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Introduction

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If the invective of Nietzsche and Shaw is to be taken as an endorsement of the lasting quality of an artist, then Mendelssohn is exemplary in taking pride of place beside Tennyson and Brahms in the canon of great nineteenth-century artists.¹ The publication of *Mendelssohn Perspectives* in 2012 is a timely celebration of this ‘coming of age’ for Mendelssohn research. It appears at a time when the first complete edition of Mendelssohn’s music, recommenced during the sesquicentenary year of 1997,² continues apace, while the first comprehensive catalogue of his music and the first four of a planned 12 volumes of his complete correspondence are now in print.³ This unimpeded view, built as it is upon the impressive scholarship of the last half century, allows this volume to celebrate multifaceted and engaging perspectives on Mendelssohn studies, free of the onus to rehabilitate his image.

When the first significant collection of essays on Mendelssohn appeared in 1974 – *Das Problem Mendelssohn* – Carl Dahlhaus scarcely dared to hope for a ‘Mendelssohn Renaissance’.⁴ Although not without its own difficulties, *Das Problem Mendelssohn* succeeded in carving out the topics that have since become standard fare in Mendelssohn studies: travel, correspondence, *Lied ohne Worte* style and lyricism, classicism, historicism, tradition and so forth – but not, in any systematic way at least, religion. Mendelssohn’s music was worth arguing about, even fighting over, Dahlhaus boldly claimed.⁵

¹ Shaw wrote a considerable amount on the music of Brahms. He famously revised and apologized for his ‘hasty (not to say silly) description of Brahms’s music’ when his criticism was published in book form in 1936. Of the earlier invective is a description of the ‘intolerable tedium’ (Shaw (1981), 2: 67) of Brahms’s music which he considered to be ‘a prodigiously elaborated compound of incoherent reminiscences’ (Shaw 1: 540). He criticized the ‘kid-glove gentility’ and ‘conventional sentimentality’ of Mendelssohn’s music. On Nietzsche’s view of Mendelssohn, see Botstein (1991), particularly 7; and of Brahms, see Thatcher (1973).

² Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1997–).

³ Mendelssohn Bartholdy (2008–).

⁴ ‘Von einer Mendelssohn-Renaissance zu sprechen, wäre zweifellos eine große Übertreibung (also schlechter Stil, wie er Mendelssohn verhaßt gewesen ist).’ Dahlhaus (1974), 7.

⁵ ‘Über den Komponisten Mendelssohn kann man sich streiten, und zwar wissenschaftlich streiten.’ Dahlhaus (1974), 9.

In the following decades, as Mendelssohn studies gained momentum, collected-essays volumes began to appear with greater regularity. *Mendelssohn and Schumann: Essays on their Music and Its Context* appeared in 1984, following an international conference hosted in North Carolina by R. Larry Todd and Jon W. Finson.⁶ Nearly another decade elapsed before the next two English-language volumes appeared in quick succession: *Mendelssohn and His World* (1991)⁷ and *Mendelssohn Studies* (1992),⁸ both edited by Todd. In his preface to *Mendelssohn Studies*, Todd could already celebrate ‘a healthy resurgence of interest’ in the life and music of Mendelssohn.⁹

German scholarship kept up the pace in the 1990s with volumes edited by Rudolf Elvers, Hans-Günter Klein and Christian Martin Schmidt, to mention a few representatives of a group of scholars who are still regarded as leaders in international Mendelssohn studies.¹⁰ The focus on Berlin-based symposia continued in *Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy Kongreß-Bericht Berlin 1994* (ed. Christian Martin Schmidt, 1997),¹¹ and shifted to Leipzig in *Dem Stolz und Der Zierde Unserer Stadt: Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy und Leipzig* (ed. Wilhelm Seidel, 2003).¹² Both volumes marked the 150th anniversary of Mendelssohn’s death – the first volume timed to appear in 1997, and the other the result of a conference organized by Kurt Masur in 1997 to celebrate the composer’s extensive contributions to the musical and cultural life of Leipzig. Mendelssohn was clearly taking root firmly in the international academic discourse.

Writing in 2001, John Michael Cooper recognized that much remained to be done ‘before the general body of knowledge and information concerning [the Mendelssohns] can begin to rival the general quality of scholarship concerning many of their contemporaries’.¹³ Scholars rose to the challenge, and the first decade of the twenty-first century saw an explosion of work on Mendelssohn (including the definitive biography for the new century by R. Larry Todd, *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music*, in 2003).¹⁴ Douglass Seaton, in the preface to *The Mendelssohn Companion* (2001),¹⁵ was able to quietly celebrate a full Mendelssohn renaissance, but, like Cooper, noted that much important source study and critical evaluation remained to be done. By 2002, Cooper and Julie D. Prandi offered something new: a collection of essays devoted not just to Felix but also, in part, to his sister Fanny. They hoped

⁶ Todd and Finson (1984).

⁷ Todd (1991a).

⁸ Todd (1992b).

⁹ Todd (1992a), xi.

¹⁰ For a more complete listing of collected-essays volumes, in both German and English, see Cooper (2011), 1–6.

¹¹ Christian Martin Schmidt (1997).

¹² Seidel (2003).

¹³ Cooper (2001a), 3.

¹⁴ Todd (2003).

¹⁵ Seaton (2001a).

that their volume, *The Mendelssohns: Their Music in History*, would contribute to building an ‘edifice’ on the ‘foundations’ of scholarship that had been established in the previous three decades,¹⁶ and grappled with some of the newer, more controversial, emphases in Mendelssohn scholarship, including race and gender.

In Peter Mercer-Taylor’s *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn* (2004),¹⁷ the troubling sociological, cultural, religious, and biographical issues which had been simmering just below the surface of the commentary moved to the foreground: invoking the full century of Mendelssohn’s troubled reception history, from Nietzsche’s ‘schöne Zwischenfall’ to Dahlhaus’s ‘Problem Mendelssohn’ and beyond, Mercer-Taylor asserted that ‘Mendelssohn has proven one of music history’s great wall-dwellers’.¹⁸ Mendelssohn scholarship was further bolstered by *Mendelssohn in Performance* (ed. Siegwart Reichwald, 2008), which saw Christopher Hogwood hail a ‘sea-change’ in that Mendelssohn’s output merited a volume dedicated entirely to performance studies.¹⁹ In *Mendelssohn Essays* – the first collection of essays on Mendelssohn by a single authority – R. Larry Todd looked forward to the bicentenary of Mendelssohn’s birth and was optimistic for the future of Mendelssohn scholarship, pointing out: ‘It now seems clear from a postmodern perspective that his image has been largely rehabilitated, as musicians and scholars have returned to this paradoxically familiar yet unfamiliar European classical composer, and have begun viewing him from new perspectives.’²⁰

Mendelssohn Perspectives, this latest instalment in this tradition of collected-essays volumes, is informed by critical engagement with a wide range of source materials. The volume includes not only traditional musical analysis-based studies, but also embraces lines of inquiry that are crucial to other areas of the humanities, bringing these approaches to bear on historical and interpretive studies of the Mendelssohns. The result is an interdisciplinary approach that intersects with subjects such as biography and culture, issues of historicism, German literature and aesthetics, gender and race, and philosophy and science.

I

Mendelssohn’s Jewish heritage has interested writers since his own lifetime, and has fuelled controversial scholarly discussion since the 1990s.²¹ Each of the chapters in Part I, ‘Mendelssohn’s Jewishness’, contributes new insights to this conversation by introducing new documentary evidence. Marian Wilson Kimber

¹⁶ Cooper and Prandi (2002), v.

¹⁷ Mercer-Taylor (2004).

¹⁸ Mercer-Taylor (2004), 1.

¹⁹ Reichwald (2008), vii.

²⁰ Todd (2008b), xi.

²¹ See Sposato (1998); Botstein (1998): 210–19; Steinberg (1999): 31–44; Botstein (1999): 45–50; Sposato (2006); and Cooper (2007a).

addresses phrenology and physiognomy in the nineteenth century, and explores Mendelssohn's reception in an age where physiognomic ideals held great currency and had an especially potent influence on Jewish stereotyping in portraiture. Sinéad Dempsey-Garratt addresses the misconceptions surrounding Mendelssohn's posthumous reception by revealing antecedents to the key themes articulated in Wagner's attack on Jewish composers in his *Das Judentum in der Musik*. Nicole Grimes offers a close reading of Eduard Hanslick's critical responses to Viennese censorship of Mendelssohn's secular cantata *Die erste Walpurgisnacht* and a correlation of Hanslick's condemnation of this censorship with his equally forceful condemnation of Wagner's 1869 republication of *Das Judentum in der Musik*. Colin Eatock contrasts the changing attitudes towards Jews – including social conditions, legal status and the roles they played in public life – in Britain and Germany during Mendelssohn's lifetime and the Victorian period. In England throughout the 1830s and 1840s, Mendelssohn was not viewed in any significant sense as a Jew; but after his death, English periodicals increasingly viewed him as Jewish.

II

The three chapters in Part II, 'Between Tradition and Innovation', challenge the received view of Mendelssohn as a conservative mired in dead traditions and offer new ways to understand Mendelssohn's relationship to the music of the past – he was not a passive receptacle for tradition, but an active catalyst for stylistic development in the nineteenth century. John Michael Cooper attacks head on the tendency to view Mendelssohn as a passéistic composer, challenging the notion that Hector Berlioz – the epitome of a frontier-pushing, eccentric Romantic – was completely at odds with the aesthetic outlook and compositional practice of the highly trained and elegant Mendelssohn. Focussing on two case studies of Mendelssohn's 'Italian' Symphony and *Die erste Walpurgisnacht*, the findings of this chapter profoundly challenge and alter the manner in which we frame these two composers in the tradition/innovation dichotomy. Julian Horton and Paul Wingfield embark on a large-scale exploration of Mendelssohn's compositional process in sonata form. This formidable study aims to establish grounds for understanding Mendelssohn's sonata forms that are derived from the empirical evidence of his complete *oeuvre* and its function within the aesthetics of high classicism, rather than in terms of their proximity to an abstracted normative paradigm such as that found in the sonata theory of James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy. Trading the composer's desk for the conductor's podium, Mendelssohn also channelled his rigorous engagement with earlier music into his innovative approaches to performance. As a self-avowed disciple of J. S. Bach, he regularly performed Bach's works in the organ loft and at the piano, and conducted the oratorios of Handel at musical festivals throughout Europe and England. Anselm Hartinger adeptly shows that Mendelssohn, despite his respect for the original score, was a thoroughly Romantic, eminently practical musician, and did not

hesitate to alter these works to render them more easily performable by his available forces and more palatable to his audiences.

III

During Mendelssohn's lifetime, his stage works played a central role in shaping his reputation. Since his death, however, they have had a more uneven performance and reception history. Yet throughout his lifetime and well beyond, as the chapters in Part III show, Mendelssohn and the stage has never ceased to pique the imagination of his audience. Jason Geary and Monika Hennemann address two fundamental aspects of Mendelssohn's stage music: the tangible and the intangible; the factual and the fictitious. Geary explores a pivotal moment in the history of the German stage: Mendelssohn's role in the revival of Greek Tragedy in the Prussian court for an 1841 production of Sophocles' *Antigone*. Drawing from contemporaneous reviews of the work, Geary elucidates how Mendelssohn and his collaborators mediated between past and present, and reconciled audiences to the otherness of Greek tragedy through the use of stylistic references that underscored the play's dramatic content and resonated with political and religious concerns of the day. Drawing together an impressive range of sources, Monika Hennemann navigates the enduring fascination with Mendelssohn's legacy and with his bizarrely empty place in operatic history. She traces the persistent attempts, both of journalists during Mendelssohn's lifetime and of novelists long after his death, to invent the opera he never wrote.

IV

Part IV, 'Style and Compositional Process', delves first into the relationship between composition and improvisation in Mendelssohn's and Fanny Hensel's compositions and performances. R. Larry Todd's study of the *Lieder ohne Worte* offers a new way of viewing the separate *Lieder ohne Worte* not as stand-alone miniatures of a few minutes in length, but as units which could be combined and expanded by improvisation and precluding into a substantially larger form. In an exciting extension of scholarship and improvisational practice, he offers a reconstruction of what Mendelssohn's improvisation may have sounded like based on contemporary descriptions. Angela R. Mace extends the discussion of porous generic and conceptual borders between composition and improvisation in her study on cadenzas. She explores how Felix and Fanny, as concerto soloists, composers, and improvisers, navigated the aesthetic minefield of the classical cadenza while projecting their unique compositional styles through a stylistic filter appropriate to the piano concertos of Mozart and Beethoven. Merging the discussion of style and compositional process, Benedict Taylor takes a psychoanalytical approach to understanding the remarkable 'deformation' in the cyclic form of the first movement of Mendelssohn's Quartet in E-flat major, Op.

12. His hermeneutic analysis draws on Freud's psychological notion of trauma as a way to understand the deeper psychological undertow below the lyrical surface of the quartet. This, in turn, has larger implications for the composer often seen as avoiding the more turbulent Romantic style.

V

This volume benefits directly from some of the richest sources of information on Mendelssohn: the letters and correspondence that have recently come to light. The four chapters in Part V, 'Contemporary Views and Posthumous Perspectives', significantly enhance our understanding of Mendelssohn's life from his early musical education and development under the tutelage of Zelter, through his professional relationships and friendships, to his negotiation of commercial and legal contracts with publishers throughout Europe. Regina Back is the first to explore the correspondence between Mendelssohn and Carl Klingemann in unabridged form, drawing on her own recent edition of these letters with Juliette Appold.²² This correspondence, which spans from Mendelssohn's adolescence until his death, explores Mendelssohn's discussion of family events, politics, professional changes, and artistic projects, which he shared with Klingemann in this particularly intimate friendship. Lorraine Byrne Bodley redefines a portrait of the young Mendelssohn by Goethe and Zelter, drawing on selected excerpts of their extensive correspondence as recently translated and annotated in her book *Goethe and Zelter: Musical Dialogues* to compose a richly textured elucidation of this seminal relationship in Mendelssohn's life.²³ Cécile Reynaud and Pietro Zappalà each provide excellent studies of Mendelssohn's interactions with his French and Italian publishers, and thereby address a lacuna in Mendelssohn research; each can be understood as a counterpart to Peter Ward Jones's earlier contribution to this subject, 'Mendelssohn and His English Publishers'.²⁴ Zappalà provides insight into the complicated web of international marketing, copyright, and politics that Mendelssohn had to navigate with great delicacy and tact. Reynaud emphasizes the concerts and publications of Mendelssohn's music in France that demonstrate how Mendelssohn's involvement with and reception in that country was much more extensive than is often assumed.

Mendelssohn's multi-faceted career – his myriad talents, travels, correspondence, friendships, and artistic collaborations – thus admits a kaleidoscopic array of scholarly approaches to his life and works. Each chapter included in *Mendelssohn Perspectives* draws on this rich and extensive context to contribute to a composite image of Mendelssohn. This image has been blurred, readjusted, and redefined for decades; we hope that these chapters will do their part as Mendelssohn comes into sharper focus for the decades yet to come.

²² Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (2008–).

²³ Byrne Bodley (2008).

²⁴ Ward Jones (1992).