

Abstracts

R. LARRY TODD: *Mendelssohn Reception and Us: Reflections on the Bicentenary*

The occasion of the Mendelssohn bicentenary invites a new look at the composer's complex reception history and consideration of his place in nineteenth-century musical culture. Of all the composers in the traditional European musical canon, Mendelssohn's case is arguably the most unusual, owing to his rapid ascendancy in the 1830s and 1840s and embrace in German, English, and American realms, followed later in the nineteenth century by a period of decline and, in much of the twentieth century, neglect – in sum, a paradoxical coupling of lionization and denigration. The current restoration of the composer's image, spurred in part by the revival of the collected edition of his music, the appearance of the first full thematic catalogue, and the launch of a collected edition of his correspondence, has gone a considerable way toward dispelling long entrenched, familiar views of the composer – that he was, according to the Wagnerian critique, a 'lightweight' who could not grapple with the profundities of German music, that his music was too Bachian or reactionary, too classical, or ultimately lacking in dramatic cogency. As one example, this essay reconsiders Mendelssohn's 'reliance' on Bach as part of a larger, historical view by which the composer effectively read music as the history of music. A synthesizer rather than radical innovator, Mendelssohn believed firmly in historical continuities, and experimented with adjusting the degree of stylistic separation between his music and earlier models he viewed as exemplary. In turn, Mendelssohn's music attracted the attention not only of many later nineteenth-century composers (Brahms, Richard Strauss, Tchaikovsky, Horatio Parker, Alkan, Fauré), but also of twentieth-century composers whom one would ordinarily not associate with Mendelssohn (Schoenberg, Ives, Ravel, Britten), and easily penetrated mass-media, popular culture.

JOHN MICHAEL COOPER: *Mendelssohn's Fugues for String Quartet (1821)*

In the spring of 1821 the thirteen-year-old Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy completed a series of twelve fugues for string quartet. These fugues, which were first published in 2005 and remain little known today, functioned as a de facto sequel to the well-documented rigorous instruction in musical composition that Mendelssohn received under the tutelage of Carl Friedrich Zelter. The compositional development that they trace documents his attempts to apply his thorough understanding of counterpoint in the practical idiom of the string quartet, and to rehabilitate a historically outmoded genre in modern terms. In this sense they are early manifestations of his lifelong engagements with styles and techniques of earlier repertoires; they also illuminate the fallaciousness of some enduring perceptions of his attitudes toward the musical past.

ROHAN H. STEWART-MACDONALD: *'Developmental Recession' and Large-Scale Teleology in the Sonata-Type Movements of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy*

'End-weighting' is acknowledged as a feature of the typical nineteenth-century sonata-type movement. It often emanates from expansive codas and, in a number of cases, from the

strategic reduction of tension during the development section and deferral of it until later on in the structure. In ‘Non-traditional Functions of the Development Section in Sonata Forms by Brahms’ (*The Music Review*, 11/1 [1990], pp. 25-35) David Beveridge explored the latter tendency in the sonata-type movements of Brahms, and the purpose of this article is to investigate the earlier examples of Felix Mendelssohn. Charles Rosen once observed, in relation to the ‘Midsummer Night’s Dream’ Overture, that «with Mendelssohn, the end of the development is often not a climax but the lowest point of tension» (*Sonata Forms*, New York, W. W. Norton, 1980, pp. 259-260). There are a sufficient number of examples of ‘developmental withdrawal’ in the works of Mendelssohn – including the first movements of the Octet in E_b major, Op. 20, Symphony no. 2 in B_b major, Op. 52 (‘Lobgesang’) – to make it a characterising feature of his style. That ‘developmental withdrawal’ often precedes substantial, sometimes intense codas in the same movements means that Mendelssohn sometimes seems to be engineering a collaboration between the two devices to achieve end-weighting. For such ‘collaboration’ to take place, however, a palpable connection must exist between development and coda: this does not occur in every instance and the effects of the ‘developmental withdrawal’ can be purely local and bound up with an apparent desire to uphold the traditional – that is, eighteenth-century – articulation of the onset of the recapitulation using strikingly original means.

BENEDICT TAYLOR: *Beyond Good and Programmatic: Mendelssohn’s ‘Reformation’ Symphony*

Mendelssohn’s ‘Reformation’ Symphony is something of a problem-piece – biographically for the composer, historiographically in terms of its later reception, and above all aesthetically for our attempts at situating it within the traditional categories of musical criticism. To compound the issue, Mendelssohn’s actual composition is by no means an inconsiderable achievement; to put it bluntly, a very fine work seems to be hiding here within the melange of confused aesthetic criteria and reception history that surrounds it. Most fundamentally, the problem boils down to the symphony’s relationship with an aesthetic dispute concerning the relative status of absolute and programmatic music. This debate is not merely an ‘extramusical’ discourse but is in fact exemplified by the very musical materials used by Mendelssohn, specifically the use of pre-existent or cyclic themes within this symphony and its expressive succession of movements. The present study builds upon research concerning Mendelssohn’s relation to programmatic aesthetics and one of their most significant proponents, A. B. Marx, to explore this work at a deeper analytical level, suggesting finally the complex equipoise this symphony holds between rival aesthetic camps and the implications for our understanding of the music.

NANCY NOVEMBER: *Off-String Bowing in Beethoven: Reconsidering the Evidence*

This article reconsiders the complex evidence relating to string bowing ca. 1800, and considers modern-day performance practices in relation to this. The focal point is the thorny issue of when and where detached and off-string bow strokes were and are considered appropriate. I draw attention to conservative undercurrents and continuities into the nineteenth century. Tourte’s bow design certainly facilitated the production of legato strokes, but the new bows were not immediately and uniformly adopted. The new flexible bow sticks also

enhanced the production of a variety of off-string and bounced bowings. I question the idea that springing bow strokes were not a part of the technical equipment of the French Violin School, and probe the supposed uniformity and hegemony of that school around this time. ‘Negative evidence’, in the form of contemporaries’ polemics and complaints, help to build up a picture of the diverse practices of early nineteenth-century Viennese violinists, among them Beethoven’s chosen performers. The general adoption of detached articulation in most modern-day recordings of classical and early romantic chamber music should not be dismissed as stylistically incorrect. However, modern quartet players can certainly add to the breadth of their interpretations through the historical information. In determining the appropriate range of possibilities for bow articulation, modern performers interested in historically informed performance should take into account the entire musical text, including such parameters as tempo, dynamics, melodic contour, texture, and harmonic rhythm. Most importantly, these performers should not lose sight of the requirements for variety and contrast given the need for clarity of structure.

GRAHAM PONT: «*Viva il caro Sassone*»: *Handel’s Conquest of Italy at the Keyboard*

It has long been assumed that Handel composed very little music for solo keyboard during his Italian sojourn (1706–1710). Given the fame he won as a keyboard player in Italy this seems an implausible claim – one which has been reinforced by an almost blanket rejection of substantial manuscript sources of early keyboard works ascribed to Handel, as well as the loss of all his pre-London keyboard autographs and various early copies. The present article examines the contents of three collections of keyboard music containing works which are, or might plausibly be, ascribed to the young Handel: 1) Berlin Mus. Ms. 30078. This contains one accepted movement (HWV 577), two more that are certainly derived from authentic sources and another seven compositions, five of which were probably composed in Germany and very possibly performed during Handel’s Italian tour. 2) Three manuscript sources (Berlin Mus. Ms. 9181, Zürich Ms Car xv 249 and Salzburg Mn 106) of the *Zwölf Fantasiën* published by Georg Walter (Zürich, 1742). Some of these short pieces are obviously by Handel; others are less typical. But of the *Vier Stücke* added by Walter, the first two are arguably Handelian and the final «Carillon» is positively authenticated. 3) *Pieces Choisies pour le Clavecin par différents Auteurs* (Amsterdam, 1733). This is one of six unauthorized editions published by G. F. Witvogel which include keyboard music by Handel. Among the 24 movements printed here are concordances to the above manuscript collections, as well as several other movements in Handel’s early style. Analysis of these sources reveals a considerable corpus of original keyboard music much of which represents a distinct phase in Handel’s artistic development, between his formation in Germany and maturation in England. From this early period we now have some thirty or more previously doubted or unrecognized compositions which, with varying degrees of certainty, can be ascribed to Handel.