "social improvement," one in which musical understanding could translate into socio-political reform.

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<sup>134</sup> Der ganzen Anstalt möchte der Grundsatz als Basis dienen: dass jede Gattung der Kunst sich erst dann über das Handwerk erhebt, wenn sie sich bei größtmöglicher technischer Vollendung einem rein geistigen Zweck, dem Ausdrucke eines höheren Gedankens widmet; das also Gründlichkeit, Richtigkeit, und strenge Ordnung in Lehren und Lernen zum ersten Gesetz gemacht würde, um den Handwerk nichts voraus zu lassen, zugleich aber alle Fächer nur im Hinblick auf jenen Gedanken, den sie aussprechen sollen, und jene höhere Bestimmungen, der die technische Vollkommenheit in der Kunst unterzuordnen ist, gelehrt und gelernt werden müssten.

The thesis that Mendelssohn understood his conservatory projects as a means of cultivating “Germans” — and not simply German musicians — is supported by two factors: the centrality of musical education to contemporary discussions of German nation-building, and Mendelssohn’s close relationship to C.F. Zelter and the *Singakademie*. Multiple scholars have documented the degree to which music became a symbol of “German” *Kultur* during the early nineteenth century, tracing the ways in which musical education — first vocal, and later instrumental — was perceived as a means of “teaching” Germans to live in “harmony” with one another (Gramit 2002; Grotjahn 2005; Garratt 2010). Less explored, however, have been the likely linkages between Mendelssohn’s projects and the *Singakademie* of his mentor, C.F. Zelter. An embodiment of the socio-musical ideals circulating in early-nineteenth-century, Zelter’s *Singakademie* was predicated on the belief that musical practice could model social relationships. “There is perhaps no society in the world,” he wrote

in which, as in the *Singakademie*, all relationships are predicated on the freedom of each individual...No one is greater than another and no one seems more essential than anyone else. The harmony of the gods seems to have built itself an earthly home” (Garratt 2010: 35).

In spearheading conservatory projects during the early 1840s, Mendelssohn can be understood to have been continuing this project; developing institutions that would teach German-speaking musicians to form part of an ideal national culture beyond the confines of Prussia or Saxony.

### **Prussia and Saxony: between monarchical structures and the public sphere**

The fate of Mendelssohn’s Berlin and the Leipzig conservatory projects reflects the degree to which Mendelssohn’s conception of the ideal “German” social order involved a new

relationship with monarchical power. Clearly this relationship was not to be found in Prussia, where Mendelssohn was an “advisor” to Friedrich Wilhelm IV and, accordingly, entirely at the mercy of the Prussian bureaucracy. “You want to hear news about the Berlin Conservatory,” he wrote Ferdinand David in a condemning — and brutally sarcastic — letter in 1841,<sup>135</sup>

I do too, but there is none. The project is in the widest field, if it is even in a field at all and not simply floating in the air. The King seems to have a plan to reorganize the Academy of Art; but it’s not going so well because it requires the reorganization of the Academy of Art...there is no director for the construction of the building, and in all four subject-areas the current faculty cannot (or shouldn’t, at least) be replaced, nor can their rights be diminished, that is to say, they have to die first. At this rate, I am likely to die with them, and the question is: will the reorganization happen the correct way then?  
(Mendelssohn 1863: 299).

Mendelssohn’s sarcasm regarding the inflexibility of the Prussian court presaged his attempts to take a hiatus from Berlin the following year (1842) and, ultimately, his decision to leave Berlin altogether. “Of course, after the last experience, I’m afraid of what his Excellency has already

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<sup>135</sup> Du willst Neuigkeiten vom Berliner Conservatorium hören; ich auch aber es gibt keine. Die Sache ist im allerweitesten Felde, wenn sie überhaupt gar in irgend einem Felde schon ist, und nicht bloß in der Luft. Der König scheint ein Plan zu haben, die Akademie der Künste umzugestalten; das geht doch nun aber einmal nicht gut, ohne aus der jetzt bestehenden Gestalt derselben eine andere zu machen...für das Baufach fehlt es noch an einem Direktor, und in allen 4 Fächern können (oder sollen wenigstens) die einmal vorhandenen Mitglieder nicht abgesetzt und in ihren Rechten geschmälert werden, also müssen diese Mitglieder erst aussterben. Mit ihnen zugleich werden wir auch aussterben, und ob dann de Umgestaltung in der gewünschte Art erfolgt, ist die Frage.

told me...” he wrote to the Prussian state functionary Bunsen in 1844, probably referring to his earlier attempts to negotiate a release from court service,<sup>136</sup>

...but only in this way (leaving the court) can I hope to remain in the King’s favor, the present impression excepted, and that is more important to me than anything else. Only in this way can I hope to truly serve the King and his ideas. I shouldn’t be an unenthusiastic, dubious, secretly morose worker for this king. In this state, I’m useless to him, and destroy myself” (Mendelssohn 1997: 408).

Although Mendelssohn could not preserve his professional and artistic agency in Prussia without quitting the court, his relationship with Saxony was more flexible, and ultimately proved more attractive to him. Two interrelated aspects of this relationship distinguished it from the one he had in Berlin. The first were Mendelssohn’s interactions with the Saxon court, for which Mendelssohn was less of a servant than a business partner or contractor; the recipient of an endowment with which he could do what he pleased. The second was the nature of Leipzig itself, a city with a long mercantile history and, accordingly, a set of powerful bourgeois institutions. Indeed, while Berlin was the seat of the Prussian Royal residence, Leipzig was comfortably detached from the Saxon Crown (which resided in Dresden), and was governed by a town council comprised almost entirely of the merchant class (Pieper 1998). Thus, Leipzig provided a kind of “third space” for Mendelssohn between the monarchical order and the more Republican

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<sup>136</sup> Freilich fürchte ich nach diese Erfahrung wieder auf’s Neue, was ich Ew. Exzellenz schon mündlich sagte: dass meines Bleibens auf so gefährlichem Boden, — unter so schwierigen Verhältnissen nicht sein kann. Aber eben dadurch, und nur dadurch, kann ich hoffen, mich in der gute Meinung des Königs, abgesehen von momentanen Eindrücken, zu erhalten, und das ist mir wichtiger als alles andere. Ja nur auf solche Weise kann ich hoffen, dem König und seinen Ideen wahrhaft zu dienen. Ein kühler, zweifelhafter, heimlich verdrossener Arbeiter darf ich diesem Könige nicht sein; so kann er mich nicht brauchen. So bin ich ihm unnütz, und vernichte mich selbst. —

values of the public sphere, allowing Mendelssohn a kind of direct control over the establishment of his conservatory that had not been possible in Berlin.

In many ways, Mendelssohn can be seen to have extended Leipzig's "transitional social reality" into the institutional structure of his conservatory. Indeed, although officially an "imperial" school with underwriting from the Saxon monarchy, the Leipzig Conservatory was funded principally by private tuition and local endowments. Moreover, the school promoted a profoundly Republican social order: open to anyone with adequate musical knowledge, the resources to pay tuition,<sup>137</sup> and facility in the German language, the Conservatory was both "German" and cosmopolitan at the same time, resulting in a substantial international presence, and exceptionally high rates of female and Jewish matriculation (Grotjahn 2005: 314).<sup>138</sup> A "third space" between the old world and the new, Mendelssohn's conservatory led Germans towards the values of a social order that he would not see realized during his lifetime.

### **PART III — Leading Jewish musicians towards integration in "German" society**

As I have shown above, both Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto and his conservatory projects can be understood as examples of this composer's cultural leadership within the German community: while the Violin Concerto can be heard as an effort at forging a specifically "German" model for the genre, the Berlin and Leipzig conservatories can be understood as projects designed to cultivate "German" society. Using Ferdinand David's and Joseph Joachim's central role in these enterprises as a point of departure, I conclude this chapter with an

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<sup>137</sup> It is worth noting that the Saxon King offered six scholarships annually to Saxon students, each of which was renewable for two to three years.

<sup>138</sup> A third of all conservatory students between 1843 and 1868 were women.

exploration of the ways in which Mendelssohn modeled and promoted the “Germanization” of the Jewish community.

As Ruth HaCohen and James Loeffler have stressed in their recent work, Mendelssohn was a member of the first generation of German-speaking Jews to fully participate in, and in some cases, even serve as protagonists of, public musical life (HaCohen 2011). The emergence of such figures — including Mendelssohn, Meyerbeer, and Moscheles —, they argue, was a reflection of multiple sociocultural factors, the most important of which was the rise of the educated bourgeoisie, or *Bildungsbürgertum*, a class of people who understood themselves as “Germans” in a cultural sense rather than in an ethnic or political one. Individuals of Jewish heritage formed a disproportionate portion of this new class. Traditionally denied participation because of their status as cultural “outsiders,” this community enthusiastically embraced the Enlightenment ideal of *Bildung*; the belief that the acquisition of universal knowledge could lead to “social advancement.”<sup>139</sup> Literature — particularly Goethe<sup>140</sup> — formed the backbone of this cultural canon, but music, which came to be seen to a growing extent as the “most German of the arts,” played an increasingly central role (Applegate 2002).

As touched upon in the first chapter of this dissertation, Felix Mendelssohn was not only a product of the German Jewish engagement with *Bildung*, but also the heir apparent to its Jewish pioneer, his grandfather Moses Mendelssohn, and this pedigree suggests that his efforts at establishing conservatories in Berlin and Leipzig were at least partly related to the values of his

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<sup>139</sup> The formulation *bürgerliche Verbesserung (der Juden)* was popularized by Christian Wilhelm Dohm in his 1781 pamphlet of the same name.

<sup>140</sup> As Mendes-Flohr relates, Germans of Jewish heritage came to refer themselves as “Germans by the grace of Goethe” (Mendes-Flohr 1999: 5).

community of birth. On a general level, these efforts can be understood as extending the importance of *Bildung* for German-speaking Jews; a translation, so to speak, of a socially-specific set of values onto the national plane. More specifically, they can be seen — at least in part — as an effort at providing members of the Jewish community with a route to sociocultural stability. Indeed, by opening its doors to all musicians, regardless of nationality, institutions like the Leipzig Conservatory were (implicitly) inviting the participation of Jewish musicians. Moreover, by furnishing secure teaching posts divorced from state regulations, they offered Jewish musicians the opportunity to develop careers in German-speaking Europe without converting to a Christian denomination.

Mendelssohn's well-documented relationships to the Jewish violinists Ferdinand David and Joseph Joachim provides evidence of both his importance to the German-Jewish community, and his investment in nurturing "Jewish" musical talent. Mendelssohn's relationship with the violinist Ferdinand David (1810-73), for its part, demonstrates how central he (and the Mendelssohn family in general) was to contemporary German-Jews. Born in the same Hamburg residence as Mendelssohn, David's career was intimately tied to that of his powerful friend. At the age of 16, when he determined to leave Hamburg for Berlin, David contacted Mendelssohn, who put him up in the family house on the Leipzigerstraße and helped him to obtain a post as a violinist at the *Königstädtischen Theater* (Eckhardt 1888: 9-13). David's musical career paralleled Mendelssohn's closely thereafter: when Mendelssohn left Berlin in 1829, David left as well, moving to Estonia, and touring through the major cities of the Russian Empire, including Moscow and St. Petersburg. When Mendelssohn was appointed *Konzertmeister* of the *Gewandhaus* orchestra in Leipzig in 1835, David returned to Germany to assume first chair of

the ensemble. And in 1843, when the Leipzig Conservatorium opened its doors, it was David who was appointed as the head violin teacher (*Ordentliche Lehrer*), a position he held for the remainder of his life (Phillips 1979: 100). This appointment was soon followed by Mendelssohn's dedication of the Violin Concerto op.64, in 1844/5.

Perhaps even more than with Ferdinand David, the connection of violinist Joseph Joachim's (1831-1907) connection to Mendelssohn reflects his centrality to the contemporary German-Jewish musical community, highlighting his role not only as mentor, but also as a sociocultural model. Born on the edge of the Austrian Empire into an affluent family of Jewish merchants, the talented Joachim was shepherded along by members of the German-Jewish elite, first to Vienna (1839), where he studied with Joseph Böhm, and then to Leipzig (1843), where his Viennese hosts, the Wittgensteins, hoped he could further his gift at the newly-formed Conservatory. Unexpectedly, however, the prodigy never had the chance to enroll in the new institution: upon hearing him play, Mendelssohn is purported to have declared the twelve-year-old too advanced for a regular course of instruction, and to suggest that he limit his studies to private violin lessons (with David) and harmony classes. Mendelssohn would personally take care of the remainder of the young man's education.

What followed Joachim's audition, details the violinist's first biographer, Hans Moser, was an intense musical and intellectual mentorship virtually without parallel in Mendelssohn's life. "Nearly every Sunday," writes Moser,

Mendelssohn played with the boy (Joachim), whom he designated as *Teufelsbraten* whenever he did anything particularly well. These Sundays were the occasion of many a talk on art, the memory of which is ever fresh in Joachim's mind, and he is wont to quote the wise sayings of the master when speaking of bygone days. Above all, Mendelssohn

advised him in the choice of works for study, his favorite motto being — “A true artist should only play the best.” He accustomed Joachim to think first of the music itself, then of his instrument, and to never sacrifice the intention of the composer in order to simplify the execution of any passage. Especially did he exhort his protégé to honor the old masters. “It is inartistic, nay barbaric, to alter anything they have written, even by a single note”...Joachim’s inimitable rubato may be traced to the example of Mendelssohn, who understood perfectly how to blend one subject with another without forcing the passage to the slightest degree...But he did not stop here: he also often accompanied the boy on the pianoforte when he played in private, and almost always when he played in public...” (Moser 1901:46).

In the years before his death in 1847, Mendelssohn would play a central role in catapulting Joachim onto the international stage, inviting him to perform at his home in Berlin, sending him to London with introductions to important figures in the musical community, and conducting the orchestra for his first celebrated performance of Beethoven’s Violin Concerto with the London Philharmonic in 1844.

Soon after Mendelssohn’s death in 1847, Joachim left Leipzig for Weimar (1848), and developed the musical relationships that he is best known for, including his close friendship with Johannes Brahms. But as Moser’s (perhaps overly) sentimental narrative indicates, Mendelssohn remained a central model for Joachim. One of Joachim’s Mendelssohnian inheritances was musical: a sense of respect for the past, and a dedication to canon formation.<sup>141</sup> But part of the inheritance was also pedagogical. Indeed, in many ways, Joachim can be understood as the heir to the Prussian “national” conservatory that Mendelssohn had helped to outline during his residency in Berlin. Assigned to the directorship of the Berliner *Musikhochschule* when it finally

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<sup>141</sup> Karen Leistra-Jones explores this aspect of Joachim’s approach in her recent article “Staging Authenticity: Joachim, Brahms, and the Politics of *Werktreue* Performance” (2013).

took shape on the eve of German nationhood (1869), the great violinist would ensure the “Festigung des deutschen Nationalcharakters” for the next 40 years; an appointment that can be understood as “the high point of (Jewish) acculturation in the field of music.” (Borchard 2009: 48).<sup>142</sup> Like Ferdinand David before him, Mendelssohn had paved the way for Joachim to integrate into — and even lead — German musical life.

### **An unforeseen destination: the Violin Concerto and the “Jewish” violin**

And yet, if Mendelssohn served as a model — and perhaps even a guide — for the acculturation of “Jewish” violinists like David and Joachim into “German” society, the outcome of this process had decidedly unforeseen consequences, transforming “German” art music into a “Jewish” craft as much as it converted “Jewish” musicians into “German” ones. Mendelssohn’s Violin Concerto Op.64 serves as an excellent case study for this phenomenon, not only because of its central role in the emergence of the concept of the violin as a “Jewish national instrument,” but because of the degree to which it has served as a model for Western conceptions of the “Jewish” musical sound. Indeed, while David, and especially Joachim, may have come to be understood as “German” icons during their lifetimes, the majority of the Jewish individuals that they inspired to engage in Western musical culture were not seen in this light. Rather than

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<sup>142</sup> Joachims nahezu vierzigjährige Leitung der Berlin Musikhochschule markiert gewissermassen den Höhepunkt des Akkulturationsprozesses im Bereich Musik. Als Hochschuldirektor in Berlin repräsentierte er die einzige staatliche Institution der Musikausbildung, und diese Ausbildungsstätte stand für ein bestimmtes kulturpolitisches Konzept. Dieses Konzept wurde auch von anderen Musikern und Musikerinnen getragen, in erste Linie wäre da der Pianist und Dirigent Hans von Bülow zu nennen.

becoming “German” musicians, Jewish violin virtuosi transformed their instrument into an icon of “Jewish” identity.

The association of Western art music with “Jewish” musicians over the course of the twentieth century needs little reinforcement.<sup>143</sup> Throughout Western Europe, Imperial Russia/USSR, and the United States of this period, individuals of Jewish heritage were vastly over-represented in conservatories, orchestras, and recital halls: close to fifty-percent of students at the *fin de siècle* St. Petersburg Conservatory were of Jewish extraction, and there is everything to indicate that the situation was similar in Germany, France, and the United States (Loeffler 2010). “Jewish” musicians in these societies were composers, conductors, and virtuosi of all types, but perhaps no single musical symbol represented them more than the violin. It is not merely that many of the century’s great violin virtuosi — Jascha Heifetz, David Oistrakh, Yehudi Menuhin, and Isaac Stern among them — had Jewish backgrounds, the trope reached well into popular culture, culminating, in the United States, anyway, in the smash-hit musical *The Fiddler on the Roof*, in which the *Shtetl* patriarch Tevye maintained Jewish “tradition” with a violin in its hand.

In more essentialist narratives of Jewish musical history, the prevalence of Jewish violinists in the twentieth century has been understood as a mark of historical continuity: Jews, ran this narrative, had been *Klezmorim* folk fiddlers for centuries, and thus naturally gravitated towards the violin as they assimilated into the modern world. There may, indeed, be a degree of truth to this story, especially in the Russian context, but, as James Loeffler points out, the idea of the “fiddler on the roof” seems to have emerged with the paintings of Marc Chagall — not

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<sup>143</sup> In the twenty-first century, this association may very well have been transferred to East Asian musicians.

necessarily the *Shtetl* — a point reinforced by Sander Gilman (2005), whose essay on the Jewish performance of identity places the advent of the “Jewish violinist” solidly in the twentieth century. Moreover, the idea of a translation of *Klezmorim* tradition into Western musical culture seems overtly refuted by the musical identities of the first generation of public musicians of Jewish heritage, — including Moscheles, Mendelssohn, Meyerbeer —, all of whom were composers and pianists; none of whom were known for their command of bowed instruments of any kind.

Indeed, the first violinists of Jewish heritage on the historical record — Ferdinand David and Joseph Joachim — have much less to do with *Klezmorim* than with Felix Mendelssohn, a situation that would seem to link the idea of the “Jewish violinist” more to the Jewish aspirations for universal “German” culture than the persistence of an ethnic musical tradition. In very general terms, the profound influence of Mendelssohn’s conservatory projects on cultural entrepreneurs of Jewish heritage like Julius Stern (who founded Berlin’s Stern Conservatory in 1850) and Anton Rubinstein (who founded the St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1862), suggests that Mendelssohn had contributed to a sense that musical training could provide a road to sociocultural acceptance for Jews. A brief pedagogical genealogy of some of the twentieth century’s most celebrated “Jewish” violin virtuosos, meanwhile, indicates that this road came to be associated with the violin through Mendelssohn’s violinist protégés: Yehudi Menuhin and Isaac Stern were both students of Louis Persinger, himself a product of David’s violin school at the

Leipzig Conservatory. The lineage of Jascha Heifetz (who played Ferdinand David’s violin) and Itzhak Perlman, for their parts, can be traced to Leopold Auer, a student of Joseph Joachim.<sup>144</sup>

A similar conceptual reversal is worth considering with respect to the sound of Mendelssohn’s Violin Concerto, a piece that constituted the backbone of the repertory for violinists from Ferdinand David onwards. For contemporary ears, anyway, the opening theme of the *Allegro* of this work exudes a “Jewish” tone; a melancholy nostalgia highlighted by its minor mode lyricism, particularly the sobbing b6-5-4-1, b6-5-4-#7 motif, which calls to mind theatrical scenes from Eastern European *Shtetl* life: the despair of poverty; the bitter cold of winter wind; perhaps the sung prayer of a *Hazzan*.<sup>145</sup>



Figure 5.4: The “Jewish” theme of Mendelssohn’s Violin Concerto.

Mendelssohn, of course, would have been unfamiliar with these associations: the composer, who died nearly half a century before Jewish artists and literati began to romanticize *Ostjuden* (Eastern European Jews), is unlikely to have ever seen a *Shtetl* (German or otherwise), and would have been indisposed to write music about it if he had. Nor, interestingly,

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<sup>144</sup> Perlman’s lineage is several generations removed from Joachim: he was taught by Ivan Galamian, a student of Konstantin Mostras, who was a student of Auer.

<sup>145</sup> Max Brod, for example, claimed that a “Jewish tone — albeit used unconsciously — can be heard clearly, pervading the essence of the work rather than its details” (Moricz 2008:7).

The image shows a page of musical notation for an excerpt from the *Allegro* of Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 5. The score is written for violin and piano. The key signature is A minor (three sharps: F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/4. The top system shows the violin part with dynamics such as *f*, *fp*, and *p*. The piano part includes a section marked **TUTTI** with the instruction *f col arco cresco.* The notation includes various rhythmic patterns, slurs, and dynamic markings throughout both staves.

Figure 5.5: Excerpt from the *Allegro* of Mozart’s Violin Concerto No.5.

is the *Allegro* likely to have been intended as a reference to other “exotic” ethnic groups that we now associate with the Romantic era: Liszt did not begin writing “Hungarian” music until the late 1840s (the first *Hungarian Rhapsody* appeared in 1846), and Brahms’ *Hungarian Dances* were not published until the late 1860s. What, then, did Mendelssohn intend with his *Allegro*?

One possible answer to this riddle, I posit, can be found in the last movement of Mozart’s Violin Concerto No.5 (K.219), where an A minor *Allegro* is sandwiched between two sections in A major headed *Tempo di menuetto*. In addition to the minor mode of its melody, with the attendant stress on the “exotic” b6-5, this *Allegro* shares several crucial aspects with the first

Musical score for the first system of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto, Allegro. The score is written for piano, violin, and cello/bass. The piano part features a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth notes. Dynamics include *p*, *cresc.*, and *f*. A rehearsal mark "M. B. 18." is present.

Musical score for the second system of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto, Allegro. The score continues the piano, violin, and cello/bass parts. Dynamics include *f*, *mf*, and *fp*. A page number "3" is visible in the upper right corner.

Figure 5.6: Excerpt from the *Allegro* of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto.

movement of Mendelssohn's Concerto: its duple meter, and its powerful tutti marching rhythms, which interrupt chromatic scalar passages in the violin. Indeed, it would seem that, more than a "Jewish" opening to his Concerto, Mendelssohn intended to capture a militant, "Turkish" flair; a very different "exotic" than the Eastern European sounds that we are tempted to hear today.<sup>146</sup>

On one level, Mendelssohn's use of musical "otherness" — Jewish, Turkish, or something else altogether — in his Violin Concerto suggests an alternate reading of his work, one in which alterity is integrated into society, or even serves to positively influence the social world. Here, however, I want to stress the paradoxical nature of this concerto's semantic transformation over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Written as a vehicle for the participation of Jewish musicians in German society, Mendelssohn's composition was ultimately heard in a "Jewish" light, serving less as a vehicle for social integration than as a statement of fundamental ethnic and historical alterity. This "conversion to Judaism" was not unique to Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto. Rather, as I explore in the epilogue of this dissertation, it was indicative of a broader trend; a process intimately tied to the profound sociocultural changes experienced by German-speaking Europeans in the century after Mendelssohn's death.

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<sup>146</sup> This conjecture was inspired by Jonathan Bellman's exploration of the genesis of the *Styl hongrois* (1991).

**CHAPTER 6: EPILOGUE — *DAS JUDEMENTUM IN DER MUSIK*, OR THE  
CONVERSION OF MENDELSSOHN TO JUDAISM<sup>147</sup>**

In the majority of this dissertation, I have been concerned with demonstrating the ways that Mendelssohn used music as a vehicle for political engagement. Compositions like the *Scottish Symphony*, the incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the “Prussian” sacred music, and the Violin Concerto, I have argued, not only reflected the perspectives of the Restoration-era Prussian world in which they were created, but were also intended to *influence* that world; to underwrite and critique sociopolitical structures; to model alternative approaches to national and ethnic identity.

And yet, if Mendelssohn’s music was aimed at assisting in the realization of a site-specific sociopolitical agenda, this agenda — and the musical language in which it was expressed — quickly lost relevance for German-speakers following his death in 1847. Indeed, the sociopolitical changes induced by the Revolution of 1848, combined with the introduction of new forms and techniques of musical expression, promptly obscured Mendelssohn’s authorial intentions. Over the course of the following century, his music would be radically reheard; its semantic contours fused with the hermeneutic horizons<sup>148</sup> of listeners who shared few, if any, of the social and artistic reference points that Mendelssohn and his audiences took for granted.

As touched upon in Chapters 4 and 5, the emergence of a “Jewish” hearing of Mendelssohn’s music was among the most central of these (posthumous) semantic

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<sup>147</sup> This subtitle is borrowed from Brian Eatock’s book chapter of the same name (2012).

<sup>148</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer theorized the hermeneutic experience as the fusion of two “horizons”: the content of a work and the historically-informed prejudices of the observer (Gadamer 2003).

transformations. Scholars have placed this “conversion to Judaism” at several points on the historical timeline. For some, it took place in the late nineteenth century, an outgrowth of Richard Wagner’s *Das Judentum in der Musik* and the anti-Semitic movement that embraced his work (Fischer 2000a; 2000b; Eatock 2012). For others, meanwhile, it has been understood as a twentieth-century phenomenon; the direct result of a National Socialist cultural policy that excluded Mendelssohn from the “German” canon (Hirsch 2011) and galvanized a generation of postwar scholars to hear his oeuvre in a “Jewish” light (Sposato 2006).<sup>149</sup>

In this epilogue, I contribute a brief addendum to this reception history by exploring the competing claims about Mendelssohn’s “Jewishness” voiced in two Weimar-era texts, both of which bore the “Wagnerian” title *Das Judentum in der Musik*. On one level, this exploration demonstrates the ubiquity of racist musical discourse among German-speakers during the interwar period (Moricz 2008). More importantly, it reinforces the tremendous stakes of music in social life; the way in which debates over musical meaning can be the sites of struggles for self-understanding, belonging, and — ultimately — life and death. While Mendelssohn’s music may not have retained the political message that he intended, it continued to play a central role in German political life well into the twentieth century.

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<sup>149</sup> As Sposato writes: “Perhaps out of a need to compensate for the Nazi defamation campaign or perhaps because challenging Mendelssohn’s Jewishness would have been seen as furthering that campaign, Mendelssohn’s mark of shame was refashioned as a badge of honor...” (Sposato 2006: 5).

The Weimar-era episode of Mendelssohn reception history I recount here centers on the publications of Heinrich Berl (1926) and Simon Levy (1930), both of which were entitled *Das Judentum in der Musik*.<sup>150</sup> The two books present very different philo-Semitic hearings of this composer's work: while Berl embraced Mendelssohn's essential "Jewish" alterity, claiming that the composer's "oriental" lyricism allowed him to positively transform the Western musical tradition, Levy argued that Mendelssohn should be understood as a "Jewish German"; a figure whose compositions reflected the German character and constituted a fundamental building block of the German canon.

As the Wagnerian titles of Berl's and Levy's texts indicate, both books were written against a backdrop of increasingly radical anti-Semitic activity in German-speaking Europe. Indeed, although often celebrated for its social and artistic liberalism, the Weimar Republic was also a hotbed of reactionary fundamentalism; a community in which a vocal minority (incensed by the unexpected loss of the First World War and the crushing reparations that followed) turned to anti-Semitic diatribe: Germany's capitulation, it was claimed, had been the work of Jewish spies (the *Dolchstoßlegende*); the Weimar Republic a "Jewish" experiment (*Judenrepublik*) intended to bring the "people" to their knees. As a substantial body of recent scholarship has shown, these reactionary attitudes extended into the musical world, where figures like Hans Pfitzner claimed German culture to be under attack from international Jewish influences, including atonal music and Jazz (Levi 1994; Potter 1998; Hirsch 2011).

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<sup>150</sup> Thanks to Irina Nowak and Uli Wyrwa for introducing me to these and other materials at the *Zentrum für Antisemitismusforschung*.

Given his important role in the late-nineteenth-century anti-Semitic movement — not to mention his iconic status within European cultural life in general — it is no surprise that Richard Wagner provided a principle source of inspiration for Weimar-era anti-Semitic discourse. A look at the entry for “Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy” in the anti-Semitic Encyclopedia *Sigilla Veri* (Ekkehard 1929) shows the extent to which this discourse was employed — and radicalized — with respect to Felix Mendelssohn. While Wagner saw Mendelssohn’s centrality to German musical life as a *reflection* of the impotence of the age; a sign of the decay of national art, the *Sigilla Veri* portrayed him as a *Kulturzer-setzer*; an *active* destroyer of German culture. While Wagner saw Mendelssohn as a “cultured Jew”; a “tragic” figure who remained essentially foreign despite his attempts to assimilate, the *Sigilla Veri* painted him as an unsavory character; a dishonest and aloof “cosmopolitan” at odds with the German people. While Wagner accused Mendelssohn of creative impotence, claiming that his “trivial” and “sentimental” music did not resonate with the “soul” of the German people, the *Sigilla Veri* asserted that he had “stolen” and debased contemporary German works, suggesting that compositions like *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and the *Scottish Symphony* were mere take-offs of those by “German” musicians like Weber and Beethoven (Ekkehard 1929; Fischer 2000a; 200b).

One of the Weimar-era reactions to the kind of radicalized anti-Semitic discourse expressed in the *Sigilla Veri* was to embrace — and celebrate — Mendelssohn’s alterity as a “Jewish” musician, a strategy spearheaded by publications like Heinrich Berl’s *Das Judentum in der Musik* (1926). A compilation of articles published in the Jewish magazines *Der Jude*<sup>151</sup> and

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<sup>151</sup> *Der Jude* was a monthly cultural-zionist (*kulturzionistisch*) magazine with a distribution of between three and five thousand copies. The magazine was printed in Berlin and Vienna from 1916 to 1928.

<i>Das Judentum in der Musik</i> (1926)	<i>Der Jude</i>	<i>Menorah</i>
“Das Judentum in der abendländischen Musik” (85-103)	1921 Issue 8: 495-505	
“Zum Problem einer jüdischen Musik” (137-174)	1923 Issue 5: 309-320	
“Die Wiederherstellbarkeit der althebräischen Vokalmusik” (189-218)	1923 Issue 9: 528-544	
“Bearbeitung jüdischer Melodien” (103-123)	1924 Issue 10: 618-624	
		“Die Musik der antiken Juden” (1928) Issue 5: 272-282
		“Die Juden in der romantischen Musik: Meyerbeer - Mendelssohn - Offenbach” (1929) Issue 9-10: 499-508
		“Die Juden in der modernen Musik: Bizet - Mahler - Schoenberg” (1930) Issue 5-6: 265-275

**Table 8: Heinrich Berl’s Jewish music publications over the course of the 1920s.**

*Menorah*<sup>152</sup> over the course of the 1920s, Berl’s book effectively recapitulated Wagner’s arguments with respect to “Jewish” musicians, claiming that they possessed a unique “lyrical” spiritual essence fundamentally foreign to the German world. And yet, argued Berl, Jewish difference had not been a destructive force in German culture. Quite the opposite: it had allowed Jews to push the German tradition forward; to create new musical styles. Mendelssohn was a

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<sup>152</sup> Marketed as an “illustrated journal for the Jewish family,” *Menorah* advocated for a cultural homogenization of the Jewish community. The trilingual publication appeared monthly from 1923 to 1932.

case in point: fusing the Western “harmonic” tradition with his “oriental” lyrical spirit, argued Berl, Mendelssohn’s music embodied the “cornerstone of the Romantic, the truest and richest in the genre symphony as in the folksong and children’s song” (Berl 1926: 90).

Understandably, Berl’s essentialist reading of Jewish musicians in general, and Mendelssohn’s music in particular, was greeted with some ambivalence by individuals within the German-speaking Jewish community. On the one hand, Berl’s conception of a Jewish “race” with an “oriental” musical essence must have appealed to the editors and readership of the Jewish periodicals in which he published his work, and seems to have closely mirrored the claims of contemporary scholars<sup>153</sup> like Arno Nadel, whose 1923 article in *Der Jude* identified the recitative, diatonicism, and parallelism of synagogue song as

not merely something learned or abstract, but the essence of Jewish music and, in truth, the Jewish soul overall, as it has been expressed for thousands of years and will be in the foreseeable future. The recitative corresponds to the unbound essence of the Jewish soul, the diatonic-melodic to its eternally peaceful singing and humming...the parallelisms to the philosophical, questioning and answering, the meditateness of its mysticism... (Nadel 1923: 235).<sup>154</sup>

That said, many individuals — among them, several well-known scholarly figures — had little patience for Berl’s theses. In a terse article in *Der Morgen*, the music historian Alfred Einstein

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<sup>153</sup> Moricz (2008) identifies Berl as an inspiration for the Jewish music scholar Alexander Ringer (1921-2002).

<sup>154</sup> Mit diesen Charakteren ist nicht nur etwa Gelehrtes oder Abstraktes festgelegt, sondern das Wesen der jüdischen Musik und in Wahrheit der jüdischen Seele überhaupt, wie sie sich seit Jahrtausenden äußert und für absehbare Zeit äußern kann. Das Rezitativische entspricht dem ungebundenen Wesen der jüdischen Seele, das Melodisch-Diatonische ihrem ewigen stillen Singen und Summen...das Parallelistische ihrem Philosophieren, Fragen und Antworten, das Meditative ihrer Mystik... (Nadel 1923: 235).

roundly rejected the idea of a Jewish musical essence, snapping that “nothing about ‘Jewishness in music’ will be discussed here — nothing about this endlessly and fruitlessly debated problem that is repeatedly stirred up in the age of anti-Semitism whenever a Jew writes music” (Einstein 1927).<sup>155</sup> Music theorist Rudolf Réti’s review of *Das Judentum in der Musik* recapitulated this sentiment with brutal sarcasm: mimicking Berl’s over-enthusiastic prose, Réti opened his review by celebrating the book in vastly exaggerated terms; then proceeded to demolish its argumentation, highlighting its a-historicity, superficiality, and dearth of musical analysis. *Das Judentum in der Musik*, concluded Réti, was a “book of our time,” an epithet that condemned far more than it celebrated (Réti 1927).

While writers like Heinrich Berl strove to transform anti-Semitic rhetoric about Mendelssohn into an expression of a positive “Jewishness,” other Weimar-era individuals overtly negated the binary between “Jewishness” and “Germanness,” portraying the composer as a Jewish representative of “German” culture. This perspective is powerfully reflected in Simon Levy’s “self-defense essay” *Das Judentum in der Musik* (1930). A collection of historical portraits of “Jewish” musicians written by a medical doctor and musical amateur, Levy’s book systematically refutes Wagner-inspired claims, portraying Mendelssohn as an active and contributing member of German society; “a man, who from his first appearance until today, was

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<sup>155</sup> In a 1927 article in *Der Jude*, Alfred Einstein rejected discussion of a “Jewish” musical essence, proposing instead to explore the ways that Jewish characters were portrayed in the Western art music canon. “Nicht vom ‘Judentum in der Musik’ soll hier gesprochen werden — nicht von diesem endlos und fruchtlos erörterten Problem, das im Zeitalter des Antisemitismus immer wieder aufgerührt wird, so oft ein Jude eine Musik schreibt...Nein, unser Ziel ist bescheidener... Wir wollen versuchen darzustellen, wie der Jude sich in der Musik darstellt, wie ihn, durch der Zeiten Bildersaal hindurch, die Phantasie des Musikers anschaut...” (Einstein 1927: 590).

and remains one of the most radiant stars in the musical heavens, for whom the heart of the (German) people beats...” (Levy 1930: 29).

Levy’s “defense” of Mendelssohn began with a vindication of his “German” character, and branched quickly into an exploration of his musical accomplishments. The grandson of the “universal” philosopher, Moses Mendelssohn, he argued, Felix had grown up a Christian, and had developed important ties to Zelter and Goethe, mentors who had inspired the composer to duty towards his “spiritual homeland” (Levy 1930: 29). This German background, argued Levy, translated into musical works that embodied the national spirit (Levy 1930: 33). In response to Wagnerian accusations of Mendelssohnian “sentimentality,” Levy retorted that Mendelssohn’s musical style corresponded to “the lyrical exuberance of contemporary poetry” and “sang from the heart of the (German) people” (Levy 1930: 34).<sup>156</sup> Accusations of creative impotence, meanwhile, were countered with a long list of compositions and accomplishments, including *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (the “point of departure” for a novel “elfin style”), the Violin Concerto (the “most played in all the violin literature”), the concert overtures (Mendelssohn was the “founder” of the idea of “symphonic poetry”), and the revival of the *St. Matthew Passion*. Like Mendelssohn, Levy concluded, German Jews stewarded German culture out of “a feeling of

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<sup>156</sup> Man hat Mendelssohn eine gewisse Sentimentalität in seinen Liedern und Chorwerken vorgeworfen. Zum Teil besteht dieser Vorwurf zu Recht, wenn man auch bedenken muss, dass diese Sentimentalität dem lyrischen Überschwang der zeitgenössischen Dichtung entsprach. Sicher ist, dass er mit dieser sogenannten Sentimentalität doch aus dem Herzen des Volkes heraus sang, in dem er dankbaren Widerhall fand. Die Werke Mendelssohns...leben eben im deutschen Bewusstsein...Freuen wir also ruhig des Besitzes dieses deutschen Künstlers” (Levy 1930: 34).

duty” and “inner solidarity” to their homeland; one that could be denied in the present moment of “hate and self-mutilation,” but would ultimately be recognized.<sup>157</sup>

In contrast to Heinrich Berl’s text, Simon Levy’s *Das Judentum in der Musik* does not appear to have generated a response in the intellectual community, Jewish or otherwise. But if it had, it is unlikely to have been less ambivalent than Berl’s. Indeed, if Levy’s text reinforces any single theme, it is the degree to which racist thinking had permeated the social thought of the Weimar-era musical world (Moricz 1998): Levy’s “Christian,” “German” Mendelssohn was, after all, still somehow included in a book about “Jews.” Why, Alfred Einstein might have asked, include him in the book in the first place?

That said, my reason for exploring the work of Berl and Levy at the conclusion of this dissertation has little to do with the effectiveness or influence of their publications: both authors were (and remain) obscure; neither was a music scholar; neither was a great intellect. Rather, I have taken a perfunctory look at the context and content of these two books because of how clearly and unequivocally they demonstrate the stakes of musical discourse for the broader sociopolitical world. As hardly needs emphasizing, the Weimar-era debate over the “Jewishness” of Felix Mendelssohn’s music was only partly about music; it was also about the boundaries of “Jewishness” and “Germanness” and where (and if) those boundaries crossed. But music

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<sup>157</sup> Wir hoffen und glauben behaupten zu dürfen, dass dem Teil, den die deutschen Juden zu der Verwaltung deutschen Kulturgutes, zu der Pflege deutscher Kunst beigetragen haben, ein inneres Verpflichtungsgefühl, innere Verbundenheit zugrunde liegt, dass die Dankbarkeit, mit der viele von ihnen ihrem Lande und ihrer Kunst dienten und dienen, jener schönen Selbstverständlichkeit entspringt, die der Geprüfte und Befreite vor allen Anderen auf dem Altare der wahren Heimatliebe als Opfer darbringt, als ein Opfer, das wohl in den Zeiten des Hasses und der Selbstverstümmelung vorübergehend verkannt und herabgesetzt, nie aber vor den wahren Richter verworfen werden kann (Levy 1930: 60).

provided a forum for discussion about these issues, and a grim preview of the decade to come.

The National Socialist ban on Mendelssohn's music, after all, would be accompanied by a ban on *actual* Jewish musicians: Berl, who was married to a Jewish wife, was forced into hiding in Baden-Baden;<sup>158</sup> Einstein and Réti fled to the United States; Nadel was murdered in Auschwitz.

As I continue with my work on Felix Mendelssohn and his music, I am interested in supplementing the hermeneutic interpretations of authorial intention contained in Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5 of this dissertation with additional documentation of the ways in which audiences have responded to Mendelssohn's work at different places and times. As the brief exegesis above demonstrates, a look at Weimar-era German-speaking listeners may be a good place to begin. Equally productive case studies could include examinations of Mendelssohn reception in early-twentieth-century Tel Aviv, the nascent German Democratic Republic, or perhaps even in the missionary communities of the English-speaking colonial world.

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<sup>158</sup> In the afterward to his 1946 chronicle *Das Badener Tagebuch*, Berl details his personal situation during the National Socialist era: "Als die Nationalsozialisten zur Macht gelangen waren, stand der Verfasser vor einem Trümmerfeld seiner Bemühungen: durch seine sogenannte nichtarische Ehe wurde er vollkommen aus der Bahn des Schaffens geworfen. Er floh aus Karlsruhe nach Baden-Baden, entschlossen niemals vor der Gewalt zu kapitulieren... So mühsam und schleppend das Experiment war: Es ist gelungen. Die internationale Atmosphäre des Bades hat ihn und seine Familie vor der physischen Vernichtung bewahrt" (Berl 1946: 413).

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