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Mendelssohn and the Musical Sublime

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Joshua A. Waggener

ABSTRACT

How does the aesthetic category of the sublime, in its various formulations from the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, assist in explaining the significance of Felix Mendelssohn and his compositions to English and German audiences in his lifetime and beyond? Due to the conceptual proximity of a number of formulations of the sublime to primary traits of his compositional output, Mendelssohn's life and work can be understood through the categories of sublime aesthetics. Despite challenges in his reception and complexities in modern scholarship, Mendelssohn's biography and musical accomplishments consistently show conceptual and contextual relations to a wide variety of sublime formulations.

Mendelssohn's early life and works display a prodigious musical talent impacted by multiple sublime influences, including the 'sublime' music of George Frideric Handel. His most popular early overtures – *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*, and *The Hebrides* – demonstrate connections with an even wider range of sublime objects and concepts. Although Mendelssohn's works from the 1830s and 1840s show an increasing appreciation for historical genres and forms, this does not represent a 'decline' from 'sublime' standards of originality, but an 'ascent' to new heights of 'genius', according to early nineteenth-century standards. His late works such as the *Lobgesang*, the Berlin Psalm Intros, and *Elijah* confirm his ability to create music modelled on sublime predecessors, communicating 'Grand Concepts', and expressing ineffable feeling. Overall, this thesis aims to show that the sublime can serve to evaluate the music of Mendelssohn using contextually-appropriate aesthetic concepts, thus offering a new understanding of his compositional accomplishments.

Mendelssohn and the Musical Sublime

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Ph.D. Thesis

Department of Music, Durham University

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AmZ</i>	<i>Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung</i>
<i>BamZ</i>	<i>Berlin allgemeine musikalische Zeitung</i>
<i>BmZ</i>	<i>Berlinische musikalische Zeitung</i>
<i>ECCO</i>	<i>Eighteenth Century Collections Online</i>
<i>MLM</i>	R. Larry Todd, <i>Mendelssohn: A Life in Music</i> (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
<i>MTM</i>	Benedict Taylor, <i>Mendelssohn, Time and Memory: The Romantic Conception of Cyclic Form</i> (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

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Preface

As Lord Kames succinctly stated in 1762, ‘Great and elevated objects considered with relation to the emotions produced by them, are termed grand and sublime’.¹ By the 1760s, the terms ‘grand’ and ‘sublime’ were more than complimentary descriptors. ‘The grand’, or its more significant synonym ‘the sublime’, was established as a major category in the discourse of aesthetic thought in England and Germany. Major essays, treatises, and even full-length books had taken up the subject, which – ironically – dealt with vast objects, awe-inspiring experiences, and mind-boggling ideas that were ultimately ineffable.

As a category of musical aesthetics, ‘the sublime’ was a particularly amorphous concept in the early-eighteenth century. But, as the eighteenth century progressed, music was increasingly described as ‘sublime’ in more particular ways and associated with specific timbres, harmonies, and textures. In England, these traits were identified in the music of a particular German-born composer – George Frideric Handel – whose grand biblical oratorios were recognized as works of ‘genius’. Increasingly, the focus of admiration shifted beyond artistic objects to the artistic geniuses who created them.

By the early-nineteenth century, musical aesthetics had changed significantly; yet ‘the sublime’ continued to be a meaningful aesthetic category applied to musical works that produced ‘astonishing’ effects. Significantly, such ‘sublime’ works were recognized as ‘the work of genius’. The composers of such works were understood to have seemingly divine creative power.

As this thesis will show, one such composer was Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1809–1847). Due to the conceptual proximity of a number of formulations of the sublime to primary traits of his compositional output, Mendelssohn’s life and work can be understood through the categories of sublime

¹ Henry Home (Lord Kames), *Elements of Criticism*, 1st edition, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: printed for A. Millar, London; and A. Kincaid & J. Bell, Edinburgh, 1762), Vol. I, iv, p. 266; from *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (accessed 26 June 2013).

aesthetics. Despite challenges in his reception and complexities in modern scholarship, Mendelssohn's biography and musical accomplishments consistently show conceptual and contextual connections to a variety of formulations of the sublime from the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. In the following chapters, I will consider these connections to show just how Mendelssohn and his music can be considered 'sublime'.

Chapter One will introduce key figures and concepts of sublime aesthetics from the eighteenth century, first in England and then in Germany. This survey will interact with significant writings ranging from literary criticism, philosophical essays, and aesthetic treatises to display a wide range of formulations of 'the sublime', including Longinus' famous treatise, English commentary on Longinus, and German aesthetic thought from Moses Mendelssohn to Immanuel Kant to Georg Hegel. It will also demonstrate the significant conceptual correspondence between the sublime and theories of genius emerging in the eighteenth century.

Next, in Chapter Two, I will search for the sublime in musical discourse, surveying eighteenth-century writings from England and Germany. This survey will consider primary formulations of the sublime (those of Edmund Burke, Moses Mendelssohn, and Kant), as well as those from lesser-known eighteenth-century writers. The musical sublime will then be considered in light of changes in English and German aesthetics in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, especially with regard to the increasing value placed on 'expression' in music.

Chapters Three through Six will then seek to answer the question: How does the aesthetic category of the sublime, in its various formulations from the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, assist in explaining the significance of Mendelssohn and his compositions to English and German audiences in his lifetime and beyond?

In Chapter Three I will begin to identify connections with the sublime in Mendelssohn's early life and musical output. I will recognize his prodigious talent, and then give an account of his early exposure to the works of Handel. An examination of representative works by Handel (the *Utrecht Te Deum* and *Jubilate*) will show how Handel defined the musical sublime. Then, correlations with Handel's sublime style will be found in some of Mendelssohn's early works: the Octet for Strings, the 1826 *Te Deum*, and *Psalm 115*. As Handel was recognized as a 'genius' for his musical accomplishments, so will Mendelssohn be recognized as a 'genius' for his original and exemplary works.

Next, in Chapter Four, I will demonstrate how Mendelssohn's early overtures continue the connection with sublime objects and concepts. These include the sublimity of dramatic literature (Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), sublime aspects of romantic poetry (Goethe's 'Meeresstille' and 'Glückliche Fahrt'), and the sublimity of Scottish landscapes and legends. Through this study, Mendelssohn's early compositional style will be presented as increasingly 'sublime' in itself.

Chapters Five and Six will seek to connect Mendelssohn's later musical achievements with sublime aesthetics, countering a reading of Mendelssohn's post-prodigy accomplishments known as the 'narrative of decline'. Informed by early nineteenth-century aspects of the sublime, I will argue that Mendelssohn's works continue to manifest connections with the sublime which are helpful for understanding his complex aesthetic priorities and the contemporary reception of his works. The recognition of 'genius' in the 'the work of genius' will remain significant.

Chapter Five will examine Mendelssohn's incorporation of historical musical styles and forms into his new works, a practice partially inspired by his mentor Johann Goethe. Analysis of the *Lobgesang* Symphony-Cantata will demonstrate this practice, while also exposing signs of sublimity and genius in the work.

Finally, Chapter Six will explore another facet of Mendelssohn's aesthetic thought in relation to the sublime. Based on analogies with the thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher, I will demonstrate Mendelssohn's commitment to composing works which express 'genuine' feeling and promote edifying devotion. This commitment will be shown through analyses of Mendelssohn's psalm intonations for the Berlin Cathedral (1843–1844), which also make use of 'ancient' devices and emphasize sublime ideas inherent in the psalm texts. I will conclude Chapter Six with brief consideration of the oratorio *Elijah*, including its reception. In this last major work, connections with the sublime persist, greatly enhancing Mendelssohn's contemporary and posthumous reception as a 'genius'.

1.

The Sublime in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Thought

SUBLIME. *adj.* [*sublimis*, Latin.]

1. High in place; exalted aloft. ...
2. High in excellence; exalted in nature. ...
3. High in stile or sentiment; lofty; grand. ...
4. Elevated by joy. ...
5. Haughty; proud. ...

SUBLIME. *n.s.* The grand or lofty stile. *The sublime* is a Gallicism, but now naturalized. ...
– Samuel Johnson, *A dictionary of the English language* (1755)²

ERHABEN, -er, -ste, *adj. et adv.*, which is strictly the participle of the verb *erheben*, elevated on high, but nonetheless is used by itself in various different meanings.

1. Literally, but only in Upper German: to extend raised hands towards Heaven.
2. Figuratively. (1) Projecting above the surface. ... (2) Far removed from the actual surface; high, the more noble literary style. ... (3) Other, similar things so far surpassing that awe and wonder are awakened; a subset of this, that which is grand and high. ... A noble sentiment; high-mindedness, and so forth. The sublime style, which confers sublimity on an object so it can awaken awe and wonder. ...

– Johann Adelung, *Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch* (1793)³

Eighteenth-century writers exalted ‘the sublime’ above all other aesthetic categories. The term evolved from an expression denoting ‘height’ or ‘elevation’ to a designation that was useful for distinguishing between ‘beautiful’ objects and those considered ‘grand’, ‘lofty’, or ‘noble’ and capable of producing ‘awe and wonder’. Beginning with English writers, and continuing on with German authors, the concept and category of the sublime was defined and applied in a wide range of published material, well into the nineteenth century. Due to this prominence in primary sources, ‘the sublime’ has remained a prominent topic in modern scholarship for almost

² Samuel Johnson, *A dictionary of the English language* (1755), in Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla, editors, *The Sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 111. Literary examples omitted. The continued definition includes the verb form ‘TO SUBLIME’, the adverb ‘SUBLIMELY’, and the noun ‘SUBLIMITY’.

³ Johann Adelung, *Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch der Hochdeutschen Mundart* (1793); Translated in Henry Drew Wyatt, ‘Aspects of Sublime Rhetoric in Eighteenth-Century Music’ (Ph.D. Dissertation; Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2000), pp. 233–234. Examples of use and further commentary omitted. Emphasis in original.

eighty years, especially eighteenth-century studies.⁴ The designation has become a popular and provocative term in titles of conference papers, articles, and books on topics ranging from English literature to landscape paintings to philosophy. In more recent years, ‘the sublime’ has been used in musical scholarship, including studies in historical musicology, reception history, and musical aesthetics.⁵

As this thesis seeks to explore the application of sublime aesthetics to a major figure in Western music history – Felix Mendelssohn – this chapter will lay the necessary foundation for those that follow by introducing key figures and concepts of sublime aesthetics as it developed in the eighteenth century, first in England and then in Germany. This survey will interact with various literature ranging from literary criticism, philosophical essays, and aesthetic treatises to explore formulations of ‘the sublime’ relevant to Mendelssohn’s life and works.

Beginning with responses to Longinus’ treatise on the sublime, section one will summarize key contributions to the literature on the sublime from eighteenth-century England. As these will demonstrate, ‘the sublime’ (or ‘the great’) was applied to a range of objects, beginning with literature and then proceeding to observations of and experiences of nature.

As section two will show, English thoughts on the sublime were seminal in the development of German aesthetic thought. In significant writings by key intellectuals, ‘the sublime’ (*Das Erhabene*) was discussed with respect to literature as well as experiences of nature. However, German theories of the sublime will begin to diversify in focus, conception, and terminology, and the location of sublimity itself will shift from the ‘object’, to the ‘subject’, and then to ancient history.

Section three then considers the significant correspondence between the concept of the sublime and views of genius in the eighteenth century, both in

⁴ The seminal study in English is Samuel Holt Monk’s *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1935).

⁵ For examples of recent studies on ‘the Sublime’ with respect to Handel, C.P.E. Bach, Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, see the following: (Handel) Todd Gilman, ‘Arne, Handel, the Beautiful, and the Sublime’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 42, no. 4 (2009), pp. 529–555; Ellen T. Harris, ‘Silence as Sound: Handel’s Sublime Pauses’, *The Journal of Musicology* 22, no. 4 (2005), pp. 521–558; (C.P.E. Bach) Annette Richards, ‘An Enduring Moment: C.P.E. Bach and the Musical Sublime’, in *C.P.E. Bach Studies*, ed. Richards (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 149–172; (Haydn) James Webster, ‘The Creation, Haydn’s Late Vocal Music, and the Musical Sublime’, in *Haydn and His World*, ed. Elaine Rochelle Sisman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 57–102; (Mozart) Annette Richards, ‘Automatic Genius: Mozart and the Mechanical Sublime’, *Music & Letters* 80, no. 3 (1999), pp. 366–389; (Beethoven) Nicholas Mathew, ‘Beethoven’s Political Music, the Handelian Sublime, and the Aesthetics of Prostration’, *19th-Century Music* 33, no. 2 (2009), pp. 110–150. Additional related studies will be cited throughout this thesis.

England and Germany. A brief survey of major theories of genius will reveal significant overlap with the discourse on the sublime. Ultimately, the sublime will relocate from works of art into the mind of the artistic genius.

Overall, this chapter will trace ‘the sublime’ from its use as an aesthetic category in reference to literature and nature, to descriptions of ‘sublime’ *experiences* of nature and art, to categories of ‘sublime’ historical objects, and finally, to the ‘sublime’ mind itself – though this ‘progression’ is not always unidirectional. Particular focus will be given to ‘sublime’ concepts and figures relevant to musical aesthetics (the subject of Chapter Two), which will then be applied to the primary focus of this thesis – the life and works of Felix Mendelssohn, as well as his ‘sublime’ predecessor George Frideric Handel.

1. Species of ‘the Great’ in Eighteenth-Century English Writing

1.1. The Influence of Longinus’ *On the Sublime*

In late seventeenth-century thought, and on through the eighteenth century, references to the sublime often found their way back to the writings of Longinus, the first-century Greek author of *Peri Hupsous*.⁶ Longinus’ text is primarily a rhetorical treatise commenting on the sources of the sublime and how sublimity was achieved in the art of oratory. Structured as a classical oration such as those described in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, the stated purposes of Longinus’ treatise was (1) to be ‘something useful for men in political life’ and (2) to investigate ‘whether there is a technique for sublimity or profundity’ in ‘passages that are emotional and lofty in nature’.⁷ Emphasizing the rhetorical nature of the sublime, Longinus states, ‘Sublimity is always an eminence and excellence in language...; Sublimity, we know, brought out at the happy moment, parts all the matter this way and that, and like a lightning flash, reveals, at a stroke and in its entirety, the power of the orator’.⁸

Longinus’s rhetorical concept of the sublime was popularized in England by Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux’s 1674 translation *On the Sublime*.⁹ According to D.A.

⁶ For a summary of the transmission and attribution of the treatise, including support for Cassius Longinus’ authorship, see Malcolm Heath, ‘Longinus and the Ancient Sublime’, in *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 15–16.

⁷ Longinus, *On the Sublime*, trans. James A. Arieti and John M. Crossett (New York: E. Mellen Press, 1985), pp. 6, 11–12.

⁸ Longinus, *On the Sublime*, trans. Prickard (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1906), pp. 2–3.

⁹ For brief accounts of the influence of Longinus, as translated by Boileau, see D.A. Russell’s introduction to *Longinus’: On the Sublime* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), pp. xlii–xlvi; Roger

Russell, Boileau's work 'produced a spectacular reaction' and made Longinus 'a household name' for the next 150 years.¹⁰ Among the most significant English authors referencing Longinus (thus developing his reputation) included John Dryden (1631–1700), John Dennis (1657–1734), Joseph Addison (1672–1719), and Alexander Pope (1688–1744).

According to Boileau, the sublime aimed 'to elevate and ravish the soul, which comes from grandeur of thought and nobility of sentiment'.¹¹ Boileau's terse statement summarizes well Longinus' two primary sources of the sublime. However, Longinus had gone further (in chapter 8) to identify 'five springs of sublimity'. These began with the use of grand conceptions and the raising of especially powerful emotions, and then proceeded to three more technical aspects of the rhetorical arts: the use of rhetorical figures which reinforce sublime imagery, the use of a noble diction, and the overall application of a manner of composition which brings all these other factors into a harmonious and effective whole.

1.2. The Sublime in Literature

Although Longinus' treatise was primarily a work on rhetoric, it also includes many references to classical Greek literature that are not orations, but serve to 'prove' his argument that sublimity can be achieved through certain rhetorical techniques. These include Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Plato's *Republic*, Euripedes' *Orestes* and *Electra*, numerous quotes from Demosthenes, and lesser known works such as *The Shield of Hercules*. In these passages, his comments take on the nature of literary criticism.

Due to the influence of Boileau's translation among English critics in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, English authors began to apply the term 'sublime' (as well as finer points of Longinus' treatise) to various types of literature. With support from a classical 'expert' on the sublime, they more confidently put forth their own literary evaluations of works both 'classic' and 'modern'. For example, Joseph Addison, writing his 'Essay on the Pleasures of the

Barnett Larsson's 'The Beautiful, the Sublime and the Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century Musical Thought in Britain' (PhD Dissertation, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1980), pp. 1–5; and James T. Boulton's introduction to Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1958; Revised edition, Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1987), pp. xv–xx.

¹⁰ Russell, 'Introduction', in *Longinus*, p. xlv.

¹¹ Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, Preface to Longinus, *On the Sublime* (Paris: Denys Thierry, 1674); Quoted in Wyatt, 'Aspects of Sublime Rhetoric', p. 3.

Imagination’ in issues of *The Spectator* in 1712 – recognized as significant early descriptions of the sublime, both in literature and nature – regularly includes epigraphs from classical authors such as Martial, Ovid, Horace, Virgil, and Homer to exemplify his points.¹² Likewise, Hildebrand Jacob writes in 1735 on ‘How the mind is raised to the sublime’, and cites a Latin poem by Horace for an example of how ‘The force of numbers; the power of music, and oratory; the passion of love, and influence of wine are very efficacious in giving this elevation of thought’.¹³

Yet, English writers also argued for sublime literary works in their own tongue and from their own predecessors. As Thomas Stackhouse asked (rhetorically) in 1731: ‘Why ... might not a Demosthenes or a Cicero thunder and lighten in our language as well as they did in theirs?’¹⁴ In fact, before his relatively brief comments praising Horace, Jacob had quoted three excerpts from Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.¹⁵ And Jonathan Richardson (the elder), when discussing Longinus’ ‘sublime’ in *An Essay on the Theory of Painting* (1725), inserts English verse from Milton, Shakespeare, and Pope (as well as Latin verse from Dante).¹⁶ As Roger Barnett Larsson explains, the use of the term actually arose ‘from the need to deal critically with the greatest English literature of the preceding hundred years including Shakespeare, Milton, and Spenser’.¹⁷

‘The sublime’ was also found in biblical literature. Referring to Moses and the first chapter of Genesis, Longinus had famously stated:

Thus too the lawgiver of the Jews, no common man, when he had duly conceived the power of the Deity, showed it forth as duly. At the very beginning of his Laws, ‘God said’, he writes – What? ‘Let there be light, and there was light, let there be earth, and there was earth’.¹⁸

¹² Joseph Addison, Excerpts from *The Spectator* in *The Sublime: A Reader*, Ashfield and De Bolla (eds.), pp. 62–69. ‘The Pleasures of the Imagination’ was first printed in No.’s 411–421 of *The Spectator* (21 June 1712 – 3 July 1712).

¹³ Hildebrand Jacob, Excerpt from *The Works* (1735), in *The Sublime: A Reader*, Ashfield and De Bolla (eds.), p. 54.

¹⁴ Thomas Stackhouse, from *Reflections on the Nature and Property of Languages* (1731), in *The Sublime: A Reader*, Ashfield and De Bolla (eds.), p. 52.

¹⁵ Jacob, *The Works*, in *The Sublime: A Reader*, Ashfield and De Bolla (eds.), pp. 53–54.

¹⁶ Jonathan Richardson, *An Essay on the Theory of Painting* (1725), in *The Sublime: A Reader*, Ashfield and De Bolla (eds.), pp. 46–48.

¹⁷ Larsson, ‘The Beautiful, the Sublime’, pp. 5–6.

¹⁸ Longinus, *On the Sublime* (trans. Prickard), p. 18. Quoting Genesis 1:3.

According to Ruth Smith, by this one reference ‘Longinus provided critical sanction for literary appreciation of the Old Testament, endorsing traditional claims for the superiority of Judaeo-Christian poetry over heathen writing’.¹⁹ Citing Longinus as a precedent, eighteenth-century writers found the sublime in biblical passages beyond the opening passages of Genesis, especially in passages of biblical poetry.

The reception of Hebrew poetry from the Old Testament as ‘sublime’ was significant on multiple levels. As Lynn Poland explains,

...the rhetorical arts of sublimity helped to transform the Bible into a literary as well as a religious classic. Via the sublime, poetry becomes ‘the natural language of religion’, as John Dennis was one of the first to say; while in the hands of Robert Lowth and others, the Bible becomes the paradigm of sublime poetry.²⁰

Certainly for eighteenth-century English writers, Old Testament poetry captured the essence of the sublime and thus became its archetype.

Of all biblical poetry, the Psalms were seen as pre-eminent in their sublime density.²¹ Even the religious nonconformist Isaac Watts (1674–1748), who argued for the ‘translation’ of English psalms into Christian hymns, lauded the Psalms as ‘the most valuable Part of the Old Testament’.²² In 1710, Nahum Tate (1652–1715) actually compared the reception of the Psalms to that of Longinus’ writings. In *An Essay for Promoting of Psalmody*, he stated:

...as Longinus is Admir’d for Writing sublimely upon Loftiness, and being every where an Example to his Rules; not less surprisingly Delightful is the Harmony of Rhetorick and Reason, Eloquence and Argument, amongst Our Panegyristes upon PSALMODY, so as may seem to supersede All that I can pretend to say upon the subject.²³

¹⁹ Ruth Smith, *Handel's Oratorios and Eighteenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 109.

²⁰ Lynn Poland, ‘The Idea of the Holy and the History of the Sublime’, *The Journal of Religion* 72, no. 2 (1992), p. 183. One of the strongest advocates for the merits of Hebrew poetry was Bishop Robert Lowth (1710–1787), who gave lectures on poetry at Oxford from 1741–1750 and described Hebrew poetry as ‘sharp, swift, thrilling sentences’ which are ‘elevated in thought’ (*Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* [1787]; Translated from the Latin in Longinus, *On the Sublime* (trans. Prickard), p. 124).

²¹ Ruth Smith calls the Psalms one of the four loci classici for the biblical sublime, along with (1) the Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32), (2) the Song of Deborah (Judges 5), and (3) the Prophecy of Isaiah. See *Handel's Oratorios*, p.117.

²² Isaac Watts, *A Short Essay toward the Improvement of Psalmody ...* (London, 1707), p. 252. Available at ECCO.

²³ Nahum Tate, *An Essay for Promoting of Psalmody* (London, 1710), Preface. Available at ECCO.

Furthermore, Tate quotes the words of his contemporary Bishop Symon Patrick of Ely (1616–1707), who states that The Book of Psalms ‘*moves more powerfully, and touches the Mind more sensibly than Sentences in Prose*’.²⁴ Thus, in prominent early eighteenth-century writings, Longinus’ ‘Noble Passions’ and ‘Grand Concepts’ are recognized in biblical poetry in general, and the Psalms in particular. However, English use of the aesthetic term in the eighteenth century was not confined to literature, biblical or otherwise; in fact, ‘the sublime’ was observed far beyond the pages of any book.

1.3. The Sublime as Observed and Experienced in Nature

Although Longinus’ famous treatise taught English writers to evaluate literature according to ‘sublime’ standards, eighteenth-century English authors simultaneously applied the aesthetic category to nature, especially spatially expansive views of nature. In his initial instalment of ‘The Pleasures of the Imagination’ in the 23 June 1712 issue of the *Spectator* (No. 412), Addison explained what he meant by ‘the sight of what is *great*’:

By greatness, I do not only mean the bulk of any single object, but the largeness of a whole view, considered as one entire piece. Such are the prospects of an open champian country, a vast uncultivated desert, of huge heaps of mountains, high rocks and precipices, or a wide expanse of waters, where we are not struck with the novelty or beauty of the sight, but with that rude kind of magnificence which appears in many of these stupendous works of Nature. Our imagination loves to be filled with an object, or to grasp at any thing that is too big for its capacity. We are flung into a pleasing astonishment at such unbounded views, and feel a delightful stillness and amazement in the soul at the apprehensions of them.²⁵

Throughout essays on the sublime and related writings, English authors gave innumerable examples of ‘the sublime’ in such ‘extended’ views.

Also, in the eighteenth century sometimes observations of ‘the sublime’ overlapped both nature and literature. In response to Longinus’ admiration of Homer’s description of a voyage at sea, one of Addison’s readers wrote to express his admiration for the sublimity he found expressed in Psalm 107:23–30 (‘They that

²⁴ Symon Patrick, *The Books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon, Paraphras'd ...* (London, 1710), p. 131. Italics added.; Quoted in Tate, *Essay*, p. 24.

²⁵ Addison, *Spectator* No. 417, in *The Sublime: A Reader*, Ashfield and De Bolla (eds.), p.62. As summarized by Larsson, Addison describes the sublime (or ‘the great’) as ‘that which is physically enormous or expansive, majestic or awesome in character and which may ultimately be morally instructive and lead to a contemplation of God’ (*The Beautiful, the Sublime*, p. 7).

go down to the sea in ships ...'). After quoting the psalm passage, he then asked, 'Were we only to consider the sublime in this piece of poetry, what can be nobler than the idea it gives us, of the supreme being thus raising a tumult among the elements, and recovering them out of their confusion; thus troubling and becalming nature?'²⁶ For Addison's reader, this Psalm represented a sublime mixture of poetic affect, divine power, and natural wonder. When these elements were brought together, English authors were even more likely to recognize 'the sublime'.

The Sublime Experience, according to Edmund Burke

Once the sublime was recognized in external nature, one could discuss the *experience* of the sublime *in* nature. Numerous eighteenth-century British authors undertook explanations of this sublime experience. However, none was as influential as Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757).

Burke's *Enquiry* incorporated common aspects of the sublime such as greatness of dimension. However, his connection of the sublime with pain and clear distinction of the sublime from beauty distinguished his formulation. In Burke's words, 'Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror is a source of the sublime'.²⁷ Thus, Burke's *Enquiry* emphasized not 'sublime' objects, but the psychological 'terror' (and other strong emotions) that they produced.

Continuing Addison's distinction of aesthetic categories, Burke's *Enquiry* rehearses again and again the difference between the sublime and the beautiful, which is associated with feelings of pleasure. In Burke's view, the experience of the sublime results from the senses. Burke's description is empirical, giving a psychological and physiological account of the experience of the sublime. Thus, Burke uses terminology from the world of sensations, carefully identifying potential sources of the sublime.²⁸

²⁶ Included in Addison's *Spectator* No. 489 from Saturday, September 20, 1712; See *The Sublime: A Reader*, Ashfield and De Bolla (eds.), p. 69.

²⁷ Burke, *Enquiry* (Oxford World's Classics edition; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 36 (from Part I, Section VII).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 66–78 (Part II, Sections VI–XXI). Burke's list of sources includes (1) privations (vacuity, darkness, solitude, silence), (2) vastness, (3) infinity, (4) succession and uniformity, (5) difficulty, (6) magnificence, (7) particular aspects of light and colour, (8) particular sounds (but not words), (9) suddenness, and (10) particular tastes and smells described as 'bitters and stench'.

Although his essay primarily emphasizes experiences with the sublime, Burke does cite some examples of the sublime in literature, including classics such as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, English works by Milton and Shakespeare, and the Bible.²⁹ Also, he adds a relatively brief 'Part Five' addressing the sublime and the beautiful 'of WORDS'. However, he notes that the subject 'has been often and well handled already' and that it was his purpose to pursue 'an enquiry into the properties of such things in nature as raise love and astonishment in us; and by shewing [*sic*] in what manner they operated to produce these passions'.³⁰ Thus, Burke's *Enquiry*, while distinct in its psychological and physiological emphasis, continues the tradition in English writing of recognizing the sublime in the excellent writings of man as well as the extensive magnitude of the natural world.

2. Theories of the Sublime in German Lands

Although discussions of 'the sublime' were most prominent in English writing in the early-eighteenth century, its status as an aesthetic category would find its apogee in writers associated with the German Enlightenment (*Die Aufklärung*). In part, this was due to the recognition of 'aesthetics' as a distinct category in German philosophical writing. In 1735, Alexander Baumgarten (1714–1762) had coined the modern use of the term 'aesthetics' for the study of taste, and established this use further in his *Aesthetica* of 1750.³¹ Then, Johann Georg Sulzer's two-volume *General Theory of the Fine Arts* (*Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*, 1771/1774) became 'the culmination of German aesthetic thought in the early *Aufklärung*'.³² In the latter part of the century, Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786) and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) would write significant aesthetic essays and treatises.³³

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 32 and 35, 55, and 72, respectively. For Burke's commentary on Psalm 139, see p. 63.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 160 (Part V, Section VII).

³¹ Previously, the term 'poetics' had been used. Andrew Bowie names Baumgarten and Johann George Hamann as the 'founding figures of aesthetics'. See *Aesthetics and Subjectivity from Kant to Nietzsche* (Manchester UP, 1990), pp. 4–6.

³² Thomas Street Christensen, 'Introduction', in *Aesthetics and the Arts of Musical Composition in the German Enlightenment: Selected Writings of Johann Georg Sulzer and Heinrich Christoph Koch*, Baker and Christensen, eds. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 14.

³³ Moses Mendelssohn is the grandfather of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy. For accounts of his life, see Alexander Altman, *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; University of Alabama Press, 1973) and David Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996). For brief accounts more focused on his musical offspring, see Peter Mercer-Taylor, *The Life of Mendelssohn* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 1–15 and R. Larry Todd, *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 1–23.

Due to the significance of their writing on the sublime (*Das Erhabene*) for this study, the following section will summarize the views of Moses Mendelssohn and Kant. The influence of British theories such as Burke's will be apparent, and the recognition of sublimity in literature and nature will persist (more or less). However, Mendelssohn's and Kant's views will distinguish themselves as unique formulations with particular concepts, terminology, and applications. Kant's 'Analytic of the Sublime' will prove particularly influential. Finally, the role of the sublime in the aesthetic system (and historical views) of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) will be discussed, presenting a view that complicates the sublime for nineteenth-century aesthetics.

2.1. Moses Mendelssohn 'On the sublime and naïve in the fine sciences'

Moses Mendelssohn's theory of the sublime was the most fully articulated one in northern Germany in the mid-eighteenth century. Although written in 1754, his 'On the sublime and naïve in the fine sciences' was disseminated with the collected *Philosophical Essays* of 1761, which were further revised and released in a second edition in 1771.³⁴ Kant's Third Critique would not be published until 1790.

Mendelssohn's initial version of his essay also preceded Edmund Burke's 1757 *Enquiry*. Instead, Mendelssohn's theory builds upon earlier theories of the sublime from England, including Addison's 'Essay on the Pleasures of the Imagination' in the *Spectator* papers. And, like many of its English predecessors, Mendelssohn's commentary on the sublime focused on literature, including classical works, Shakespeare, and the Old Testament. His references to classical works included Horace's *Ars poetica* and *Odes*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, Homer's *Odyssey*, and Demosthenes' *Phillipica* (also quoted in Longinus' treatise).³⁵ His quotes from Shakespeare include excerpts from *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*.

As an example of the 'extensive sublime' – Mendelssohn's first type of sublimity – he comments on the Genesis 1:3 quote from 'the Lawgiver of the Jews' that Longinus had declared sublime: 'God said, "Let there be light", and there was light'. To explain the nature of the sublimity in this verse, Mendelssohn contrasts the

³⁴ Mendelssohn's essay was first published in 1758. Quotes here and following are from Daniel Dahlstrom's translation in Moses Mendelssohn, *Philosophical Writings* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), based upon the 1771 'improved edition' reprinted in *Schriften zur Philosophie und Ästhetik I*, ed. Fritz Bamberger, vol. I of *Gesammelte Schriften* Jubilee edition (Berlin, 1929), pp. 228–515.

³⁵ See Mendelssohn, 'On the Sublime', in *Philosophical Writings*, pp. 200–212.

original verse with a more direct statement: 'What God willed, came to be'.³⁶ The former statement represents the sublime object (God's divine power in creation) intuitively, without explicitly stating the relationship between the divine will with created objects, allowing the reader to connect the verbal proclamation with the manifestation of light. Thus, Mendelssohn's 'extensive sublime' relies upon the inherent sublimity in the 'object' (emotion, action, or property) to evoke a sublime response in the reader.

In contrast, the 'intensive sublime' – Mendelssohn's second type – does not rely at all on the qualities of the 'object'. Instead, this more 'subjective' sublimity occurs in art when the artist's representation is 'intensively' enormous, displaying great strength due to the artist's 'great wit, his genius, his imagination, and his soul's capacities'.³⁷ As Mendelssohn states, it is found in works

... in which the awe and admiration redound more on the art of the representation than on what is represented and, thus, as was previously shown, mostly on the genius and the extraordinary capabilities of the artist. In itself the object often can contain nothing elevated in stature, nothing extraordinary.³⁸

Therefore, the sublimity must be apparent in the artist's abilities, both conceptually and technically:

... we admire the enormous talents of the poet, his effective imagination, his capacity to compose, his profound insight into the nature of things, into characters and passions, and the noble manner in which he was able to express his splendid thoughts.³⁹

The observer must perceive that the artist's representation is a perfect one, performed with 'immensity of strength'.⁴⁰

Through his theory of the sublime, Mendelssohn developed a way of accounting for the aesthetic values in objects not considered 'beautiful', thus establishing the prime subject matter of aesthetics not as the aesthetic object, but the subject's experience of the object. As Alexander Rueger claims, Mendelssohn's

³⁶ Ibid., p. 200. On the importance of biblical literature in Mendelssohn's aesthetics, theology, and ethics (especially the Psalms), see Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*, pp. 46–51.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 197. Mendelssohn also mentions specific examples of power, genius, and virtue recognizable as this 'intensive' sublimity (pp. 194–195).

³⁸ Ibid., p. 210.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 195.

theory of sublimity is ‘a rationalist attempt to deal with the unbeautiful, based on a stimulation model’ [of Boileau] where the ‘perfection’ is found in the experience, not the object.⁴¹ Therefore, Mendelssohn was able to retain ‘the idea that the sublime originates in a perfection of the object’, but replaces the artistic object with the subject’s (perfect) experience of that object.⁴² As the following description will demonstrate, Kant’s theory will continue the ‘interiorization’ of sublime experience.

2.2. The Kantian Sublime

German eighteenth-century aesthetic thought reached maturity with Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 1790), which examined the judgment of taste and added more particular distinctions between the beautiful and the sublime. Following his *Critique of Pure Reason* (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 1781) – which examined the limits of theoretical reason – and his *Critique of Practical Reason* (*Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, 1788) – which examined the validity of ‘pure’ moral reason – Kant sought to mediate between the two by writing a third ‘Critique’ concerning the mind’s power to make judgments in the areas of aesthetics and teleology. Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* was intellectually provocative in its descriptions of the sublime and seminal in its influence on other thinkers. The following will briefly summarize the main tenets of Kant’s ‘sublime’ in comparison to the preceding theories by Burke and Mendelssohn.

Comparisons with Burke and Mendelssohn

Kant’s formation of the sublime can be seen, to some extent, as a reaction to Burke’s views. Kant probably based his early knowledge of Burke on a summary of Burke’s *Enquiry* by Moses Mendelssohn.⁴³ By the time of the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant knew Burke’s *Enquiry* in full, and, as evident in his comments, held the work in high esteem (‘exceedingly fine’). However, he recognized Burke’s work only as ‘psychological observations’; for Kant, Burke’s *Enquiry* was a ‘*merely empirical* exposition of the sublime and of the beautiful’.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Alexander Rueger, ‘Enjoying the Unbeautiful: From Mendelssohn’s Theory of “Mixed Sentiments” to Kant’s Aesthetic Judgments of Reflection’, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (Spring, 2009), p. 185.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 186.

⁴³ See Boulton, ‘Editor’s Introduction’, in Burke, *Enquiry*, p. xlvi. According to Boulton, this review helped provoke Kant’s *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764).

⁴⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, tr. Wemer S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, 1987), Ak. p. 277. Page references here and following refer to the Akademie edition, as referenced in Pluhar (Kants

Kant set out to describe the sublime quite differently from Burke, conceiving the sublime as transcendental, not physiological. As Vanessa Ryan states, ‘Whereas Burke consistently limits the role of the mind in the sublime experience, Kant’s sublime is an entirely spiritual consciousness, which arises at the point where pure reason transcends the sensuous’.⁴⁵ In Kant’s own statement: ‘Sublime is what even to be able to think proves that the mind has a power surpassing any standard of sense’.⁴⁶ To Kant, the sublime is an experience of ‘displeasure’ that occurs when ‘imagination’ and ‘reason’ come into conflict, as the ‘imagination’ fails to conceive the magnitude of an object, but ‘reason’ is exalted due to its power to intuit that very magnitude. This sublime mental experience, while initially displeasing for the cognitive faculties, ultimately leads to a sense of satisfaction based on the realization that ‘reason’ is superior to sensibility, a transcendent satisfaction independent of sensory pleasure.⁴⁷

As a result of Kant’s emphasis on the cognitive over the sensible, the role of natural phenomena differs in his formulation. In contrast to Burke’s *Enquiry*, as well as Addison’s essays, objects of nature only receive brief descriptions or passing references in Kant’s *Critique*. For example, Kant mentions examples which nature ‘offers’ for ‘a large unity for a measure’, each of which represents a larger magnitude: a tree, a mountain, the earth, a planetary system, the Milky Way system.⁴⁸ Later, Kant states that ‘If we are to judge nature as sublime . . . , we must present it as arousing fear’ and gives examples including rocks, thunderclouds, volcanoes, hurricanes, and the boundless ocean.⁴⁹ However, in perhaps his most famous reference to nature in the Third Critique, Kant asserts: ‘Thus the vast ocean heaved up by storms cannot be called sublime’.⁵⁰ His conclusion regarding the role

gesammelte Schriften (9 vols.; Berlin, 1908–13), III). Emphasis added. On Burkean concepts incorporated into Kant’s theory, see Boulton, ‘Editor’s Introduction’ in Burke, *Enquiry*, pp. xlvi–xlvi and Vanessa L. Ryan, ‘The Physiological Sublime: Burke’s Critique of Reason’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62, no. 2 (April 2001): pp. 265–279.

⁴⁵ Ryan, ‘The Physiological Sublime’, p. 278. For a careful summary of Kant’s transcendental sublime, see Donald W. Crawford, *Kant’s Aesthetic Theory* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974), especially at p. 152.

⁴⁶ Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (trans. Pluhar), *Ak.* p. 250.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, §27, *Ak.* pp. 257–260. For Kant, ‘imagination’ (*Einbildungskraft*) and ‘reason’ (*Vernunft*) are cognitive faculties that serve the primary faculties of ‘understanding’ (*Verstand*) and ‘sensibility’ (*Sinnlichkeit*).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, *Ak.* p. 256.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, *Ak.* pp. 260–261.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, *Ak.* p. 245.

of nature is that ‘true sublimity must be sought only in the mind of the judging person, not in the natural object the judging of which prompts the mental attunement’.⁵¹

It is Kant’s positioning of the sublime in the mind that displays the influence of Moses Mendelssohn’s theory.⁵² As Mendelssohn had moved away from a completely ‘objective’ view of sublimity residing in nature or great works of literature by proposing the more ‘subjective’ category of the ‘intensive’ sublime, so Kant relocated the sublime completely to the inner workings of the human mind. Furthermore, Mendelssohn’s division of the sublime into two distinct categories provided a model for explaining the multi-faceted experiences of the sublime more fully – one that Kant would follow.

However, unlike Mendelssohn and the theorists of the sublime in England, Kant did not apply his view of the sublime to the critical evaluation of specific artistic objects, literature or otherwise. Whereas Mendelssohn and others found it quite fitting to follow Longinus’ example and comment on various literary works of biblical, classical, and modern origins, Kant kept his ‘Analytic of the Sublime’ focused on his conceptual theories. Only at the end of his explication of the sublime does he address ‘Fine Art’ (‘schöne Kunst’), and even here (‘for the sake of brevity’) he only provides one stanza of a poem (by ‘the great king’ Frederick the Great) and one other line of poetry (author unnamed) without extensive commentary.⁵³ Otherwise, throughout his entire ‘Analytic’ he does not bother to present famous selections from literature or make references to renowned artists.⁵⁴ Due to his ‘transcendental’ approach to the sublime as part of his three-volume critical philosophy, Kant’s *Critique* does not need to engage in literary criticism to determine or demonstrate what is ‘sublime’.

⁵¹ Ibid., *Ak.* p. 256.

⁵² For comments on how Moses Mendelssohn’s view of the sublime prefigures aspects of the Kantian sublime, see Dahlstrom’s introduction to Mendelssohn’s *Philosophical Writings*, p. xxiv.

⁵³ Kant comments ever so briefly on these to demonstrate expressions of an ‘aesthetic idea’ (in contrast to a ‘rational idea’), but then quickly moves back to his conceptual explanation of the topic. See *Ak.* pp. 315–316 in ‘On the Powers of the Mind Which Constitute Genius’ (§49).

⁵⁴ In Section 33 (‘Second Peculiarity of a Judgment of Taste’), Kant does make a passing reference to the French writer Charles Batteux and the German dramatist Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, but only as examples of famous aestheticians. See *Ak.* p. 284.

Kant's Division of the Sublime

Following Mendelssohn, Kant finds it expedient to divide the sublime into two categories. His first category – the ‘mathematical sublime’ – deals with the popular sublime trope of ‘immensity’, but from a more theoretical viewpoint. Instead of waxing eloquent about the ‘enormous’ size or other ‘extensive’ aspects observable in particular objects, Kant instead exalts the mind’s sublime ability to consider infinity; as he states: ‘... [A] power that enables us to think the infinite of supersensible intuition as given (in our intelligible substrate) surpasses any standard of sensibility. It is large beyond comparison even with the power of mathematical estimation...’.⁵⁵ Here Kant insists that, while the ‘mathematical’ sublime still occurs as a response to ‘immense’ objects, it demonstrates that the concept of infinity actually precludes reliance on the senses.

In contrast to the ‘mathematical’ sublime’s emphasis on the intuitive concept of infinity, Kant’s category of the ‘dynamical’ sublime focuses on a realization of our own mental powers in encounters with the power of nature. (This is where Kant gives brief examples from the natural world.) Although potentially dangerous experiences of vastness, magnificence, and suddenness in nature may produce this mental state, Kant asserts that, to be sublime, such experiences would not be ones that threaten our existence.⁵⁶ This is to say that such experiences are not painful ones, but ultimately pleasurable. In the ‘dynamical’ sublime, pleasure is found in the superiority of moral and mental faculties which are able to bravely assert cognitive victory over any potential danger to which a lesser faculty’s imagination might fall victim.⁵⁷

Kant’s divisions of the sublime allow him to distinguish ‘sublime’ responses of our powers of reason with respect to both its ‘pure’ and ‘practical’ aspects. As Paul Guyer writes,

... Kant characterizes his mathematical and dynamical sublimes as two different responses to the perception of nature, a response to the magnitude of nature that triggers a recognition of the power of our own theoretical reason

⁵⁵ Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (trans. Pluhar), *Ak.* pp. 254–255.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, §28, *Ak.* pp. 260–264.

⁵⁷ As Ryan explains, ‘...to Kant the sublime, like the beautiful, is a feeling of pleasure, and a judgment about the sublime is an aesthetic judgment that is reflective and disinterested’ (‘The Physiological Sublime’, p. 278). See Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (trans. Pluhar), *Ak.* pp. 266–267.

and a response to the might of nature that triggers a recognition of the power of our own practical reason and will.⁵⁸

Thereby, Kant distinguishes his formulation of the sublime from his predecessors' views. In conception (transcendental versus psychological or rhetorical), methodology (discussing cognitive theory versus describing nature or literature), and terminology (the 'mathematical' sublime and 'dynamical' sublime versus others), Kant's distinctions reveal that discussion of the sublime requires one to speak not in the singular, but the plural, distinguishing the Burkean and Kantian sublimities, as well as the 'Mendelssohnian' and others.⁵⁹

2.3. Hegel and the 'Symbolic' Sublime in Ancient History

The significance of 'the sublime' in works of art as part of a comprehensive aesthetic system of thought is perhaps most profound in the teaching of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831). As the following will summarize, Hegel designates ancient art as 'sublime' in his influential philosophical system. However, his conception of the sublime in historical works of art would not lead to a veneration of these works or a motivation for producing new artistic creations. Instead, Hegel's 'sublime' art would remain in ancient history.

Hegel's thought on aesthetics and the sublime are inseparably woven into his philosophy of history, which was first articulated in published form in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (*Phänomenologie des Geistes*, 1807). As Benedict Taylor summarizes, 'The basic premise of Hegel's *Phenomenology* and indeed his entire philosophy ... is the notion of history as a necessary self-sustaining process tracing the coming to self-consciousness of an idea (namely Spirit or *Geist*) over time'.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Guyer, 'The German Sublime', p. 104.

⁵⁹ The description of the sublime in Kant's Third Critique quickly produces responses among fellow German writers, most notably from Johann Christoph Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805) and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775–1854). Schiller writes two essays, the first entitled 'On the Sublime (Toward the Further Elaboration of Some Kantian Ideas)' (1793) and the second simply 'On [or 'Concerning'] the Sublime' (1801). Schelling, who considers art the 'universal organon of philosophy' (*System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800)) or, later, as 'a symbol of the infinite' (*Philosophy of Art* (posthumously published, 1859)), considers sublime art best represented in tragedies, where the hero can demonstrate 'the sublime of moral character'. See James Kirwan, *Sublimity: The Non-Rational and the Irrational in the History of Aesthetics* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 70–83 on Schiller and Guyer, 'The German Sublime', pp. 107–109 on Schelling.

⁶⁰ Benedict Taylor, *Mendelssohn, Time and Memory: The Romantic Conception of Cyclic Form* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 57. Taylor refers to Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, first delivered in 1805–1806, and published posthumously 1833–1836.

Hegel's view of history becomes the constant in his constantly developing and increasingly comprehensive system of philosophical thought.

The implications of Hegel's historical view are evident in his *Lectures on Fine Art* (*Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*; delivered 1818–1829, published posthumously in 1835). Here he establishes historic art as a predecessor to religion and philosophy, seeing ancient works as preliminary representations of *Geist*. As Hegel states, 'In works of art the nations have deposited their richest inner intuitions and ideas'.⁶¹ Like the late Joseph Schelling (1775–1854), finite works of art were understood as 'a *symbol* of the infinite', at least for ancient civilizations.

This designation points to the interrelationship between history and artistic genres in Hegel's system, which postulates three 'forms' of art throughout time: the 'symbolic', the 'classical', and the 'romantic'. Hegel's descriptions of how 'the Idea' is presented or realized over time reveal that the effectiveness of art reaches an apogee in 'classical' art and then diminishes with the rise of 'romantic' art. First, in 'symbolic' art '... the Idea is presented to consciousness only as indeterminate or determined *abstractly*, and ... for this reason the correspondence of meaning in shape is always defective and must itself remain purely abstract'.⁶² Eventually, in 'classical' art, 'it is the free and adequate embodiment of the Idea in the shape peculiarly appropriate to the Idea itself in its essential nature'.⁶³ By modern times, 'romantic' art was 'no longer the sensuous immediate existence of the spiritual in the bodily form of man, but instead the *inwardness of self-consciousness*'.⁶⁴ Hegel refers to this as 'the self-transcendence of art', where art is displaced by religion and philosophy (at least as a representation of *Geist*).⁶⁵

Unfortunately for the contemporary advocates of sublime aesthetics, Hegel's notion of 'the sublime' is tied to 'symbolic' art. As Kirwan states, 'Hegel ... particularly associates the sublime with the first, and most primitive, of the three

⁶¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), Vol. I, pp. 7–8; Quoted in Guyer, 'The German Sublime', p. 110.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 77. My summary of Hegel's three 'forms' of art follows that of Guyer, 'The German Sublime', p. 111.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* Hegel states 'In this way romantic art is the self-transcendence of art but within its own sphere and in the form of art itself'.

basic relations that the Idea can take to its configuration: the symbolic ...'.⁶⁶ This primitive stage of art is considered sublime in the sense that it is 'indeterminate' and 'abstract', which Hegel sees as detrimental to its expressive potential for an 'Idea' that itself is 'inconceivable'. Hegel asserts that the sublime occurs as '*the effort to give sensuous expression to an Idea in which the inconceivability of the Idea, and the impossibility of finding an adequate expression of it by means of the sensuous, are clearly evidenced*'. Thus, for Hegel, the 'sublime' becomes just a passing stage on the way to the formalistic 'beauty' of 'classical' art', whose form is 'peculiarly appropriate to the Idea itself in its essential nature'.⁶⁷

Hegel's 'low' view of the previously 'exalted' category of 'the sublime' leads to a diminished view of 'sublime' art and diminished use of 'sublime' in aesthetic discussions. As Kirwan states, '...though it is one of the ways in which the relationship between the Ideal and the attempt at its configuration appears in art, [the sublime] by no means enjoys the lofty status it had held in some eighteenth-century accounts'.⁶⁸ Likewise, Guyer asserts, 'Hegel's treatment of the sublime must be regarded as a major factor in the virtual disappearance of the category from aesthetics in the century or more following the posthumous publication of his *Lectures on Fine Art* in 1835'.⁶⁹ In sum, Hegel diminishes sublime aesthetics by allocating 'sublime' art to ancient history, discriminating between it and 'the Ideal' of 'classical' art which followed.

As 'the sublime' as an artistic category diminished in Hegel's system (and in subsequent nineteenth-century German writing), so did the significance of 'romantic' art as a significant expression of *Geist*. In the introduction to his *Lectures on Fine Art*, Hegel strongly asserts that 'The peculiar nature of artistic production and of works of art no longer fills our highest need' and that 'it is certainly the case that art no longer affords that satisfaction of spiritual needs which earlier ages and nations sought in it'.⁷⁰ More generally, he claimed that '...the conditions of our present time

⁶⁶ Kirwan, *Sublimity*, p. 94. My account of the location of Hegel's 'sublime' in his 'symbolic' form of art as well as Hegel's views on the sublimity of Hebrew poetry is indebted to Kirwan, pp. 93–96.

⁶⁷ Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, 3 vols, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1892), Vol. III, pp. 469–470.

⁶⁸ Kirwan, *Sublimity*, p. 92.

⁶⁹ Guyer, 'The German Sublime', p. 109.

⁷⁰ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, Vol. I, p. 10. Note that Hegel relates this to the close relationship between art and religion in ancient times.

are not favourable to art'.⁷¹ Most tragically for lovers of art, he declared that 'art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past' that 'has lost for us its genuine truth and life'.⁷² In short, he declared 'the death of art'.

Hegel's lectures on history, art, and philosophy were influential beyond his students and fellow academics. As John Edward Toews states,

... the influence of Hegelianism in Berlin was not confined to the university. The sympathy and support of patrons of literature and the arts like the Varnhagens, the Veits, and the Mendelssohns ... made Hegelianism an extremely important, if not completely dominating, presence in the Berlin literary world and general cultural scene.⁷³

In short, most everybody was 'a Hegelian' in 1820s Berlin, and they were beginning to recognize the contributions of their shared German heritage (as well as those of ancient and classical civilizations) and eager to progress forward as part of a superior (German) culture.⁷⁴ However, due to Hegel's views on history and his category of 'symbolic' art, 'the sublime' was back in history – permanently.

In such a cultural context, how could 'modern' German art be considered 'sublime'? Would it have to imitate 'ancient' works in their 'sublime' abstractions? What would then characterize its 'sublimity'? The competing formulations of the sublime and Hegel's view of 'symbolic' art certainly problematized the issue.

However, what if 'the sublime' no longer resided in the artistic object (as Moses Mendelssohn and Kant would agree), but instead was found in the mind of a 'genius'? If so, what relationship would such a 'genius' then have to his or her works of art?

Due to the complexity of these questions and the relationship between artistic products and their creative producers in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, the following section will survey views of genius. This will serve to give a clearer view of what a 'genius' was in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Also, it will begin to show the relationship between concepts of genius and sublime aesthetics. Then, in later chapters, the nature of Felix Mendelssohn's 'genius' will be explored, along with various analyses of his 'sublime' works.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., p. 11; Quoted in Guyer, 'The German Sublime', p. 110.

⁷³ John Edward Toews, *Hegelianism: The Path Toward Dialectical Humanism, 1805–1841* (Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 86.

⁷⁴ See Taylor, *MTM*, p. 57 with reference to Scott Burnham, 'Criticism, Faith, and the Idee: A.B. Marx's Early Reception of Beethoven', *19th-Century Music*, 13 (1990), p. 187.

3. The Sublime in the Mind of ‘Genius’

When eighteenth-century theories of the sublime are applied to the human mind, the concept of ‘genius’ emerges. As Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla demonstrate in their collection *The Sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory*, early in the eighteenth century writings addressing aspects of Longinus’ sublime begin to also present the idea of ‘genius’. When poets are recognized for their literary power to move the affections (often by disregarding the ‘rules’ of composition) they are seen as the source of ‘Grand Concepts’ and ‘Noble Passions’. Thus, as Ashfield and de Bolla state, the idea of the ‘original genius ... can be understood as an outworking of the discourse of the sublime’.⁷⁵

Perhaps even more than in English writings, theories of genius were integrated into the German discourse of the sublime, resulting in the exaltation of ‘sublime genius’ for the ‘works of genius’ and diminished distinctions between sublime subject and object. Building on foundational German theories of genius and artistic production, the writings of Moses Mendelssohn and Johann Georg Sulzer show a transfer of sublime qualities from artistic objects to their artistic creators, whose ‘sublimity’ and ‘genius’ were on display in their works. Next, Kant’s ‘Analytic of the Sublime’ further clarifies the relationship between ‘fine art’ and ‘genius’, emphasizing the role of exemplary models, ‘understanding’, and ‘originality’. Also, Kant’s writing provides a pattern for the emergence of ‘genius’ and demonstrates the common domain of ‘genius’ and ‘sublimity’.

Then, in the nineteenth century, writers such as Schelling recognized the genius’ seemingly divine power to unify and create. As these ideas were transmitted from Germany to England, the status of ‘the genius’ rose to the sublime heights of ‘Hero’ and ‘Prophet’. The transmission of German ideas of genius to England assured that, both in Germany and England, ‘sublime’ works of art brought the recognition of ‘genius’; and once recognized as a ‘genius’, the artist was expected to produce ‘sublime’ works.

3.1. Connecting ‘Genius’ to the ‘Work of Genius’

In *The Possessor and the Possessed: Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, and the Idea of Musical Genius*, Peter Kivy traces one eighteenth-century concept of genius back to Longinus’ *On the Sublime*. He summarizes genius (‘roughly’) as one who has ‘the

⁷⁵ Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime: A Reader*, p. 18.

ability to achieve sublimity in writing’ and ‘a figure of weight, spirit, nobility, loftiness of thought’.⁷⁶ However, he acknowledges that ‘in the end we get ... a collection of ideas ... rather than a “theory”’ and that ““Theories” were to come only upon the reemergence of *On the Sublime* in the eighteenth century’.⁷⁷ Thus, it was left up to eighteenth-century writers to define a ‘genius’, which often occurred in the discourse on the sublime.

It is Moses Mendelssohn that explicitly develops a view of genius in relation to the sublime.⁷⁸ As summarized above, Mendelssohn’s essay ‘On the sublime and naïve in the fine sciences’ identified two types of sublimity, of which he described the second type as the ‘intensive’ sublime. This appeared when works of art put on display the ‘great wit’, ‘genius’, and ‘imagination’ of the artist.⁷⁹ The focus of ‘the awe and admiration’ was ‘mostly on the genius and the extraordinary capabilities of the artist’.⁸⁰ The work of art (specifically works of literature in Mendelssohn’s essay) facilitated the recognition of such ‘genius’.

This view of the relationship between the genius and the work of genius led to a change in focus of aesthetic theory from the empirical evaluation of ‘perfect’ works to an interest in the creative process itself. As Peter Watson discerns, ‘the product of genius is itself a form of perfect knowledge’.⁸¹ This is exemplified in Johann Georg Sulzer’s treatise *General Theory of the Fine Arts* (1771–1774). According to Sulzer, an artistic genius displays certain qualities *in his art* – including inspiration (*Begeisterung*), originality (*Originalgeist*), and variety (*Mannigfaltigkeit*) – such that ‘Ideas suddenly develop themselves with seemingly no effort, and the best of them flow forth in such abundance as if the product of some higher force’.⁸²

⁷⁶ Peter Kivy, *The Possessor and the Possessed: Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, and the Idea of Musical Genius* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 14–15.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15. Kivy also acknowledges that there is no precise term for ‘genius’ in Longinus’ text (despite modern translations using such), but points to literal translations of Longinus’ terminology as ‘greatness of mind’ (p. 14).

⁷⁸ Peter Reill discusses the context of developing German theories of genius, including those of Bodmer, Sulzer, and Mendelssohn, in his monograph *The German Enlightenment and the Rise of Historicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

⁷⁹ Mendelssohn, ‘On the Sublime’, in *Philosophical Writings*, p. 197.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

⁸¹ Peter Watson, *The German Genius: Europe’s Third Renaissance, the Second Scientific Revolution, and the Twentieth Century* (1st ed. New York: Harper, 2010), p. 75.

⁸² See Nancy Baker and Thomas Christensen, eds. and trans., *Aesthetics and the Arts of Musical Composition in the German Enlightenment: Selected Writings of Johann Georg Sulzer and Heinrich Christoph Koch* (Cambridge UP, 1995), pp. 32, 34, and 47.

Likewise, Sulzer states, ‘All artists of genius reveal themselves in their works by the fruitfulness of their genius’.⁸³ However, the genius is able to select and order these many ideas to produce art that appears whole: a ‘perfect sensuous representation’. Thus, ‘the product of genius’ – the work of art – became an objective display of the unique knowledge and natural power of genius.

In 1790, an even more significant and influential German theory of artistic genius was to be published, one defining more clearly the relationship between genius and sublimity. This would come with Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*.

3.2. A Kantian Pattern for Genius

In the *Critique of Judgment*, Section 46, Kant states his definition of genius: ‘Genius is the talent (natural endowment) that gives the rule to art’.⁸⁴ Furthermore, an initial corollary of this definition is that ‘fine arts must necessarily be considered arts of genius’.⁸⁵ Going further in Section 48 (‘On the Relation of Genius to Taste’), Kant demands that ‘fine art itself, i.e., production of such objects, requires genius’.⁸⁶

In Kant’s extended discussion of genius in the Third Critique (§§46–50), a pattern for the emergence of genius can be discerned. In the following, this Kantian pattern will be detailed to explain more fully Kant’s view of genius, the significant relationship between genius and ‘fine art’, and ultimately, the close connection between the sublime and genius in Kant’s influential work on aesthetics.

Kant’s pattern for the development of genius begins with some prerequisites. To even be considered as a possible genius, one must possess both talent for and knowledge of fine art. But what did Kant mean when he referred to ‘talent’ and ‘knowledge’, and how did it relate to ‘genius’?

For Kant, ‘genius’ was a particular ‘talent’.⁸⁷ In his summary of his main points on genius in Section 49, ‘On the Powers of the Mind Which Constitute Genius’, Kant states that ‘*First*, genius is a talent for art, not for science, where we

⁸³ Sulzer, *General Theory of the Fine Arts*, in Baker and Christensen, *Aesthetics and the Arts of Musical Composition*, p. 47 (from the entry on ‘Mannigfaltigkeit’ (variety)).

⁸⁴ Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (trans. Pluhar), Ak. p. 307.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., Ak. p. 311.

⁸⁷ It is important to note that, for German thinkers in the eighteenth century, ‘talent’ alone was not enough to be considered a ‘genius’. ‘Genius’ was related to, but distinct from, ‘talent’. For examples of the use of these terms, see Sulzer’s comments on ‘invention’ (*Erfindung*) and ‘originality’ (*Originalgeist*) in his *General Theory* (in Baker and Christensen, *Aesthetics and the Arts of Musical Composition*, pp. 56 and 36).

must start from distinctly known rules that determine the procedure we must use in it'.⁸⁸ Thus he identified both the domain of genius ('art') and its nature (a 'talent'). Limiting the domain of genius to art meant that this unique 'talent' could not be reduced to teachable 'rules'. In his 'Elucidation and Confirmation of the Above Explication of Genius' (§47, following his initial definition of 'genius' in §46), Kant makes this clear. In contrast to learning Newton's scientific laws (or 'steps'), 'one cannot learn to write inspired poetry'.⁸⁹

However, the 'talent' for 'fine art' that was genius also relied upon knowledge of fine art.⁹⁰ In his opening discussion 'On Fine Art' (§44), Kant related such knowledge to that of the so-called 'fine sciences', stating that

fine art in its full perfection requires much science: e.g., we must know ancient languages, we must have read the authors considered classical, we must know history and be familiar with the antiquities, etc.: and this is why these historical sciences have, through a confusion of words, themselves come to be called fine sciences, because they constitute the foundation and preparation needed for fine art, and in part also because they have come to include even a familiarity with the products of fine art (as in oratory and poetry).⁹¹

Thus, for Kant the idea of 'genius' is not in opposition to the idea of 'talent' or a faculty that finds 'knowledge' unnecessary. Instead, Kant's 'genius' is a particular 'talent': one that is capable of producing works of 'fine' art, based on extensive particular 'knowledge' of 'fine art'.

The next step in the Kantian pattern for genius relates to the nature of artistic production for the genius. In Section 47, he makes the clarification (or 'elucidation') that 'genius must be considered the very opposite of a *spirit of imitation*'; however, he goes on to describe the genius as an artist 'who needs nothing but an example in order to put the talent of which he is conscious to work'.⁹² As the 'natural' talent of 'genius' cannot do without particular 'knowledge', neither can it do without previous artistic models.

⁸⁸ Ibid., *Ak.* p. 317.

⁸⁹ Ibid., *Ak.* pp. 308–309.

⁹⁰ For Kant, 'knowledge' is a type of judgment that asserts objective truth about something. As Werner Pluhar explains, 'Knowledge (*Wissen*), for Kant, is assent (*Fürwahrhalten*) that is adequate not just subjectively but objectively, i.e., adequate to convince not just oneself but everyone' (Pluhar, 'Translator's Introduction', in Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, p. xl).

⁹¹ Ibid., *Ak.* p. 305.

⁹² Ibid., *Ak.* pp. 308–309. Emphasis in original.

However, Kant is very clear to define exactly how a ‘genius’ relates to these artistic models. He states: ‘...the [artistic] rule must be abstracted from what the [previous] artist has done, i.e., from the product, which others may use to test their own talent, letting it serve them as their model, not to be *copied* [*Nachmachung*] but to be *imitated* [*Nachahmung*]’.⁹³ His use of ‘imitation’ (*Nachahmung*) here differs from his strong statement earlier regarding the ‘spirit of imitation’. There must be a distinction between simply *copying* a previous work of art and *imitating* an artistic model. As he would explain in the concluding remarks of Section 49: ‘...imitation becomes *aping* if the pupil *copies* everything, including even the deformities that the genius had to permit only because it would have been difficult to eliminate them without diminishing the force of the idea’.⁹⁴ Obviously, Kant’s ‘genius’ was not to ‘ape’ or mimic his artistic predecessors or their works.

Furthermore, for Kant’s genius, it was not enough to simply study previous ‘products’ of artistic masters. As a next step, a true genius must demonstrate ‘understanding’ of great works by conceptualizing their purpose and thus being able to emulate aspects of these works.⁹⁵ As he states in the conclusion of Section 49, ‘genius presupposes understanding, but also a presentation (though an indeterminate one) of the material, i.e., of the intuition, needed to exhibit this concept, and hence presupposes a relation of imagination to understanding’.⁹⁶ The genius’s ‘power of concepts’ was able to synthesize (through the ‘imagination’) essential ‘aesthetic ideas’ (determinative concepts) of the model, and thereby get at the unwritten ‘rules’ of the previous genius’ manner of production. He was able to go beyond his own ‘talent’ and ‘knowledge’ to a true ‘understanding’ of the existing work. He was then able to emulate the previous master in new artistic productions.

Kant’s pattern for genius continues with the adaptation of ‘aesthetic ideas’ and unwritten ‘rules’ from artistic models into new works of art. As his initial

⁹³ Ibid., *Ak.* p. 309. Pluhar provides the bracketed original terms and quotes the editor of the Philosophische Bibliothek edition of Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, who asserts that Kant ‘presumably meant to write ‘*Nachahmung ... Nachfolge*’ (‘[not to be] imitated [but to be] followed’).

⁹⁴ Ibid., *Ak.* p. 318.

⁹⁵ Kant viewed ‘understanding’ (*Verstand*) as one of two basic cognitive faculties (along with ‘sensitivity’), which can be defined as ‘the faculty of concepts, thought, and discursivity’ or simply ‘the power of concepts’. See Hanna, ‘Kant’s Theory of Judgment’ in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2011) and Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (trans. Pluhar), *Ak.* p. 190.

⁹⁶ Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (trans. Pluhar), *Ak.* p. 317. In the production of ‘fine art’, a genius’ power of imagination was one able to create an ‘aesthetic idea’. See Hanna, ‘Kant’s Theory of Judgment’ and Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (trans. Pluhar), *Ak.* p. 314.

discussion of genius in Section 46 makes clear, first and foremost, a genius must demonstrate *originality* in art. He writes, ‘Genius is a *talent* for producing something for which no determinate rule can be given, not a predisposition consisting of a skill for something that can be learned by following some rule or other; hence the foremost property of genius must be *originality*’.⁹⁷ Again, simply copying (‘aping’) a previous work would not do.

However, Kant’s requirement of originality for genius goes beyond his German predecessors such as Sulzer. Having in Section 47 already clarified the way in which geniuses may ‘imitate’, Kant, in Section 49, goes so far as to equate genius with originality. He states: ‘Genius is the exemplary originality of a subject’s natural endowments in the *free* use of his cognitive powers’.⁹⁸ When this happens, Kant asserts that a genius follows another genius but with ‘his own originality’, showing ‘boldness of expression’ and some deviation from artistic rules.⁹⁹ Thus, the ‘originality’ of a genius shows uniquely bold powers of expression: powers that are worthy of emulation.

The final step of Kant’s pattern of genius is to produce exemplary new models. As Kant states in Section 46, ‘Since nonsense too can be original, the products of genius must also be models, i.e., they must be *exemplary*...’.¹⁰⁰ As Kant has made clear, the work of genius is not an imitation of a previous work: ‘they do not themselves arise through imitation’.¹⁰¹ Instead, the new product follows unwritten ‘rules’ that the genius has discerned, and, furthermore, can serve as the source of a new ‘standard or rule by which to judge’.¹⁰² Thus, a genius must produce artistic products that then serve as models for future geniuses.

It is in this sense that Kant’s genius ‘gives the rule to art’.¹⁰³ However, this ‘rule’ is an ineffable one, not able to be articulated by the artist or his admiring followers. Furthermore, as such ‘rules’ are only discerned in the mind, the true locus

⁹⁷ Ibid., *Ak.* pp. 307–308.

⁹⁸ Ibid., *Ak.* p. 318. Emphasis in original.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., *Ak.* p. 308. Furthermore, In Section 49, Kant distinguishes between ‘originality’ and mere ‘mannerism’, which ‘consists in aping more *peculiarity* (originality) as such, so as to distance oneself as far as at all possible from imitators, yet without possessing the talent needed to be *exemplary* as well’ (*Ak.* p. 318).

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., *Ak.* p. 307.

of Kant's artistic genius is not the artistic product, but the artistic mind (in all its faculties). Understood in this sense – and recalling that 'true sublimity must be sought only in the mind of the judging person' – Kant's 'genius' and 'sublime' exist in the same cognitive space.¹⁰⁴ Here in the *Critique of Judgment*, German theories of genius and sublimity have found their fullest articulation and their common ground.

3.3. A Genius with the Divine Power of Creative Imagination

By the end of the eighteenth century, German views of genius had culminated in Kant's genius of sublime cognitive powers, able to produce exemplary new works of fine art. His 'transcendent' view of genius was seminal to further thinkers, who increasingly saw the genius' imaginative powers as akin to divine powers of creation. While the emphasis is on the powers of the genius, the admiration of 'the work of genius' also rises to new heights. This is evident in views from late eighteenth-century Germany and on into the nineteenth century in England.

First, late eighteenth-century German views of genius became significant for Idealist thought, especially that of Schelling. In Part Six of his *System of Transcendental Idealism*, Schelling concludes his discussion of the 'Character of the Art Product' by emphasizing the importance of genius as follows:

Genius is ... marked off from everything that consists in mere talent or skill by the fact that through it a contradiction is resolved, which is soluble absolutely and otherwise by nothing else. In all producing, even of the most ordinary and commonplace sort, an unconscious activity operates along with the conscious one; but only a producing whose condition was an infinite opposition of the two activities is an aesthetic producing, and one that is only possible through genius.¹⁰⁵

Here Schelling insists that 'genius' is required to solve the contradiction between consciousness and reality, and this resolution occurs only in 'aesthetic producing'. Furthermore, Schelling asserts that

Art is paramount to the philosopher, precisely because it opens to him, as it were, the holy of holies, where burns in eternal and original unity, as if in a single flame, that which in nature and history is rent asunder, and in life and action, no less than in thought, must forever fly apart.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., *Ak.* p. 264.

¹⁰⁵ Johann Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Peter Lauchlan Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), p. 228.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 231 (§3 Corollaries).

This sacred and revelatory aspect of the artist's work is acknowledged by Berbeli Wanning, who sees 'divine creative power' manifested in Schelling's 'artistic intuition'. According to Wanning, Schelling's artistic genius is therefore '...a human being who is in possession of that creative power through which the unconsciously working power of original divine creation flows into a consciously produced artistic product'.¹⁰⁷ Thus, for Schelling, the artistic genius was a channel through which this divine power flowed into works of art.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) helped bring this view of genius further into the nineteenth century, and onto English soil. For Coleridge, this 'unifying imagination' (following Schelling's 'artistic intuition') was the essence of genius, as evident in Shakespeare's 'fusion to force many into one' in his great dramatic works and poetry. According to notes from his lectures on Shakespeare (1808/1811–1812), Coleridge found 'undoubted proof' of 'Imagination or the power by which one image or feeling is made to modify many others' in Shakespeare's *King Lear* and the 'greatest faculty of the human mind' in his early poem *Venus and Adonis*.¹⁰⁸ This continued emphasis on the connection between the 'product' of genius and the genius himself further demonstrates how writings on the sublime and genius overlap, even with the post-Kantian 'transcendental' genius. According to David Vallins, Coleridge would assert that 'we cannot separate ... sublimity [of artworks] from the unifying imagination, which never allows us to rest in the concrete or the superficial, but always directs us towards the transcendent ideas which it incorporates'.¹⁰⁹ In a work of art, sublimity was the evidence for the 'unifying imagination' of a genius, where, as Watson explains, 'the two realms of the individual and the general came together'.¹¹⁰

By the 1830s, another significant aspect of the eighteenth-century German genius was being emphasized in the English press: 'originality'. John Abraham Héraud's article 'On Poetical Genius Considered as a Creative Power' for *Fraser's*

¹⁰⁷ Berbeli Wanning, 'Schelling', in *Music in German Philosophy: An Introduction*, ed. Sorgner and Fürbeth (University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 101; with reference to *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), p. 223.

¹⁰⁸ From Coleridge's Notebooks from 1808–1811; Quoted in David Vallins, *On the Sublime: Coleridge's Writings* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 99. For a coherent transcription of this passage, see Coleridge's *Criticism of Shakespeare*, R. A. Foakes, ed. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), p. 22.

¹⁰⁹ Vallins, *On the Sublime: Coleridge's Writings*, p. 83.

¹¹⁰ Watson, *German Genius*, p. 75.

Magazine (1830) described a ‘creative genius’ as one that could have ‘original thoughts’: ‘What are called original thoughts, are underived, indeed original, existent in the individual soul’.¹¹¹ And, similar to Schelling, these ideas were evidence of a divine creative power manifest in the human genius:

We shall ... contend for the creative faculty of genius in its literal signification, and assert its power of creation in the most extended sense; not only in the combination of ideas, but ideas themselves, primarily and underived, as its own absolute and independent production ... we shall endeavour to prove, that the human, like the Divine mind, doth possess this living fountain – a creative power in itself to produce the sublime, the beautiful, and the new!¹¹²

Thus, Héraud required that the ‘creative genius’ have the power to produce original ideas underived from preexistent materials; as he stated later in his essay: ‘the imagination creates its ideas ... from nothing!’¹¹³ Héraud’s proposal builds on a classic aspect of sublime rhetoric apparent in Longinus’ treatise *On the Sublime*: as the Hebrew God had created light *ex nihilo* (only with the utterance ‘Let there be light’), so any author capable of creating truly original works must have a similar ability through the use of imaginative powers. Here Héraud, building on the ideas of Schelling (and views of sublime rhetoric going back to Longinus) adds the ‘genie’ to ‘genius’, evoking the supernatural in his description of a ‘creative genius’.

Likewise, in a popular series of lectures from 1840, Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881) advanced a view of ‘The Hero’ as an ‘original man’ with words of divine source and power. In his lecture ‘The Hero as Prophet’ he described one ‘sent from the Infinite Unknown with tidings to us. We may call him Poet, Prophet, God; – in one way or other, we all feel that the words he utters are as no *man’s* words’.¹¹⁴ According to Carlyle, the words of ‘The Hero’ are original and God-sent, not derived from human sources.

¹¹¹ J. A. Héraud, ‘On Poetical Genius Considered as a Creative Power’, *Fraser’s Magazine*, 1 (1830), p. 59; Quoted in Robert Macfarlane, *Original Copy: Plagiarism and Originality in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 2. See Macfarlane, pp. 38–39 for a summary of the influence of Héraud’s article on British thought in the 1830s and 1840s.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 56–57; Quoted in Macfarlane, *Original Copy*, p. 38.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 63; Quoted in Macfarlane, *Original Copy*, p. 2.

¹¹⁴ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1840), p. 55; Quoted in Macfarlane, *Original Copy*, p. 40 from *The Works of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. H.D. Traill (London: Chapman and Hall, 1896–1899), v. 45. Emphasis added.

Through English writers such as Coleridge, Héraud, and Carlyle, German ideas of genius were popularized in English literature, the press, and popular lectures. The requirement for a genius to demonstrate ‘imagination’ and ‘originality’ remained, and the attribution these powers to a divine source took the view of genius to new levels of prominence. Their powers were supernaturally sublime, and their works were there to prove it.

4. Summary

This chapter has traced the concept of ‘the sublime’ in eighteenth- and earlynineteenth-century thought. Beginning with Longinus’ treatise as the impetus of discourse on ‘the sublime’, definitions and discussions of the concept were found in works of literary criticism, essays, and treatises. The focus of these writings was initially literature (classical, English, and biblical), but also recognized the sublime in nature. Then, Burke’s *Enquiry* moved the discussion of the sublime towards the empirical experience of the sublime, emphasizing the psychological and physiological.

Beginning with Moses Mendelssohn, German theories of the sublime increasingly found the sublime not only in works of art and nature, but their creators. Kant’s important formulation continued the movement inward, describing sublimity with respect to the cognitive powers of the mind. However, Hegel’s location of ‘sublime’ art in the ‘symbolic’ works of ancient history threatened to make the aesthetic category itself obsolete (at least for ‘modern’ works of art).

As demonstrated in section three, the significant overlap between the discourse of the sublime and that of ‘genius’ provides a way forward for the continued discussion of sublime aesthetics beyond specific writings on ‘the sublime’. For German writers of the late-eighteenth century, sublimity becomes incarnate in the mind and imagination of the genius. Kant’s ‘Analytic of the Sublime’ puts forth a pattern for genius, and Schelling’s view of genius further connects the concept with divine creative power. For these writers, the ‘sublime’ mind of genius is capable of presenting itself in artistic creations which themselves display sublime qualities.

In the following chapter, the sublime will be explored with respect to the art of music. First, eighteenth-century writing that connects the sublime to music will be explored, including connections with Longinus’ rhetorical sublime as well as eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theories of musical expression. Then, in Chapters

Three through Six, aspects of sublime aesthetics from the eighteenth as well as the early-nineteenth centuries will be sought in the life and works of Felix Mendelssohn.

2.

The Sublime in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Musical Thought

And may not long Sounds be to the *Ear* what extended Prospects are to the *Eye*?
– *An Essay on the Sublime. By the late Dr. Baillie* (London, 1747)¹¹⁵

The principal, if not indeed the sole function of a perfect musical composition is the accurate expression of emotions and passions in all their varying and individual nuances.
– Johann Georg Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste* (Leipzig, 1792–1794)¹¹⁶

English and German writers of the eighteenth century recognized the sublime in literature and art, explaining in extensive detail how Longinus's descriptions of the sublime could be applied as an aesthetic category. But how did they identify the sublime in music? Are sublime aspects of literature and nature transferable? Furthermore, how does discussion of the sublime in music relate to views of music and other significant aesthetic discussions in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries?

This chapter will seek to answer these questions and summarize how music was understood to be 'sublime'. After an initial search for applications of the sublime to music in three primary eighteenth-century formulations, this chapter will survey early eighteenth-century writers who describe more particularly how music may convey Longinus' 'Grand Concepts' and produce 'Noble Passions'. Then, the musical sublime will be considered in light of changes in musical aesthetics. As views of music's imitative capabilities recede and advocates of music's expressive power arise, the significance of the sublime in musical thought will expand, resulting in more comprehensive definitions and theories at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The sublime will be seen to transcend musical territories, connecting musical eras, elements, and capabilities within a larger discussion of aesthetic ideals.

¹¹⁵ John Baillie, *An Essay on the Sublime. By the late Dr. Baillie* (London, 1747), p. 39.

¹¹⁶ Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste* ..., 2nd edition (Leipzig, 1792–1794); In Peter le Huray and James Day, *Music and Aesthetics in the Eighteenth and Early-Nineteenth Centuries* (Abridged edn.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 99.

1. Searching for the Musical Sublime

As discussed in Chapter One, after the resurgence of interest in Longinus' treatise *On the Sublime* (following Boileau's translation), the eighteenth century saw an ever-increasing number of formulations and manifestations of this aesthetic concept. In England, Edmund Burke's *Enquiry* (1757) assumed a primary position, serving to define the distinction between the aesthetic categories of 'the sublime' and 'the beautiful'. In Germany, Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790) brought the discussion of sublime aesthetics into the most influential system of critical philosophy of the century. However, both were preceded in origin by Moses Mendelssohn's 'On the sublime and naïve in the fine sciences' (written in 1754). This essay, along with other essays eventually included in his collection of *Philosophical Writings* (1761, revised 1771), established Mendelssohn's reputation as a significant thinker on important philosophical issues and influenced Kant's more popular formulation.¹¹⁷

Although similar in their basic categorical distinctions, these three primary formulations of the sublime were shown to be different in (1) conception, (2) methodology, and (3) terminology. First, Burke's empirical observations on 'the sublime' contrast greatly with Mendelssohn's theories based on early principles of German aesthetic philosophy, especially the requirement of a 'perfect representation' in art. Kant's theory, although informed by both Burke's *Enquiry* and Mendelssohn's essay, differs even more through its focus on the transcendental capabilities of our inner cognitive powers. Second, the methodology of each formulation is distinct: Burke primarily describes the psychological and physiological response to natural phenomena, while Mendelssohn engages in literary criticism, and Kant discusses cognitive theory. Finally, both Mendelssohn and Kant move beyond Burke's basic binary categories to subspecies of the sublime (Mendelssohn's 'extensive' and 'intensive' sublimes and Kant's 'mathematical' and 'dynamical' sublimes).

The distinctions between these formulations of the sublime directly affect their application with respect to music. At least initially, two of the three (the Burkean and the Mendelssohnian) seem to have something to say about 'the sublime' in music; but Kant's may not relate to music at all. Thus, searching for definition of the musical sublime may prove to be *beyond* the conceptual boundaries of these

¹¹⁷ See Dahlstrom, 'Introduction', in Mendelssohn, *Philosophical Writings*, p. ix.

primary formulations. However, due to the significance of these theories in concept and influence, the following will endeavour to evaluate each with respect to application for the musical sublime and refer to possible approaches for applying the Burkean, Mendelssohnian, and Kantian sublimines to music, drawing on relevant studies.

1.1. The Burkean Sublime and Music

At least initially, Burke's theory of the sublime seems applicable to music, presenting music's powers as part of nature's ability to evoke the sublime. His detailed descriptions of 'the passion caused by the great and sublime in *nature*' in Part Two of his *Enquiry* refer to many things that seem relevant to music. As the following will summarize, Burke's *Enquiry* does allow for the inclusion of musical sound among those natural phenomena able to produce a sublime effect. However, due to his lack of musical detail in his descriptions, much is left open to interpretation in how this occurs.

In Section IV of Part Two of his *Enquiry*, Burke gives music as an example of how 'obscure and imperfect idea[s]' may be conveyed through 'the acknowledged and powerful effects of instrumental music' (in comparison to the clarity of speech).¹¹⁸ Also, in Section XVIII he compares the sublime effect of the sudden 'striking of a great clock' in 'the silence of the night' with 'a single stroke of a drum, repeated with pauses'.¹¹⁹ However, aside from his general distinction of instrumental timbre (versus a vocal timbre) and brief reference to battery percussion, more specific aspects of *musical* sound are not identified in these comments. Burke does comment further about sound in general, including loud sounds; 'low, confused, uncertain sounds'; and the cries of animals.¹²⁰ Furthermore, he asserts that 'sounds have a great power', and 'modifications of sound, which may be productive of the sublime, are almost infinite'.¹²¹

From these comments, more specific aspects of musical sounds can be surmised and said to produce the Burkean sublime. The ineffable nature of expression in various instrumental genres of music can be understood to communicate 'obscure and imperfect idea[s]'. Music's use of sudden contrasts in

¹¹⁸ Burke, *Enquiry* (Oxford World's Classics), pp. 55–56 (Part Two, Section IV).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 76 (Part Two, Section XVIII).

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 75–78 (Part Two, Sections XVII–XX).

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 75 and 77–78 (Part Two, Sections XVII and XX).

dynamics (loud and soft) and pitch (high and low) can produce surprise, even terror. The limitless combinations of timbral possibilities can often be ‘confused’ and ‘uncertain’, especially to the untrained ear. Thus, music can be understood to have this ‘great power’ that is ‘productive of the [Burkean] sublime’.

The analogical openness in Burke’s theory seems to promise ready application to the realm of music. However, Burke’s actual comments on music are scant and vague. As Roger Barnett Larsson decries,

Unfortunately, given Burke’s lack of musical knowledge, it is impossible to determine whether he really thought intrinsic traits alone constituted musical beauty and sublimity, or whether he simply felt incompetent to deal with music in connection with more complicated issues.¹²²

Burke’s sublime, as described in the *Enquiry*, is therefore limited (or at least vague) in its application to musical aesthetics.

The influence of Burke’s *Enquiry*, however, cannot be underestimated. According to Larsson, Burke’s essay was ‘the most important source for the shaping of ideas on the beautiful and the sublime in the last half of the eighteenth century and even beyond’.¹²³ Furthermore, Larsson states that Burke’s ‘inclusion of music among the arts that may be distinguished as beautiful or sublime doubtless helped further the notion that music could be effectively dealt with in these terms’.¹²⁴ Although other British writers were discussing ‘the sublime’ in music with more detail several decades before Burke, it was the *Enquiry* that was most influential. These other works will be explored below, but first an evaluation of the primary German formulations of the sublime is in order.

1.2. The Mendelssohnian Sublime and Music

As Burke’s inclusion of musical sound amongst ‘natural’ means of producing the sublime helps confirm music’s sublime potential, Moses Mendelssohn’s mention of music among the fine arts in his essay ‘On the sublime’ promises similar support for the musical sublime. However, such application may be difficult to assert with much detail, at least initially. This is due (as in Burke’s *Enquiry*) to the brevity and lack of clarity in Mendelssohn’s comments on music in his essay, most likely due to his lack of extensive knowledge about music.

¹²² Larsson, ‘The Beautiful, the Sublime’, p. 81.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 21.

¹²⁴ Ibid., pp. 78–80.

In his essay ‘On the sublime and naïve in the fine sciences’, Mendelssohn’s insights on music and the sublime are limited to two comments. First, he acknowledges that the ‘monotone repetition of a single [musical] sound, at equal intervals’, is capable of expressing ‘reverence, fright, [and] horror’ through its ‘uniformity of repetition’.¹²⁵ Second, after discussing how perfections in works of art can display ‘*immensity of strength*’ to produce ‘awe’, he (somewhat obscurely) states that ‘The sublime in literary composition is accompanied by the enormous in music, by the artificially immense in the repetition, and so forth’.¹²⁶ Due to the lack of further comment on what is ‘enormous’ in music, the modern reader may infer that the grandfather Mendelssohn did not have the musical understanding that his grandchildren Felix and Fanny would.

However, Mendelssohn’s obscurity regarding ‘the enormous in music’ does not mean that his theory does not explain *how* music may produce a sublime effect, at least to the extent that Burke did. His assertion that the ‘monotone repetition of a single sound’ can express ‘reverence, fright, [and] horror’ is similar to Burke’s comparison of the sudden ‘striking of a great clock’ with the repeated ‘stroke on a drum’. Essentially, for Mendelssohn, music’s ability to provoke the sublime (like other arts) relates to its imitation of other potentially sublime sounds in human experience. Furthermore, Mendelssohn’s categories of the ‘extensive’ and ‘intensive’ sublimines allow for the sublime to be sought not only in the ‘naïve’ representations of obviously sublime objects and ideas, but also in the sublime displays of an artist’s ‘great wit’ and ‘imagination’.¹²⁷

1.3. The Kantian Sublime and Music

While Burke and Mendelssohn at least make brief mention of music in their theories of the sublime, Kant’s Third Critique initially appears to leave music (and other arts) out of the discussion. As Andrew Bowie points out, Kant refers to the ‘sublime’ specifically in response to nature, not art.¹²⁸ As Kant begins his ‘Analytic of the Sublime’, he states that ‘we start here by considering only the sublime in natural

¹²⁵ Mendelssohn, ‘On the Sublime’, in *Philosophical Writings*, p. 194.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 194–196. Emphasis in original.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

¹²⁸ Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*, p. 36.

objects (since the sublime in art is always confined to the conditions that [art] must meet to be in harmony with nature) ...'.¹²⁹

Kant does mention music in his 'Analytic of the Sublime'. In his 'Division of the Fine Arts' (Section 51), Kant separates the 'fine arts' into three categories: (1) the arts of speech (oratory and poetry), (2) the visual arts (architecture, sculpture, and painting), and (3) the art of the beautiful play of sensations. It is this third category which includes music as the 'play of sensations (of hearing)'.¹³⁰ In his next section, he discusses how these might be combined, giving examples of song (poetry and music), opera (song with pictorial or theatrical exhibition), and oratorio (which is an 'exhibition of the sublime ... insofar as it belongs to fine art ... with beauty'), but refers to no particular examples.¹³¹

Kant then discusses the comparative aesthetic value of the various fine arts, where he puts forth music, after poetry, as the second most highly ranked of the fine arts due to its proximity to poetry and speech.¹³² However, in an evaluation of the culture (or cultivation) that an art can provide the mind, he conflictingly gives music the lowest place 'since it merely plays with sensations'.¹³³ This low standing of music in Kant's second ranking (considered with respect to the mind's cultivation) becomes a hindrance to viewing music as 'sublime' in Kant's formulation.¹³⁴

However, as argued in Chapter One, Kant's pattern for 'genius' (as described in Sections 46–50 of the Third Critique) has significance for understanding a great work of art as evidence for the inner sublimity of the 'genius' who produced the work. Although Kant does not discuss 'sublime' works of music in these sections, his specific understanding of 'genius' in relation to 'fine art' makes the recognition of 'genius' in the production of musical works possible. Kant's theory of genius will be

¹²⁹ Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (trans. Pluhar), §23, *Ak.* p. 245. This is in contrast with 'the beautiful', which Kant associates more directly with the 'fine (schöne) arts'.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, §51, *Ak.* p. 325.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, §52, *Ak.* p. 325.

¹³² *Ibid.*, §53, *Ak.* p. 328.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, §53, *Ak.* p. 329. Some scholars ascribe this low estimation to Kant's 'utterly philistine' taste in music. See Eva Schaper's essay 'Taste, Sublimity, and Genius,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 368–392.

¹³⁴ Despite this hindrance, Herbert Schueller argues that music *can* be sublime, using various concepts directly from Kant's own formulation. See 'Immanuel Kant and the Aesthetics of Music', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 14, no. 2 (1955), pp. 218–247.

used in future chapters to help understand the reception of Mendelssohn as a ‘genius’ and his works as ‘sublime’ in the nineteenth century.

In summary, direct applications of these primary formulations of the sublime to musical aesthetics are somewhat problematic. Due to the lack of musical detail, Burke’s and Mendelssohn’s theories of the sublime only present vaguely *how* music may be considered sublime. Kant’s theory does not apply the category of ‘the sublime’ to music at all, and further relegates music to the lowest division of fine arts, at least with respect to its effect on the mind. Therefore, the use of these theories for musical aesthetics requires elaboration based on cursory and somewhat obscure references to music (as in Burke’s and Mendelssohn’s writings), or an emphasis on other aspects of the theory (such as Kant’s views of ‘genius’).

One seeking to understand ‘the sublime in music’ with more precision must resort to other formulations of the sublime, often from lesser-known thinkers. In the next section of this chapter, such references to the sublime in music will be identified in English writings to build an early eighteenth-century perspective useful for the analysis of ‘the sublime in music’.

2. Resorting to Other Sublimes

Before Burke’s famous *Enquiry*, English writers in the early-eighteenth century found numerous applications of Longinus’ five ‘sources of sublimity’, especially the first two which Boileau had summarized as ‘grandeur of thought and nobility of sentiment’.¹³⁵ They were increasingly bold to recognize ‘the sublime’ in literature beyond the classical, especially in biblical poetry from the Old Testament. Furthermore, the aesthetic category of ‘the sublime’ (or ‘the great’) was encountered in vast views of nature. As Addison stated, ‘Our imagination loves to be filled with an object, or to grasp at any thing that is too big for its capacity’.¹³⁶ Thus, Longinus’ ‘grandeur of thought’ was experienced through an encounter with a large expanse, which stimulated conceptions that were greater than the mind could conceive.

The commentary on ‘Grand Concepts’ and ‘Noble Passions’ in literature and landscapes was truly voluminous in the early-eighteenth century. However, what descriptions of ‘the sublime’ in music can be found?

¹³⁵ Boileau, Preface to Longinus, *On the Sublime*; Quoted in Wyatt, ‘Aspects of Sublime Rhetoric’, p. 3.

¹³⁶ Addison, *Spectator* No. 417, in *The Sublime: A Reader*, Ashfield and De Bolla (eds.), p.62.

In his study of ‘The Beautiful, the Sublime and the Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century Musical Thought in Britain’, Roger Barnett Larsson surveys a number of British publications from the eighteenth century that comment on the musical sublime. These include well-known writers such as Joseph Addison (1672–1719), Charles Avison (1709–1770), and Alexander Gerard (1728–1795), as well as lesser-known figures such as John Baillie (d. pre-1747) and Roger North (1653–1734). These writers demonstrate (with increasing detail) that music could in fact be considered ‘sublime’.

The following section will survey writings on the musical sublime by these authors to discern how music was said to convey Longinus’ ‘Grand Concepts’ and produce ‘Noble Passions’, and also relate music to the popular conception of ‘the sublime’ as something ‘vast’ or ‘expansive’ in nature. Through the course of this survey, particular means will be discerned by which music was said to be capable of expressing sublimity.

2.1. ‘Grand Concepts’ and ‘Vastness’ in Art and Music

In eighteenth-century writers, Longinus’ concepts are apparent as authors seek to describe the sublime in non-literary arts. For example, Addison saw the sublime (the ‘great’) primarily in nature, but he did acknowledge their application in the fine arts. A lesser-known, but significant essay from later in the eighteenth century that specifically examines the sublime in the arts is John Baillie’s *An Essay on the Sublime* (1747). Baillie makes general applications of Longinus’ first source of sublimity to a wide range of objects. He sees the sublime in

... every thing which thus raises the Mind to Fits of *Greatness*.... Hence arises that *Exultation* and *Pride* which the Mind ever feels from the *Consciousness* of its own *Vastness* – That *Object* only can be justly called *Sublime*, which in some degree disposes the Mind to this *Enlargement* of itself, and gives her a lofty *Conception* of her own *Powers*.¹³⁷

Baillie’s assertion that ‘every thing which thus raises the Mind to Fits of *Greatness*’ can be considered sublime seems to open the possibility for finding Longinus’ ‘Grand Concepts’ in all the arts. But, how was music to ‘raise the Mind’ to such ‘Fits’?

¹³⁷ John Baillie, *An Essay on the Sublime. By the late Dr. Baillie* (London, 1747), p. 4; Available at ECCO.

Back in 1712, Addison's next instalment of his 'Pleasures of the Imagination' papers addressed the 'several sources' of 'the secondary pleasures of the imagination', which included 'statuary, painting, description [in writing], and music'. It is here that Addison suggests how these various forms of art may produce such 'pleasures'. As he states:

In all these instances, this secondary pleasure of the imagination proceeds from that action of the mind which compares the ideas arising from the original objects with the ideas we receive from the statue, picture, description, or sound, that represents them. It is impossible for us to give the necessary reason why this operation of the mind is attended with so much pleasure ...; but we find a great variety of entertainments derived from this single principle; for it is this that not only gives us a relish of statuary, painting, and description, but makes us delight in all the actions and arts of mimicry.¹³⁸

Essentially, Addison is here describing the power of association experienced in these art forms, powers which are apparent whenever we 'delight in all the actions and arts of mimicry', that is, imitation.

Through the course of this instalment, Addison briefly comments on the power of imitative association in these art forms, including that of music. Regarding the possibility of 'visible objects' being represented by 'sounds that have no ideas annexed to them', he states that

...it is certain, there may be confused imperfect notions of this nature raised in the imagination by an artificial composition of notes, and we find that great masters in the art are able, sometimes, to set their hearers in the heat and hurry of a battle, to overcast their minds with melancholy scenes and apprehensions of deaths and funerals, or to lull them into pleasing dreams of groves and elysiums.¹³⁹

Without being able to explain exactly how musical 'great masters' represent such 'visible objects', Addison nevertheless provides critical sanction for the power of music to convey a variety of powerful ideas and experiences ranging from the battlefield to the graveside to the idyllic paradise, all of which are potentially 'sublime'.

Baillie's *An Essay on the Sublime* also acknowledges the power of music to convey ideas by association – specifically 'sublime' ideas. In Section V, he describes 'the powerful Force of *Connection*' in music, giving the example of how 'the most

¹³⁸ Addison, *Spectator* No. 416 (27 June 1712), in *The Works of Joseph Addison*, pp. 145–146.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

fantastic *Jigg* of a *Bagpipe* – which is innately lacking in sublimity – ‘shall elevate a *Highlander* more than the most *solemn* Musick’.¹⁴⁰ For Baillie, music can conjure the sublimity of war and noble deeds, *if* the hearer (such as the ‘*Highlander*’) associates particular musical sounds (such as a bagpipe’s ‘*Jigg*’) with such events.

However, Baillie, while confessing that he ‘know[s] so little of *Musick*’, goes further to identify specific musical sounds that he associates with the sublime: ‘This I know; – all *grave* Sounds, where the Notes are *long*, exalt my Mind much more than any other Kind; and that *Wind-Instruments* are the most fitted to *elevate*; such as the *Hautboy*, the *Trumpet*, and *Organ*...’.¹⁴¹ First, he considers certain sounds that are serious or solemn (‘all *grave* Sounds’) as particularly sublime, emphasizing the *length* of the notes. Next, he identifies specific timbres (‘the *Hautboy*, the *Trumpet*, and *Organ*’) that convey an association of sublime ‘height’, presumably through actual pitch (‘high notes’) or a sense of mental ‘elevation’. In both of these descriptions, Baillie is making a clear connection with the ‘vastness’ in nature so admired as sublime in eighteenth-century writings: ‘long’ notes and ‘high’ sounds are equivalent to ‘expanded views’ of nature.

To evoke the sublime, things encountered in nature or art must have some quality relating to ‘vastness’. As Baillie asserts at the conclusion of his essay: ‘large Objects only constitute the *Sublime*’.¹⁴² Baillie’s identification of this ‘vastness’ in music (by its ‘*grave* Sound’ and relatively long note values) assured that music had this quality; and, through a rhetorical question, he confirms this further: ‘And may not long Sounds be to the *Ear* what extended Prospects are to the *Eye*?’¹⁴³

Following Baillie’s writing, more influential essays on music and ‘taste’ in the 1750s continued to recognize music’s power of association and its representation of ‘vast’ objects. First, Charles Avison (an accomplished organist and composer in Newcastle) associated particular musical sounds with the sublime in his *Essay on Musical Expression* (1752). His *Essay* reveals some agreement with Baillie on what instruments produce sublime sounds. In his comparison of instruments that express

¹⁴⁰ Baillie, *An Essay on the Sublime*, pp. 34 and 39. After establishing principles for observing the sublime in views of nature, Baillie begins Section III of the essay by asking ‘Is there not a Sublime in Painting, in Music, in Architecture, but above all, in Virtue?’ (p. 15).

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 38. According to Larsson, Baillie’s essay provided ‘the most detailed picture of the musical sublime to date,’ including specific commentary on how music could be considered sublime (‘The Beautiful, the Sublime’, p. 55).

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 39 and 41.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

‘battles, sieges, and whatever is great and terrible’ to those that ‘are expressive of love, tenderness, or beauty’, he lists ‘the trumpet, horn, or kettle-drum’ in the first category, which assigning ‘the lute or harp’ to the latter.¹⁴⁴ Also, he declares that the organ expresses ‘the grand or solemn stile’, in contrast to the harpsichord’s performance of ‘those lively or trickling movements which thrill the ear’.¹⁴⁵ However, Avison describes the ‘ideal enjoyment of Music’ as one produced by the combination of instruments with ‘a chorus of good voices, particularly in churches where the expansion is large and ample’.¹⁴⁶

Next, Alexander Gerard’s prize-winning *An Essay on Taste* (1756, second edition 1764) largely follows Baillie’s formulation in connecting the sublime in music to ‘vast objects’. After an initial description of large objects of nature and their sublime effect on the mind, Gerard acknowledges that ‘whatever excites in the mind a sensation or emotion similar to what is excited by vast objects, is on this account denominated sublime’.¹⁴⁷ Then, in his (single) paragraph explaining how music might cause such sublime excitement, he writes:

The principles which we have laid down explain also the sublime of music: it seems to be derived in part from the length and gravity of the notes; the former constituting a kind of amplitude to the ear; the latter contributing to that composure and sedate expansion of the mind which attends the perception of sublimity....¹⁴⁸

Here Gerard describes music’s imitation of both sublime dimensions (‘amplitude to the ear’) and sublime effects (‘that composure and sedate expansion of the mind’), both of which are associated with increasing size.

As the above excerpts from Addison, Baillie, Avison, and Gerard demonstrate, discussion of ‘the sublime’ in music followed similar rhetorical paths as ‘the sublime’ in literature and landscapes, exploring music’s powers to ‘expand’ the mind with ‘Grand Ideas’ and replicate nature’s vastness through ‘extended’ musical sounds. Specifically, music was said to express the sublime through (1) non-

¹⁴⁴ Charles Avison, *An Essay on Musical Expression* (London, 1752; third edition, 1775), p. 25; Available at *ECCO*.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 101–102.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 103–104. Avison also identifies specific composers (all Italian) as most capable of producing ‘grand’ music, noting Corelli (p. 34 note), Palestrina – who he designates a ‘genius’ and the ‘father of harmony’ (p. 44) – and Marcello, with respect to the latter’s collection of psalm settings (p. 89).

¹⁴⁷ Alexander Gerard, *An Essay on Taste*, Second edition (Edinburgh: 1764), p. 16.

¹⁴⁸ Baillie, *An Essay on the Sublime*, p. 27.

representative associations with grand and elevated thoughts, including the association of particular musical sounds with the sublime, and (2) imitations of the vastness of nature through long note values, slow tempos, and other means. In the next section, a third musical method for conveying the sublime will be identified: the ‘exciting’ of ‘noble’ and ‘enthusiastic’ passions.

2.2. ‘Noble Passions’ Expressed in Music

In early eighteenth-century England, literature that was sublime was seen to evoke not just ‘Grand Ideas’, but powerful emotions. As the literary reformer John Dennis declared in *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry* (1701), the sublime ‘is a great thought, expressed with the enthusiasm that belongs to it’.¹⁴⁹ Then, in *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (1704), Dennis specifically names the emotions produced by sublime literature ‘enthusiastic passions’, and identifies these as admiration, terror, horror, joy, sadness, and desire.¹⁵⁰ Like other writers, Dennis appealed to Longinus’ treatise for support of his theories, noting that ‘in the first six or seven chapters of his book, [Longinus] takes a great deal of pains to set before us the effects which it produces in the minds of men’.¹⁵¹ He then gives examples of such ‘effects’, including (1) ‘admiration and surprise’; (2) ‘a noble pride, and a noble vigour’; and (3) ‘a fullness of joy mingled with astonishment’.¹⁵²

Dennis’ emphasis on ‘enthusiastic passions’ helps account for Longinus’ second source of the sublime in literature. But how, according to early eighteenth-century writers, could music promote such ‘enthusiastic’ responses? Writing in the 1710s and 1720s, Roger North (1653–1734) would describe the effect of particular musical devices in terms similar to those in Dennis’ treatises. Then, in his *Essay* from 1752, Charles Avison would go further to acknowledge ‘the force’ of musical expression.¹⁵³ These demonstrate how eighteenth-century writers understood music

¹⁴⁹ John Dennis, *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry*, in *The Sublime: A Reader*, Ashfield and De Bolla (eds.), p. 34.

¹⁵⁰ John Dennis, *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry*; in *The Sublime: A Reader*, Ashfield and De Bolla (eds.), p. 35.

¹⁵¹ John Dennis, *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry*, in *The Sublime: A Reader*, Ashfield and De Bolla (eds.), p. 34.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ Baillie’s *Essay* includes a list of ‘Affections’ or ‘Passions’ that ‘produce in the Person who contemplates them an exalted and sublime Disposition’ which ‘can alone with Propriety be called Sublime’. These include ‘Courage’, ‘Piety’, ‘Humanity’, ‘Heroism’, ‘Love of one’s Country’, ‘universal Benevolence’, ‘a Desire of Fame and Immortality’, and ‘Contempt of Death, Power, or of Honour’ (*An Essay On the Sublime*, p. 18).

to not only convey ‘expansive’ ideas and ‘extended’ sounds, but also evoke ‘Noble Passions’.

North is the first known writer to not only acknowledge the ‘sublime’ effects of music, but also to describe in musical detail how ‘intrinsic qualities’ of music could produce such effects.¹⁵⁴ In an early unpublished account of organ playing by a ‘Captain’ Prencourt (c. 1710), North acknowledged that the organist was able to ‘doe [*sic*] wonders, and ... elevate and surprise his hearers’.¹⁵⁵ In ‘An Essay of Musically Ayre’ (c. 1715–1720), North details more specifically how the use of non-harmonic tones and dissonances produce ‘surprise and amazement’ in organ music. Here he describes the method by which organists begin a solo passage with a dissonance

that awakens the audience, and makes them attend to what is to come of that fury exprest at first. And this sublimity of accords is scarce expressible upon any instrument or combination of instruments but the organ, where one mind and designe governs the whole, and all the varieties lye under the command of the same hand.¹⁵⁶

As Larsson comments, North is here describing how ‘a species of multiple acciaccaturas where two chords are simultaneously struck excites powerful emotions’.¹⁵⁷ In ‘The Musically Grammarian’ (1728), North notates a series of suspensions as used by Corelli, presaged with the statement: ‘[The] great Corelli hath drawne a sublime passage which he not seldom makes use of, and it is this, in 3 parts’.¹⁵⁸ These more detailed accounts of music’s sublime power, with reference to specific types of dissonances and non-harmonic tones, are said to have some of the same emotional effects that Dennis attributed to sublime literature: ‘surprise’ and ‘amazement’.

When Avison published his *Essay on Musical Expression* in 1752, music was said to produce even more specific sublime ‘passions’. As his title suggests, Avison’s

¹⁵⁴ See Larsson, ‘The Beautiful, the Sublime’, p. 43. For a brief biography of North, see Oliver Strunk and Leo Treitler, eds., *Source Readings in Music History*, rev. ed. (New York; London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), p. 585.

¹⁵⁵ Roger North, Introduction to ‘Short, easy, & plaine rules to learne in a few days the principles of Musick ...’ (c. 1710); Quoted in Larsson, ‘The Beautiful, the Sublime’, p. 43 from *Roger North on Music: Being a Selection from His Essays Written During the Years c. 1695–1728*, ed. John Wilson (London: Novello, 1959), p. 55.

¹⁵⁶ North, ‘An Essay of Musically Ayre ...’ (c. 1715–1720), f. 22v; Quoted in Larsson, ‘The Beautiful, the Sublime’, p. 43 from *Roger North on Music*, p. 80. Spellings original.

¹⁵⁷ Larsson, ‘The Beautiful, the Sublime’, p. 43.

¹⁵⁸ North, ‘The Musically Grammarian’ (1728), ff. 54v–55r; Quoted in Larsson, ‘The Beautiful, the Sublime’, p. 45 from *Roger North on Music*, p. 90.

main goal in his *Essay* was to explain how music could convey ‘passions’. In the introduction to his essay, he writes that

It is [the] peculiar and essential property [of melody and harmony], to divest the soul of every unquiet passion, to pour in upon the mind a silent and serene joy, beyond the power of words to express, and to fix the heart in a rational, benevolent, and happy tranquillity.

But, though this be the natural effect of melody or harmony on the imagination, when simply considered; yet when to these is added the force of Musical Expressions, the effect is greatly increased; for then they assume the power of exciting all the most agreeable passions of the souls.¹⁵⁹

In Avison’s statements, he asserts not just music’s power, but the particular ‘passions’ which it was most likely to provoke: ‘the benevolent and social kind, ... [which] in their intent at least are disinterested and noble’.¹⁶⁰ In an extension of his comment (quoted above) regarding how ‘the sublime of music ... seems to be derived *in part* from the length and gravity of the notes’, Addison states that the sublime in music ‘... is then completed, when the artist, by skilfully imitating the sublime passions, or their objects, *inspires these passions into his hearers*, and renders them conscious of their operation’.¹⁶¹ Thus, music was not only capable of imitating the sublime, it could also ‘excite’ the sublime through its impact on the listener’s emotions.

As the next section will show, the capability of music to raise Longinus’ ‘Noble Passions’ would become central to an argument for the *expressive* power of music in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. This will be discussed along with related changes taking place in overall eighteenth-century musical aesthetics, and include a brief summary of early nineteenth-century formulations of the musical sublime.

3. Expressivist Aesthetics and the Sublime

By the end of the eighteenth century, the sublime appears in musical writings in both England and Germany. In England, the popularity of writings such as Avison’s *Essay on Musical Expression* and Gerard’s *Essay on Taste* assured that the terminology of the sublime continued to be used with respect to music. By the end of the century, ‘the sublime’ would assume a fixed status as a musical category in Professor William

¹⁵⁹ Avison, *An Essay on Musical Expression*, pp. 2–3.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁶¹ Baillie, *An Essay on the Sublime*, p. 27. Emphasis added.

Crotch's lectures on music, which began in 1798 at Oxford and continued well into the nineteenth century.¹⁶²

In Germany, Sulzer's *General Theory of the Fine Arts* (1771) recognized 'the sublime' as 'the highest thing that there is in art'.¹⁶³ Despite Kant's lack of comment on how music may be considered sublime in the *Third Critique* (1790), the aesthetic concept receives significant attention in musical writings, including an entry in Heinrich Christoph Koch's *Musikalisches Lexikon* (1802) and writings by Christian Friedrich Michaelis (1770–1834).

However, musical discourse of the late-eighteenth century is dominated by another discussion, one that involves a change in aesthetic ideals: the change from imitation to expression. As Edward Lippman states, 'Imitation and expression are generally considered to represent successive conceptions of the nature of music, the one giving way to the other starting around 1750'.¹⁶⁴ Such a significant change in overarching views of music surely would affect discussions of the musical sublime.

Due to its importance for musical aesthetics in general and the understanding of the sublime in music in particular, the following section will briefly survey representative English and German writings that testify to this aesthetic shift. Then, expressivism in music will be connected with the musical sublime, ascribing 'Grand Concepts' and 'Noble Passions' to music itself and demonstrating the close proximity of expressivist writings on music with the sublime. Finally, continuities in various eighteenth-century views of the sublime will be found in early nineteenth-century definitions related to music.

3.1. Expressivist Aesthetics in English and German Writings

As the eighteenth century progressed, the sublime was applied to music according to changing standards of taste. Music became valued more for its expressive capabilities, and less as an imitation of nature. Avison's *Essay on Music Expression* (first published in 1752) is an early example of this discussion. Avison identifies

¹⁶² The major tenets of Crotch's musical aesthetics and categories, including 'the sublime', are summarized in his *Substance of Several Courses of Lectures on Music*, published in 1831, and available in a modern edition edited by Bernarr Rainbow (Clarabricken, Co Kilkenny Ireland: Boethius Press, 1986).

¹⁶³ Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste ...*, 2nd edition (Leipzig, 1792–1794); in le Huray and Day, *Music and Aesthetics*, p. 113.

¹⁶⁴ Edward Lippman, *History of Western Musical Aesthetics* (University of Nebraska Press, 1992), p. 83.

sharp distinctions between certain types of imitation and expression in music, and establishes strict limitations for music's imitative powers. As he states,

Music as an imitative art has very confined powers, and because, when it is an ally to poetry (which it ought always to be when it exerts its mimetic faculty) it obtains its end by raising corresponding affections in the soul with those which ought to result from the genius of the poem.... Music can only imitate motions and sounds, not objects.¹⁶⁵

Avison saw music's potential power as an expressive art as greater than its imitative powers.

Likewise, James Beattie, in his *Essay on Poetry and Music as They Affect the Mind* (1776) states,

If we compare imitation with expression, the superiority of the latter will be evident. Imitation without expression is nothing: imitation detrimental to expression is faulty: imitation is never tolerable, at least in serious music, except it promote and be subservient to expression.¹⁶⁶

By the last decades of the century, English writers on music tended to agree with Beattie, valuing the 'expression' of emotion via 'modern' instrumental music over the previous 'imitation' of nature accomplished to a limited extent in 'ancient' vocal and instrumental music.

This shift in aesthetic ideals illustrates the changes in the perceived relationship between nature, music, and the composer, changes which are enlightened by an understanding of the sublime. Music formerly achieved sublimity by its association with sublime ideas and its imitation of the sublime in nature. However, in the late-eighteenth century 'Grand Concepts' and 'Noble Passions' became ascribed to music itself. Increasingly, music that expressed (in Avison's words) '*an unaffected strain of nature and simplicity*' was considered the ideal.¹⁶⁷

The German move in musical aesthetics from imitation to expression is clearly pronounced after 1750 in representative publications by Christian Krause (1781–1832) and Johann Sulzer and is confirmed in its 'romantic' form by late-eighteenth-century works by Johann Herder (1744–1803) and Wilhelm Wackenroder (1773–1798). In these mid- to late-eighteenth-century German writings, the

¹⁶⁵ Avison, *An Essay on Musical Expression*, pp. 52–53 and p. 58. See also Lippman, *Western Musical Aesthetics*, p. 101ff.

¹⁶⁶ James Beattie, in his *Essay on Poetry and Music as They Affect the Mind* (1776); Quoted in Lippman, *Western Musical Aesthetics*, p. 107.

¹⁶⁷ Avison, *An Essay on Musical Expression*, p. 61.

discussion of music's expressive power is never far away from aspects of the musical sublime, especially the expression of the religious sublime, which Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) brings together in his early works on religion.

A clear signal of the move towards expressivist aesthetics is Christian Krause's *Von der Musikalischen Poesie* (1752). Krause's treatise addresses the problems and techniques of combining music and poetry, as well as individual characteristics of both arts. In this context, Krause describes music as a 'language' of 'desires and passions'.¹⁶⁸ According to Stoltzfus, Krause uses the term 'Ausdruck' (expression) 'as a way of specifying the content of this musical "language"'.¹⁶⁹ But what types of 'desires and passions' does Krause see music capable of 'expressing'?

First, the 'language' of music is considered a 'natural' one. As Krause states, 'The more natural an inclination, emotional disposition, and passion is to us . . . , the more musical it is, and the more easily and clearly it can be expressed in tones'.¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, the most 'natural' passions are seen as the most virtuous ones, and therefore music particularly excels in expressing such 'noble' passions. As Krause writes in the fourth chapter – which is devoted to the various affections that music represents: 'In this, music is very fortunate. All the noblest virtues and inclinations are accompanied by affections that it [music] can best express'.¹⁷¹ Krause then goes on to list 'pious feelings', 'raptures of reverence', 'elevated contemplations', 'religious zeal', 'acceptance of God's will', as well as 'love', which is described as 'the most prominent among the virtues, natural inclinations, and passions'.¹⁷² With Krause's treatise, then, music has become a 'natural' language particularly suited to express 'noble sentiments'.

The goals of music to imitate 'natural' emotions and to communicate affections as a language are both apparent in Sulzer's *General Theory of the Fine Arts* (1771). According to Christensen, Sulzer understood art as a means of beautifying natural truth; and music, of all the arts, was the most 'pure expression of

¹⁶⁸ As Lippman summarizes, 'the language that tones contain is only one of desires and passions', not concepts (*Western Musical Aesthetics*, p. 69). See pp. 67–74 for Lippman's summary of Krause's treatise.

¹⁶⁹ Philip Edward Stoltzfus, *Theology as Performance: Music, Aesthetics, and God in Western Thought* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2006), pp. 59–60.

¹⁷⁰ Christian Krause, *Von der Musikalischen Poesie* (1752), p. 101; Quoted in Lippman, *Western Musical Aesthetics*, p. 74.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 89; Quoted in Lippman, *Western Musical Aesthetics*, p. 73.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

natural sentiment'.¹⁷³ In his opening sentence of the entry on 'Musical Expression' ('Ausdruck in der Musik'), Sulzer asserted that 'The principal, if not indeed the sole function of a perfect musical composition is the accurate expression of emotions and passions in all their varying and individual nuances'.¹⁷⁴ Continuing later in this entry, he went on to state that 'Expression is the soul of music; without it, music is just a pleasant toy; with it, music becomes an overwhelmingly powerful language which engulfs the heart. ... The foundations of this power must have been laid by nature herself'.¹⁷⁵ Furthermore, in the entry specifically on 'music', Sulzer defines music's very purpose as being 'to arouse the emotions', which he states that 'it does by means of sequences of sounds that are appropriate to the natural expression of the emotion; and its application must suitably conform to the intentions of nature in emotional matters'.¹⁷⁶

In Sulzer's entries, clearly the importance of music's power of expression has taken prominence over any imitative power, while retaining its connection to nature. However, Sulzer expands the means by which music may express such emotions. In the entry on 'musical expression', Sulzer states that 'Music is perfectly suited to portraying ... movements [of emotion] and making them sensible to the soul via the ear ... if the composer [knows how] to imitate these movements *in harmony and melody*'.¹⁷⁷ He then increases his list of two musical elements to a fuller list of six musical means a composer may use to portray such movements, including (1) harmonic progressions; (2) the metre ('by means of which all kinds of movement may be imitated in general terms'); (3) the melody and the rhythm ('which are of themselves equally capable of portraying the language of every emotion'); (4) dynamic variations, (5) various accompaniment, especially the choice of instrumental timbres; and (6) modulations into other keys.¹⁷⁸ This fuller view of music's power as an 'expressive' language of emotional movements in such an influential and wide-ranging source helped confirm the move to expressivist aesthetics in German music.

¹⁷³ Baker and Christensen, *Aesthetics and the Arts of Musical Composition*, p. 12.

¹⁷⁴ Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie*; in le Huray and Day, *Music and Aesthetics*, p. 99.

¹⁷⁵ Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie*; in le Huray and Day, *Music and Aesthetics*, pp. 99–100. See also Baker and Christensen, *Aesthetics and the Arts of Musical Composition*, p. 51.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

¹⁷⁷ Sulzer, *General Theory of the Fine Arts*, in Baker and Christensen, *Aesthetics and the Arts of Musical Composition*, p. 52. Emphasis in original.

¹⁷⁸ See Baker and Christensen, *Aesthetics and the Arts of Musical Composition*, pp. 52–53 and le Huray and Day, *Music and Aesthetics*, p. 101.

At the end of the century, Herder's *Kalligone* (1800) connected music's expressive power even closer to nature, and asserted that music no longer needed the assistance of poetry to be expressive. The intimate relationship between music and nature is clear when Herder states that 'Everything ... that we hear in nature ... contains the elements of music' and that 'only a hand is needed to draw forth music [from nature], an ear to hear it and the capacity to respond to it'.¹⁷⁹ As the powerful expression of nature, music is even described as 'nature's voice' and given the power to affect us all. Herder writes that '[musical sound], the summoner of the passions, has a power that we all experience; we respond to it both physically and spiritually. It is nature's voice, an inner dynamism that draws forth a response from the entire human race; it is *harmonious movement*'.¹⁸⁰ The climax of Herder's argument comes when he asserts that 'Song and speech do not adopt the same means. Music has developed into a self-sufficient art, *sui generis*, dispensing with words'.¹⁸¹ For Herder, music would no longer be the 'handmaid' to poetry, seeking to imitate (to the best of its powers) specific ideas in the words; instead, music could communicate emotional movement directly through its own 'natural' powers.

Finally, just before the end of the century, Wilhelm Wackenroder contributed two unique publications that would most creatively represent a view of musical expressivism. In Stoltzfus' words, Wackenroder's *Confessions from the Heart of an Art-Loving Friar* (*Herzensergiessungen eines Kunstliebenden Klosterbruders*, 1796) and *Fantasies on Art for Friends of Art* (*Phantasien über die Kunst für Freunde der Kunst*, published posthumously in 1799) were 'the first appearance of a series of musical-aesthetic discourses mystically bound up with the term *Gefühl* [feeling]'.¹⁸² For Wackenroder, music is an art form that humans use to 'express their most formless emotions'.¹⁸³ In his *Fantasies*, he describes how music '...through the overwhelming magic of its *sensual force*, arouses all the wonderful, teeming hosts of the fantasy, which populate the musical strains with magical images and transform the formless excitations into the distinct shapes of human *Affekten*, which draw past

¹⁷⁹ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Kalligone*, Heinz Begenaus, ed. (Weimar, 1955), p. 146; in le Huray and Day, *Music and Aesthetics*, p. 188.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., in le Huray and Day, *Music and Aesthetics*, p. 190.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., in le Huray and Day, *Music and Aesthetics*, p. 192.

¹⁸² Stoltzfus, *Theology as Performance*, p. 60.

¹⁸³ Wilhelm Wackenroder, *Confessions and Fantasies*, trans. Mary Hurst Schubert (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971), p. 82; Quoted in Stoltzfus, *Theology as Performance*, p. 60.

our senses like elusive pictures in a magical deception'.¹⁸⁴ In contrast to more 'formalist' neo-classical aesthetics, Wackenroder emphasized the 'form' of the emotions that music could replicate. Here, even more than in Herder, musical sounds play a significant role in the inner life, affecting the human heart, mind, and soul. For the German romantics, his writings helped form an exalted view of music as 'the highest form of human expressiveness'.¹⁸⁵

3.2. Connecting Expressivism with the Sublime

Music's rise from an imitative art enslaved to poetry for real 'meaning' to 'the highest form of human expressiveness' in German aesthetics is closely connected to the recognition of the sublime in music. Krause's emphasis on music's particular ability to express 'noble sentiments' such as 'pious feelings', 'raptures of reverence', and 'elevated contemplations' recalls Longinus' theory (or at least the early eighteenth-century discussion of it). Sulzer's encyclopaedic *General Theory of Fine Art* included an entry on the sublime along with his entries on 'Music' and 'Musical Expression'. His summary of the aesthetic concept – which he considered 'the highest thing that there is in art' – emphasizes the emotional effect of the sublime: 'The sublime ... works on us with hammer-blows; it seizes us and irresistibly overwhelms us'.¹⁸⁶ After declaring music's independence from speech in *Kalligone*, Herder pointed to a distinctly sublime origin for this freedom: 'religious awe'. He asks,

What was it that helped her [music] to rise, to trust in her own power and to take flight with her own wings? What was that something that freed her from all external control, from spectacle, dance, mime, and even from the accompanying voice? It was religious awe. Religious awe raises the individual above words and gestures so that nothing remains to express the emotions but – sounds.¹⁸⁷

Likewise, Wackenroder's emphasis on music's ability to 'enrich our souls' through edifying 'essences of *Gefühl*' brought music's expressive power close to the descriptions of the religious sublime.

Most prominent in turn of the nineteenth-century German writings on music and religious sublimity are the early works of Friedrich Schleiermacher. In *On*

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 191–192; Quoted in Stoltzfus, *Theology as Performance*, p. 61.

¹⁸⁵ See Stoltzfus, *Theology as Performance*, p. 65.

¹⁸⁶ Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie*; in le Huray and Day, *Music and Aesthetics*, p. 113

¹⁸⁷ Herder, *Kalligone* (Begenau, ed.), p. 151; in le Huray and Day, *Music and Aesthetics*, p. 192.

Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers (1799), Schleiermacher describes how forms of art, including speech and song, express feelings. As David Klemm states, ‘For Schleiermacher, art provides a medium of expression for feeling; feeling and intuition can objectify themselves in art’.¹⁸⁸ Furthermore, as the twentieth-century theologian Karl Barth summarizes, for Schleiermacher, ‘...the most definite and understandable expression of the heart of this matter is speech *without* words, that is, music’.¹⁸⁹ In his fourth speech (‘On the Social Element in Religion; or, On Church and Priesthood’), Schleiermacher described this ‘speech without words’ as ‘the most definite, most understandable expression of what is innermost’. More specifically, he emphasized how religious music could express ‘the holy and infinite’:

In holy hymns and choruses, to which the words of the poet cling only loosely and lightly, that is exhaled which definite speech can no longer comprehend, and thus the sounds of thought and feeling support one another and alternate until everything is saturated and full of the holy and infinite.¹⁹⁰

For Schleiermacher, music’s powers to express emotion went beyond general passions to the very essence of religious feeling. In these *Speeches*, as well as other early writings (especially *Christmas Eve* (1806)), he communicated a clearly expressivist view of music’s powers, and connected these to particularly sublime religious concepts.

3.3. Continuities in the Early Nineteenth-Century Sublime

As the previous examples from German writings demonstrate, by the beginning of the nineteenth century both expressivism and the sublime were well-established concepts in German aesthetic theory. Inclusion of ‘Erhaben’ in Heinrich Christoph Koch’s *Musikalisches Lexikon* (1802) further demonstrates the significance of the latter concept, with indications of the diverse formulations of the concept from the eighteenth century. Michaelis’ writings bring together both ideas, describing in more detail how music can produce and portray sublime emotions. Both descriptions

¹⁸⁸ David E. Klemm, ‘Culture, Arts, and religion’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher*, ed. Jacqueline Mariña (Cambridge UP, 2005), p. 266.

¹⁸⁹ Karl Barth, *The Theology of Schleiermacher: Lectures at Göttingen, Winter Semester of 1923/24*, Sunday Sermons from the Last Years, ed. Dietrich Ritschl, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), p. 246.

¹⁹⁰ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans. Richard Crouter (Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy; Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 75.

connect concepts of the musical sublime transcending eighteenth-century divisions in musical aesthetics.

Koch's entry begins by identifying 'Erhaben' as 'the term for that which fills us with wonder and high esteem when we regard grandeur and consummate perfection...', a definition in line with eighteenth-century views of the sublime's effect on the mind, and reflecting German preoccupation with artistic 'perfection'.¹⁹¹ Later, Koch provides a specifically musical description of the sublime: 'In expressing this character [the sublime] the composer employs grave, slow movement, full and forceful harmony, and melodic phrases without much ornament; he proceeds in firm, bold strides and often moves forth in wide intervallic leaps and skips'.¹⁹² Here his musical means for achieving the sublime follow closely those of eighteenth-century English writers such as Baillie and Gerard.

When Michaelis sets out to describe the sublime in music in 1805, he also incorporates the expressive aspect of the sublime. Michaelis' description of the sublime in music displays his allowance for the emotional power of music through either the emotional impact of sublime music or the portrayal of sublime emotions through music.

In his remarks on the sublime in music in the *Berlinische musikalische Zeitung* (1805), Michaelis identifies two ways that music can produce the sublime: 'Music can *either* seek to arouse the feeling of sublimity through an inner structure that is independent of any emotional expression, *or* portray the state of mind aroused by such a feeling'. He elaborates on both possibilities further, emphasizing how, 'in the first case' music can 'arouse sublime emotions' as 'untamed nature', which is 'something analogous to an imitation of the external impact of sublime nature' and serves 'to intensify our imagination and to arouse in us the infinitely great'.¹⁹³ When Michaelis further describes how 'emotions are aroused' by music in the second part of his article, he includes more specific examples of how music evokes the sublime, including the effect of 'uniformity so great that it almost excludes variety' as in

¹⁹¹ Heinrich Christoph Koch, *Musikalisches Lexikon* (1802), as translated in Wyatt, 'Aspects of Sublime Rhetoric', p. 236.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ Michaelis, 'Einige Bemerkungen über das Erhabene der Musik', *BmZ* (1805), vol. 1, no. 46, p. 180; in le Huray and Day, *Music and Aesthetics*, p. 202.

‘constant repetition’, ‘long, majestic, weighty or solemn notes’, and ‘long pauses’.¹⁹⁴ As in Koch’s definition, these specific musical means follow closely after early eighteenth-century English descriptions.

Michaelis’ emphasis on the emotional effect achieved by some musical ‘inner structure’ in this first way also shows a connection with Longinus’ rhetorical concern for raising the emotions as well as the Kantian dynamic sublime of nature. Here the impact on the imagination is crucial for the sublime effect. As Michaelis states, ‘The feeling of sublimity in music is aroused when the imagination is elevated to the plane of the limitless, the immeasurable, the unconquerable’.¹⁹⁵ When music works to ‘intensify our imagination’, ‘the infinitely great’ is aroused, and the listener experiences the sublime.

Regarding the second means of achieving the sublime through music, Michaelis states that ‘the music portrays what is pathetically sublime’, portraying ‘our own nature, as we are moved, stirred, roused to emotional change and enthusiasm’.¹⁹⁶ Although Michaelis avoided an expressivist view in his first means, his ‘pathetic’ sublime looks within to ‘our own nature’ for the source of sublime emotions. Then, the expressive power of music itself must portray this ‘state of mind’. Here personal emotions are engaged from beginning to end of the sublime musical experience.

Michaelis’ descriptions of the musical sublime thus incorporate aspects of Longinian rhetoric, Kantian concepts, and late-eighteenth-century expressivism. His writings on the sublime provide a more detailed formulation than previously found, one demonstrating how music was considered ‘sublime’ in the nineteenth century.

4. Summary

This survey of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century descriptions and definitions of the sublime in music has sought to demonstrate the significance of this concept for musical discourse, despite changing musical ideals. Although writings on the sublime by Burke, Moses Mendelssohn, and Kant included only brief commentary on music, English sources from the early- to mid-eighteenth century (all pre-dating

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 179; in le Huray and Day, *Music and Aesthetics*, p. 203. According to le Huray and Day, Michaelis writes of the symphonies of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven in such terms that ‘The conclusion is almost unavoidable that ... Michaelis regarded these works as examples of the sublime in music’ (*Music and Aesthetics*, p. 202).

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., in le Huray and Day, *Music and Aesthetics*, p. 203.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 180; in le Huray and Day, *Music and Aesthetics*, p. 202.

Burke's *Enquiry*) commented on how music was able to convey 'sublime' ideas and produce 'sublime' effects. Writers such as Addison, Baillie, Gerard, Avison, and North articulated the sublime in ways that retained the essence of Longinus' concept (as understood in the early-eighteenth century), and revealed at least three ways that the art of music could be considered 'sublime': (1) non-representative associations with grand and elevated thoughts, (2) imitations of the vastness of nature, and (3) the 'exciting' of sublime 'passions'. The late-eighteenth-century shift in aesthetic ideals then ascribed the 'Grand Concepts' and 'Noble Passions' of the sublime to music itself, giving music 'natural' powers capable of expressing and arousing sublime emotion. By the early-nineteenth century, German writers such as Koch and Michaelis were incorporating views of the sublime from across the eighteenth century into music, asserting that music was capable of evoking and expressing the sublime through musical means (following English writers), cognitive effects (such as those described by Kant), and emotional portrayals (in line with expressivism). Thus, the sublime becomes a means of connecting diverse eighteenth-century aesthetic theories with particular descriptions of musical means and understandings of music's power.

This overarching quality of the musical sublime in eighteenth-century aesthetics has also been observed by Wyatt. In 'Aspects of Sublime Rhetoric in Eighteenth-Century Music', he connects eighteenth-century understandings of the sublime to Romantic musical aesthetics, viewing the sublime as a primary impetus for the aesthetic shift. As he states, 'The well-cultivated rhetoric of the sublime provided an impetus for the heightened significance of the individual, the intensified exploration and expression of feeling, and the conjoining of the external vastness and turmoil of nature with the interior contours of the soul...'.¹⁹⁷ Of course, with rhetorical roots extending back to Longinus in the first century, the concept of the sublime has real potential to link eighteenth-century musical aesthetics to a tradition going back much farther. Indeed, the sublime is a 'Grand Concept' capable of providing an elevated view: a view that transcends the musical territories of genres, composers, and musical eras. It is also a concept that can assist in understanding

¹⁹⁷ Wyatt, 'Aspects of Sublime Rhetoric', p. 231. Both Wyatt and Larsson have traced the sublime in eighteenth-century musical aesthetics, and have asserted its importance as a linking concept in a century often bifurcated into Baroque and Classical eras.

some of music's most interesting and complicated figures, such as Felix Mendelssohn and his eighteenth-century predecessor George Frideric Handel.

3.

The Handelian Sublime in Mendelssohn's Early Works

... [S]ublimity is an echo from greatness of mind.

– Longinus, *On the Sublime*¹⁹⁸

Could you ever discover any thing sublime, in our sense of the term, in the classic Greek literature? I never could. Sublimity is Hebrew by birth.

– Samuel Taylor Coleridge, from *Table Talk* (25 July 1832)¹⁹⁹

This chapter and the remainder of this thesis will show that primary aspects of the sublime become incarnate in Mendelssohn, including the concept of ‘genius’ as well as the techniques associated with musical sublimity. Due to the early recognition of Mendelssohn as a ‘genius’ with precocious musical gifts and the conceptual proximity of a number of formulations of the sublime to primary traits of his compositional output, Mendelssohn’s life and work can be related to various categories of sublime aesthetics, including the literary sublime as well as specific concepts of the Burkean and Kantian sublimes. By examining Mendelssohn’s life and works with a view for these concepts, the composer will be better understood in light of his historical and aesthetic context.

In this chapter I will begin to identify connections with the sublime in Mendelssohn’s early life and musical output. First, I will briefly give an account of Mendelssohn’s prodigious ‘genius’, recognizing his impressive demonstrations of musical talent at an early age as well as his early exposure to the works of Handel. Next, through an aesthetic analysis of the *Utrecht Te Deum* and *Jubilate*, I will present Handel as the ‘author’ of a ‘sublime’ musical rhetoric, one that Mendelssohn would emulate in his own early works such as the Octet for Strings, the 1826 *Te Deum*, and *Psalm 115*. These very works will also serve as evidence for Mendelssohn’s ‘genius’, one that follows a Kantian pattern of development from the ‘understanding’ and emulation of previous models to the creation of *original* works which will serve as models for future compositions.

¹⁹⁸ Longinus, *On the Sublime*, trans. Thomas R.R. Stebbing (Oxford: T. & G. Shrimpton, 1867), p. 26 (Chapter 9).

¹⁹⁹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Table Talk*, pp. 177–178; Quoted in Vallins, *On the Sublime: Coleridge's Writings*, p. 88.

1. The ‘Greatest’ Prodigy’s Introduction to Handel

In November of 1821, the young Felix was taken on a tour of significant German cities by his teacher Carl Friedrich Zelter (1758–1832). The apparent purpose of this tour was to expose the talented twelve year old to essential institutions, places, and people of German culture, including Leipzig’s *Thomasschule* where J.S. Bach had taught and composed and Wittenburg, where Martin Luther had nailed his ninety-five theses to the Castle Church door and incited the Reformation. However, Zelter also intended to introduce key German thinkers to the musical potential of this Lutheran boy of famous Jewish ancestry.²⁰⁰ Therefore Zelter brought Felix to Weimar and the home of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), his illustrious musical confidant and the father-figure of Germany’s modern literary heritage. The teacher had high hopes for Felix’s talent, and sought to confirm his potential by having the boy display his abilities before Goethe and the Weimar court.²⁰¹

While at Weimar, Felix was asked on two occasions to demonstrate his abilities on the six-octave Streicher pianoforte in Goethe’s home. On the eighth of November, three types of musical skills were displayed for Goethe and his esteemed guests in an effort to ‘test the prodigy’s abilities’.²⁰² These included (1) improvisation, (2) the performance of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century masterworks (both prepared and at sight), and (3) feats of musical memory. In the first test, Felix displayed perfect pitch as he first played back a melody Zelter had performed and technical virtuosity as he then improvised a ‘contrapuntal fantasy’ on the tune. In the second test, Felix played a Bach fugue with ornamentation, the Mozart minuet from *Don Giovanni*, and two compositions from manuscripts in Goethe’s possession: a sonata by Mozart and a setting of a Goethe poem by Beethoven. In the final trial, Felix reproduced from memory the complex orchestral score of Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro* Overture on the piano.

²⁰⁰ For an account of Felix’s family lineage back to the eighteenth century, see Todd, *MLM*, pp. 1–23 (‘Prologue’), plus the Itzig and Mendelssohn family trees before the Preface.

²⁰¹ Sadly, Zelter expressed his hopes for Felix with a mix of anti-Semitism and surprise in his letter to Goethe on 21 October 1821, when he stated that Felix ‘is the son of a Jew but he is no Jew. . . . For once it really would be *eppes rores* [something rare] if a Jewish boy were to become an artist’ (Quoted in George R. Marek, *Gentle Genius: The Story of Felix Mendelssohn* (New York: Funk & Wagnalis, 1972), p. 114).

²⁰² Todd, *MLM*, p. 87.

The second such occasion occurred three days later, when Zelter, Goethe, and musicians from the Weimar court gathered to perform and evaluate his Piano Quartet in D minor. After the piece was performed, Goethe and his guests dismissed the lad and conferred among themselves. With recollections of hearing the seven-year-old Mozart in 1763, Goethe declared that, in comparison to the young Mozart, the young Mendelssohn's accomplishments were as 'the cultivated talk of a grown-up person' to 'the prattle of a child'.²⁰³ The verdict among all those gathered was that 'Felix was an improved version of the young Mozart'.²⁰⁴

Late-nineteenth-century writers and modern scholars trying to capture the abilities of the young Mendelssohn have concurred. An 1872 review of Karl Mendelssohn's *Goethe and Mendelssohn* asserts that the book gives a 'correct estimate of the genius of Mendelssohn' and 'brings out more distinctly his distinguishing characteristic – namely, his unexampled precocity'.²⁰⁵ According to Charles Rosen, 'Mendelssohn was the greatest child prodigy the history of Western music has ever known'.²⁰⁶ But how would Mendelssohn develop from a child prodigy with precocious musical skills in improvisation, technique, and memory to a young composer demonstrating an *original* genius in composition? Under Zelter's continued tutelage and in the environment of early nineteenth-century Berlin, what would he be exposed to that would nurture his gifts and develop in him a taste for the musical sublime?

1.1. A Student of Sublime Methods and Masterworks

During his years as a student of Zelter, Felix Mendelssohn developed a familiarity with the works of eighteenth-century musical masters and acquired compositional skills essential for his own mastery of the musical sublime. As Todd states, 'For some seven years, beginning in 1819, Zelter remained the dominant musical influence on the boy and the man, and groomed him in the hallowed tradition of the

²⁰³ As quoted in Todd, *MLM*, p. 89.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ *The Pall Mall Gazette* (London, England), Wednesday, June 19, 1872; Issue 2292. Gale Document BA3207696511. Accessed online via the Gale News Vault (16 June 2012).

²⁰⁶ Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 569; Quoted in Celia Applegate, *Bach in Berlin: Nation and Culture in Mendelssohn's Revival of the St. Matthew Passion* (Ithaca, NY/London: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 19.

eighteenth century'.²⁰⁷ This sustained influence would guide the young Mendelssohn's compositional development and shape his musical tastes, exposing him to the works of certain musical geniuses (of German origin) that would become models for his own compositions.

One way that Zelter exposed Felix to sublime masterworks was through an organisation that was especially significant for the Mendelssohn family: the Berlin Singakademie. From its beginnings under Fasch as a student group that gathered to rehearse sacred music, the choir grew considerably in the last decade of the eighteenth century. Zelter helped foster this growth by recruiting members of the Mendelssohn family. Zelter came to know Abraham Mendelssohn in the 1780s when working as a mason on one of the Berlin homes of Daniel Itzig, and in 1796 persuaded him to join the Singakademie.²⁰⁸ When Fasch died in 1800 and Zelter became the director, the choir had grown to 147 voices.

The ensemble's repertoire also grew. Under Zelter's leadership, the Singakademie rehearsed and sometimes performed selections from Bach's motets and cantatas, along with works by Handel, Haydn's *Creation* and *Seasons* oratorios, and Mozart's Requiem.²⁰⁹ In 1820, when Felix and Fanny were old enough to participate in the Singakademie, they began to learn this repertoire. As Todd writes, 'At the Singakademie Felix was exposed to a distinctly eighteenth-century repertoire – in addition to Graun's cantata [*Der Tod Jesus*], the polychoral works of Fasch, oratorios of Handel, and motets of J.S. Bach – all supporting Zelter's musical diet of austere counterpoint'.²¹⁰ It was here in the Singakademie that Mendelssohn was first exposed to the Handelian sublime.

1.2. Exposure to the Handelian Sublime

Amongst the repertoire of the Singakademie were various works by Handel, which are evident in the performance records and catalogue of works in the Singakademie library. Following Fasch's rehearsals of various oratorio choruses in the 1790s,

²⁰⁷ Todd, *MLM*, 43. For a summary of early nineteenth-century German views of Protestant church music, including Zelter's views and role in its attempted revitalization, see Applegate, *Bach in Berlin*, 'Romanticism, Historicism, and the Crisis of Protestant Church Music', pp. 177–188.

²⁰⁸ Applegate, *Bach in Berlin*, p. 16.

²⁰⁹ See Ottenberg, 'Zelter' in *Grove Music Online*. See also Applegate, *Bach in Berlin*, p. 16 and Todd, *MLM*, p. 40.

²¹⁰ Todd, *MLM*, p. 55.

Zelter had performed *Messiah* with the Singakademie in 1804, 1817, and 1823.²¹¹ Christoph Henzel's recent summary of oratorios and major sacred works in the Singakademie archive reveals complete transcriptions of *Messiah*, *Saul*, *Samson*, and the *Brockes Passion*, as well as early printed editions of *Saul*, *Samson*, *Esther*, *Belshazzar*, *Joseph and his Brethren*, *Deborah*, and excerpts from *Judas Maccabäus*.²¹² While it is uncertain which of these works Felix would have been exposed to, it is probable that he participated in the 1823 *Messiah* performance and rehearsed various other oratorio choruses and other works by Handel while singing in the ensemble.

The young Mendelssohn also encountered Handel's choral works during his travels, often at particularly impressionable moments. According to a letter of 6 November 1821 to his father (written before the 'Weimar tests' occurred), Felix encountered a performance of Handel's music on the very day he met Goethe. His account states that '[on] Sunday, the Sun of Weimar, Goethe, arrived. In the morning we went to church, where half of the 100th Psalm by Handel was performed'.²¹³ Encounters with two such giants on the same day (whether in person or in performance) must have made an indelible impression on the lad.

Two later encounters with Handel's music occur as Mendelssohn was passing through Frankfurt, first with his family on return from Paris in 1825, and later in 1827 while on a holiday with friends. At the first, Felix encountered Johann Nepomuk Schelble (1789–1837) rehearsing Handel's *Judas Maccabaeus*. According to Todd, 'Felix extracted themes from the oratorio and dexterously wove them into an improvisation [on the organ that was] "thoroughly Handelian" yet with "no pretension to display"'.²¹⁴ On the second, in late September 1827, Felix stayed with Schelble and heard his Cäcilienverein choir in its last rehearsals before a performance of a Handel oratorio. According to Applegate, 'he did not know the

²¹¹ See Applegate, *Bach in Berlin*, p. 135 and Christoph Henzel, 'Oratorios, Masses, Sacred and Secular Cantatas, Arias and Lieder' in *The Archive of the Sing-Akademie zu Berlin: Catalogue = Das Archiv der Sing-Akademie zu Berlin: Katalog*, Axel Fischer, ed. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), pp. 67–68.

²¹² According to Henzel, other works by Handel in the Singakademie collection include *The Lord is my light*, *O praise the Lord with one consent*, the [Utrecht] *Jubilate*, *Te Deum* [both the 'Caroline' and 'Chandos'], the *Ode for St Cecilia's Day*, and *The ways of Zion do mourn* ('Oratorios', pp. 67–68).

²¹³ *Felix Mendelssohn: A Life in Letters*, edited by Rudolf Elvers and translated by Craig Tomlinson (New York: Fromm International Pub. Corp., 1986), p. 7. Note that this was likely the 'Utrecht' *Jubilate* from 1713, to be discussed below.

²¹⁴ Todd, *MLM*, p. 145, quoting Ferdinand Hiller, *Mendelssohn: Letters and Recollections*, trans. M.E. von Glehn (London, 1874; reprint New York, 1972), p. 4.

work and made considerable effort to pass through Frankfurt again in early October to hear it'.²¹⁵ Thus encounters with Handel's music under Schelble's conducting prompted both a 'Handelian' improvisation and an altered itinerary.

In sum, by the late 1820s, Mendelssohn was familiar with some of Handel's oratorios, including the entirety of at least *Messiah*, as well as select psalm settings and possibly some anthems. Yet, more than merely being exposed to Handel, Felix would emulate Handel's style in his own compositions. As the next section will show, this style was one that had become directly associated with the sublime in the eighteenth century.

2. Handel, Author of a Sublime Musical Rhetoric

In 1712, Addison's *Spectator* essay 'On the Pleasures of the Imagination' had indicated that music (among other arts) was capable of evoking the sublime through associations with sublime ideas and experiences. As the century progressed, other writers more confidently and specifically detailed how music could be sublime. But in the early decades of the eighteenth century, who in England was capable of writing 'sublime' music, if anyone?

Fortuitously for the English a composer of great capabilities had recently arrived on English soil. George Frideric Handel visited England first from November 1710 to June 1711, and, after gaining permission for a second visit from his employer Georg Ludwig the Elector of Hanover ('on condition that he engaged to return [to Germany] within a reasonable time'), he travelled to London again in 1712.²¹⁶ He was to remain in England, with the exception of relatively brief travels to the continent, until his death in 1759. Handel's music written for English audiences would demonstrate that Addison's assent to the sublime in music was valid.

This section will examine two of Handel's liturgical works from his earliest years in England to demonstrate how the composer defined the previously amorphous musical sublime for the English public. Handel's *Te Deum* and *Jubilate* for the celebration of the Peace of Utrecht will show how Handel's 'expansive' musical settings of an ancient liturgical hymn and an English psalm defined his

²¹⁵ Applegate, *Bach in Berlin*, p. 26, with reference to a letter in Sebastian Hensel, *Die Familie Mendelssohn 1729–1847* (1879; Reprint, Frankfurt am Main, 1973), pp. 199–200.

²¹⁶ See Otto Erich Deutsch, *Handel, a Documentary Biography* (New York, W.W. Norton, 1955), pp. 29–42. The stipulation on Handel's second visit is (famously) from the first biography of Handel: John Mainwaring's *Memoirs of the Life of the Late George Frederick Handel* (London: 1760), pp. 85–86.

sublime musical rhetoric while showing attention to Longinus' 'Grand Concepts' and 'Noble Passions'.

2.1. The Occasion for Handel's *Utrecht Te Deum and Jubilate*

After the premiere of *Rinaldo* in 1711, and a successful revival of the opera in 1712, Handel returned for his second 'visit' to England, writing additional operas for the London stage (including *Pastor Fido* (*The Faithful Shepherd*) and *Tesco*).²¹⁷ Soon he would also begin writing English sacred music, most likely beginning with his first version of *As pants the heart* (HWV 251a, based on Psalm 42).²¹⁸

In 1713, Handel received his first commissions for English liturgical music. The *Utrecht Te Deum* (HWV 278) and *Jubilate* (HWV 279) were commissioned for the Thanksgiving Service for the peace treaty for the War of the Spanish succession to take place on 7 July 1713, the culmination of a number of such services for previous victories in the war.²¹⁹ As Donald Burrows writes, the *Te Deum* 'demonstrates that Handel adapted to specifically "English" needs with remarkable speed: by then he had discovered the conventional principles of declamation and the formal moulds of English church music, and also the musical strengths of the singers in the Chapel Royal choir'.²²⁰ Handel, though a newcomer to the English musical scene, was rapidly acquiring the compositional skills necessary to write choral settings of English liturgical texts appropriate for grand occasions.

The Thanksgiving Service for the Utrecht treaty was just such an occasion. It began with a majestic procession of royalty and members of both houses of Parliament.²²¹ Although held in the evening at St Paul's Cathedral, the service followed the Morning Service liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer, which had included the *Jubilate* as a canticle option since 1552. The biblical text of the *Jubilate* (Psalm 100) would have been very familiar to Anglicans from Morning Prayer

²¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 49–51.

²¹⁸ Donald Burrows asserts that *As pants the heart* (HWV 251a) 'was almost certainly Handel's first English anthem'. See *Handel and the English Chapel Royal* (Oxford Studies in British Church Music; Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 56.

²¹⁹ Handel had composed the *Te Deum* during his first few months in England, completing the work on 14 January 1713, well before the commission or the premiere. See Deutsch, *Handel*, p. 52.

²²⁰ Burrows, *Handel and the English Chapel Royal*, p. 56.

²²¹ For information on the origins and premiere of the *Utrecht Te Deum* and *Jubilate*, see Gerald Hendrie's 'Handel's "Chandos" and Associated Anthems: An Introductory Survey' in Peter F. Williams, ed. *Bach, Handel, Scarlatti, Tercentenary Essays* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 149–159 and Hendrie's Preface in *Hallische Händel-Ausgabe* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1998), Series III: Kirchenmusik, Vol. 3, p. xv.

services. Along with the *Te Deum*, this was an aptly suited text for such an occasion, expressing praise and thanks to God for a long-awaited time of peace.

2.1. The ‘Biblical Sublime’ in the *Utrecht Works*

The prescribed texts for the Peace of Utrecht celebration allowed Handel to affirm the ‘biblical sublime’. Handel’s setting of the Prayer Book translation of Psalm 100 connected his music with biblical poetry that was considered particularly sublime by English writers. As discussed in Chapter One, the Psalms were regarded as ‘sublime’ due to their distinct poetic character. They were also venerated for their ancient origins.

Due to its ancient status as a biblical Psalm, the *Jubilate* text represented the heights of sublime lyric poetry. But what of the *Te Deum* text? As one of the most ancient hymns of Christianity, the *Te Deum* possessed considerable ‘chronological expansiveness’. Also, due to its use in churches through the centuries, it was venerated as a sacred liturgical text.²²² When combined together as a set of musical-liturgical works, the distinctly Christian hymn and the Old Testament Psalm provided a plenitude of opportunities for sublime emphases in Handel’s musical settings.

2.3. ‘Grand Concepts’ and ‘Noble Passions’ in the *Utrecht Works*

In Handel’s Utrecht settings of these texts, the composer seems to focus on particularly ‘sublime’ ideas in the biblical text, ones that can be categorized according to Longinus’ ‘Grand Concepts’ and ‘Noble Passions’. The following will demonstrate how Handel emphasized these.

Handel’s attention to ‘Grand Concepts’ (in particular, ‘grand’ dimensions) can be seen in Movement I in the *Te Deum*, as well as Movements I and V of the *Jubilate*.²²³ In the conclusion of the *Te Deum*’s opening chorus, two phrases are set

²²² According to legend, the *Te Deum* was improvised during Augustine of Hippo’s baptism by Ambrose of Milan in the fourth century, sung together by both church fathers. For an account of this legend and evaluation of its validity, see Calvin Stapert, *A New Song for an Old World: Musical Thought in the Early Church*, The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies Series (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2007), pp. 177–178.

²²³ Here and following, references to ‘movements’ within the *Te Deum* and *Jubilate* settings will correspond to performance editions of the scores. Due to the length and complexity of the *Te Deum* text, and the diversity of various historical settings, the following list will serve as a guide to the beginning phrases of its movement divisions: (1) ‘We praise thee, O God’; (2) ‘To thee all angels cry’; (3) ‘To thee Cherubim and Seraphim’; (4) ‘The glorious company’; (5) ‘When thou tookest upon thee’; (6) ‘We believe that thou shalt come’; (7) ‘Day by day we magnify thee’; (8) ‘And we worship thy Name’; (9) ‘Vouchsafe, O Lord’; (10) ‘O Lord, in thee have I trusted’.

in counterpoint. In one, the word ‘everlasting’ is extended through a melisma, first in the tenor part (bars 62–68), then alternately in soprano and bass parts (bars 77–90), and then emphasized in all parts leading to the final cadence (bars 94–101). In this same section, Handel also emphasizes the word ‘all’ in four- and three-part chords before the entire phrase ‘all the earth doth worship thee’, first three times (bars 73–75) and then twice (bars 81–82). Likewise, these same words receive emphasis in the first movement of the *Jubilate*. The word ‘all’ in ‘all ye lands’ receives a lengthy melisma, harmonized with the trumpet part (bars 24–32). (See Example 3.1.)

Example 3.1. Handel’s *Utrecht Jubilate*, No. 1, bars 23–32

(Based on *Jubilate: In Vocal Score*, W.T. Best (ed.) (Novello, 1955))

The musical score for Example 3.1 consists of several staves. At the top, the Alto Solo part is marked 'ALTO SOLO' and has the lyrics 'all ye lands, all ye lands.' The word 'all' is extended through a melisma. Below the Alto Solo part is the Trumpet part, which plays a melisma on the word 'all' in 'all ye lands'. The Piano part is divided into two systems. The first system shows the piano accompaniment for the Alto Solo and Trumpet parts. The second system shows the piano accompaniment for the Chorus part, which enters with a forte (f) dynamic. The Chorus part has the lyrics 'ye lands.' and is marked 'CHORUS'. The piano accompaniment for the Chorus part is also marked 'f'. The score ends with a final cadence.

In the fifth movement, the bass soloist elongates the word ‘everlasting’ in ‘His mercy is everlasting’ (bars 22–26). Thus, through melismas and repetitions, Handel gives particular attention to the extension of both *time* (‘everlasting’) and *space* (‘all the earth’, ‘all ye lands’) in his Utrecht works.

Handel’s attention to ‘Noble Passions’ is seen first in pious expressions in the *Te Deum* and then joyful ones in the *Jubilate*.²²⁴ In the *Te Deum*’s ninth movement, soloists initially sing the prayerful text: ‘Vouchsafe, O Lord: to keep us this day without sin. O Lord, have mercy upon us’. Then, he includes the *tutti* choir for continued pleas that the Lord would ‘let thy mercy lighten upon us’ and the confession that ‘our trust is in thee’. These quiet expressions of pious desires and faith are followed by a more robust and confident one in the following *Allegro* chorus. Here Handel has all three upper parts begin in unison on the text ‘O Lord, in thee have I trusted’. In the *Jubilate*, Handel appropriately turns to more jubilant (yet still ‘noble’) passions, following the psalm text. In the first movement, he repeats the words ‘O be joyful’ frequently, especially in the conclusion (bars 32–46). In the second movement, he elaborates on the word ‘gladness’ with melismas in the text phrase ‘Serve the Lord with gladness’ (bars 2–11 and 32–54).

Handel’s attention to these particular ideas in the sacred texts suggests that the composer was attuned to early eighteenth-century English views of Longinus’ sublime. As Wyatt asserts in his analysis of Handel’s *Zadok the Priest* (quoting William Smith’s translation of Longinus (1739)), “‘Boldness and Grandeur of Thoughts’, and “the Pathetic, or the Power of raising the Passions to a violent and even enthusiastic degree” are terms which Handel would have understood’.²²⁵ In his settings of the *Te Deum* and *Jubilate*, the ‘Grandeur’ of vast times and space and the expression of ‘noble’ and ‘enthusiastic’ passions receive emphatic emphasis.

2.4. The ‘Expansive Sublime’ in the *Utrecht Works*

In addition to his attention to particularly sublime aspects of the texts, Handel’s *Utrecht Te Deum* and *Jubilate* demonstrate the sublime through musical means. Compared to the previous models of the *Te Deum* and *Jubilate* that Handel studied, such as Henry Purcell’s setting of 1694, Handel *expanded* the music in length,

²²⁴ See Chapter Two for discussion of ‘Noble Passions’ in relation to the writings of John Baillie, who lists ‘Courage’, ‘Piety’, ‘Humanity’, ‘Heroism’, ‘Love of one’s Country’, ‘universal Benevolence’, ‘a Desire of Fame and Immortality’, and ‘Contempt of Death, Power, or of Honour’ as ‘Sublime’ passions (*An Essay on the Sublime*, p. 18).

²²⁵ Wyatt, ‘Aspects of Sublime Rhetoric’, p. 50. See pp. 57–58 in the 5th edition of Smith’s translation.

forces, and complexity. The distinctions between Handel's and Purcell's settings (as well as the 1709 setting by William Croft) have been studied in detail by Burrows.²²⁶ The following section will draw upon Burrows' observations to demonstrate how Handel's works represent the 'expansive' aspect of the sublime *musically*.

First, Handel's setting of the *Te Deum* and *Jubilate* is significantly longer than Purcell's 1694 setting. Burrows reports that 'Handel's setting takes nearly twice as long to perform as Purcell's'.²²⁷ As an example, Burrows compares Purcell's mere eighteen-bar section on 'All the earth doth worship Thee, the Father everlasting' in the *Te Deum* to Handel's 'two-subject fugal movement of forty-three bars' on the same text.²²⁸ Furthermore, in the *Jubilate*, Handel adds new subsections for the traditional first and fifth movements, extending the overall formal structure of the setting. In addition, the central movement of the *Jubilate*, the 'O go your way' chorus, is remarkably long for its day. As Burrows' states, '...at 162 bars, this chorus movement was probably the longest of its type yet composed in England'.²²⁹ Burrows' comparisons thus demonstrate that Handel was able to produce sacred music on a 'vast' scale.

Secondly, Handel expanded the musical forces in his *Te Deum* and *Jubilate*, adding oboes and flute and increasing the use of and division within the chorus. The addition of woodwinds is particularly apparent in the orchestral forces used in the *Te Deum*. Handel uses oboes in seven of the ten movements of his *Te Deum*, and also features flute in Movement VI. As Burrows states, 'Handel's extensive employment of the woodwind instruments in the *Te Deum* was something of a novelty: the four previous English settings were accompanied by Purcell's "Te Deum scoring" of strings and trumpets ...'.²³⁰ Like Purcell, Handel makes use of the trumpet in movements in D major, which adds additional force to his orchestral accompaniment.

Handel expanded the forces further through more extensive use of full chorus and more complex vocal divisions. Where Purcell gives many passages to soloists, Handel prefers the effect of the full chorus. For example, while Purcell opens his *Te Deum* setting with a trio of soloists, Handel includes the full choir. Likewise, in the

²²⁶ Burrows' presents his research on this repertoire in his chapter 'Handel's Music for the Peace of Utrecht, 1713' in *Handel and the English Chapel Royal*.

²²⁷ Burrows, *Handel and the English Chapel Royal*, p. 84.

²²⁸ Burrows, *Handel and the English Chapel Royal*, p. 84.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 84. Burrows does not italicize 'Te Deum'.

fifth movement, beginning with ‘Thou didst open the Kingdom of heaven’ (bar 20), Handel outdoes Purcell in choral scoring by using a five-part choir (SSATB) along with a quartet of soloists, compared to Purcell’s simpler setting relying upon alto and bass soloists. Burrows recognizes this distinction in Handel’s writing, stating that ‘The proportion as well as the length of chorus music in Handel’s setting is much larger than in those of its predecessors Handel’s use of choruses and ensembles where Purcell uses soloists is so consistent that it must represent a definite stylistic choice’.²³¹

The effect of this preference is indeed powerful. As Burrows asserts, Handel’s ‘substantial chorus movements provide a much more weighty effect’ than Purcell’s setting.²³² Perhaps most strikingly, Handel’s large choral forces are on display in the first of his two-part *Gloria patri* in the *Jubilate*. For the ‘Glory be to the Father’, Handel expands to an eight-part choir singing homophonic chords at a *forte* dynamic. Further evidence of Handel’s preference for the full chorus is summarized in Tables 3.1 and 3.2 below, based on information from Burrow’s research.

The third way Handel expanded his *Te Deum* and *Jubilate* was in musical complexity. In addition to increases in the size of the musical forces, Handel made use of more diverse choral textures. In the opening chorus of the *Te Deum*, Handel moves between four-part choral scoring, soloistic lines, and complex polyphony. Here Burrows confirms that ‘All three of Handel’s characteristic textures (homophonic, imitative, and one-part-against-the-rest) are represented in the choral section of the movement’.²³³ Further textural contrasts appear when Handel suddenly introduces *tutti* forces on the ‘Holy, Holy’ section of Movement III (bars 9–23) and in Movement V on ‘Thou didst open the Kingdom of heav’n’ (bars 20–25). His most complex textural writing comes in his fugal writing in Movements I (bars 59–72), V (beginning at bar 26), and VIII (a double fugue from bar 1), as well as in Movement III of the *Jubilate*.

Handel increases the harmonic complexity of his setting by employing more keys in more diverse sequences. Although still based in D major at beginning and end, his *Te Deum* moves to keys such as C major and F major, as well as various

²³¹ Ibid., p. 89.

²³² Ibid., p. 84.

²³³ Ibid., p.89.

minor keys. His *Jubilate* is similarly complex; as Burrows states, '[Handel's] key scheme is more adventurous in comparison with the previous settings'.²³⁴ (See Tables 3.1 and 3.2 under 'Key'.)

The ending of Handel's *Jubilate* presents a culmination of Handel's expansive style. As mentioned, the composer lengthened this fifth section of the text by separating it into two parts. Burrows sees these as two 'final choruses [which] form a free prelude and fugue in Handel's most spacious manner'.²³⁵ Furthermore, here is where Handel extends his choral forces in an eight-part divisi. As Burrows observes, 'The eight-part vocal writing ... is used to give a spread to sustained chords in combination with oboes and trumpets, heightened by contrast with the orchestral interludes for upper strings only'.²³⁶ Burrows' observations here reveal Handel's 'spacious manner' to be one of both formal 'length' (in time) and harmonic 'height', as well as contrasting instrumental and choral forces of no small complexity.

In sum, in a time when vast views of nature were admired for their sublimity, Handel's 1713 *Utrecht* works presented musical equivalents through their extended length, expanded forces, and increasing complexity.²³⁷ He anticipated Baillie's 1747 question, 'And may not long Sounds be to the *Ear* what extended Prospects are to the *Eye*?', affirming the sublime capabilities of music in terms of the 'extended' dimensions of landscapes.²³⁸

²³⁴ Ibid., p. 94. See Tables 3.1 and 3.2 below for representative data on Handel's variety and sequence of keys.

²³⁵ Ibid., p. 96.

²³⁶ Ibid., p. 96. Burrows sees 'pre-echoes' of Handel's 'Glory to God in the highest' [No. 15] from *Messiah* in the 'Glory to the Father' (pp. 96–97).

²³⁷ Borrowing Charles Burney's phrase from later in the century, Burrows justly describes Handel's 1713 *Utrecht Te Deum* and *Jubilate* as 'Handel's first essay in "his grandest and most magnificent style"' (*Handel and the English Chapel Royal*, p. 97, quoting from Charles Burney, *An account of the musical performances in Westminster-Abbey, and the Pantheon, May 26th, 27th, 29th; and June the 3d, and 5th, 1784. In commemoration of Handel*. London, MDCCLXXXV. [1785], p. 35).

²³⁸ Baillie, *An Essay on the Sublime*, p. 39.

Table 3.1. A Comparison of *Te Deum* Settings by Purcell (1694) and Handel (1713) [Selected Movements]²³⁹

(Based on Donald Burrows, *Handel and the English Chapel Royal* (Oxford University Press, 2005), Table 4.1, pp. 111–112; Movement numbers in [brackets] are from the critical edition score of Handel’s *Utrecht Te Deum* (Bärenreiter, 1999)).

<i>Te Deum</i> incipits	<u>Purcell’s <i>Te Deum</i> (1694)</u>				<u>Handel’s <i>Utrecht Te Deum</i> (1713)</u>			
	<u>Key</u>	<u>Time Signature</u>	<u>Voices</u>	<u>Instruments</u>	<u>Key</u>	<u>Time Signature</u>	<u>Voices</u>	<u>Instruments</u>
[1] ‘We praise thee’	D	Cut Time	ATB	basso continuo	D	Common Time	satb	full orchestra
[3] ‘To thee Cherubim’	D	Common Time	SS	basso continuo	A	Common Time	SS	basso continuo
‘Holy, holy’	D	Common Time	SS, ssatb	full orchestra	D	Common Time	ssatb	full orchestra
‘Heaven and earth’	D	Common Time	ATB, ssatb	basso continuo, full orchestra	D	Common Time	ssatb	full orchestra
[5] ‘When thou tookest’	D	Common Time	AB	basso continuo	d, F	Common Time	A	oboe and violins
‘When thou hadst’	f-sharp, b	Common Time	AB	basso continuo	A	Common Time	SATB	unaccompanied
‘thou didst open’	D	Common Time	AB	basso continuo	C	Common Time	ssatb	oboes and strings
‘Thou sittest’	D	3/2	SS	basso continuo	C	3/2	ssatb	oboes and strings

²³⁹ Under ‘Key’, capital letters indicate major keys, lowercase letters minor keys. Under ‘Voices’, capital letters indicate solo parts, lowercase letters choral parts.

Table 3.2. A Comparison of *Jubilate* Settings by Purcell (1694) and Handel (1713)

(Based on Donald Burrows, *Handel and the English Chapel Royal* (Oxford University Press, 2005), Table 4.1 (cont.), p. 113)

Jubilate incipits	<u>Purcell's <i>Jubilate</i> (1694)</u>				<u>Handel's <i>Utrecht Jubilate</i> (1713)</u>			
	<u>Key</u>	<u>Time Signature</u>	<u>Voices</u>	<u>Instruments</u>	<u>Key</u>	<u>Time Signature</u>	<u>Voices</u>	<u>Instruments</u>
1. 'O be joyful'	D	3/2	A, satb	2 tpts, strings	D, A	Common Time	A, satb	2 tpts, 2 obs, bsn, strings
('serve the Lord')					D	Common Time	Satb	
2. 'Be ye sure'	A	Common	SA	basso continuo	a	Common Time	AB	oboe(s), strings
3. 'O go your way'	D	Cut Time	Satb	strings	F	Cut Time	Satb	
4. 'For the Lord'	D	2/2	AB	basso continuo	g	Common Time	AAB	
5. 'Glory be to the Father'	D	Cut Time	Ssatb	2 tpts, strings	D	Common Time	Ssaattbb	2 tpts, 2 obs, bsn, strings
('as it was')						Common Time	Ssatb	

2.5. How Handel Defined the Musical Sublime

As Claudia Johnson has noted in her article entitled “Giant HANDEL” and the Musical Sublime’, ‘Eighteenth-century estheticians [*sic*] lagged behind music enthusiasts in discovering the *musical sublime* and in reaching a consensus about the kinds of sounds that mark it’.²⁴⁰ Up to this point (1713), writings on the sublime had not specifically described how music could achieve the sublime. Addison’s 1712 remarks in the *Spectator* only hinted at music’s sublime powers. In following years (as surveyed in Chapter Two), aesthetic writings would begin to describe the sublime with reference to music. Although these accounts differed from one another in some details, descriptions can be seen to identify traits in Handel’s sacred music, even specific aspects of his works for the peace of Utrecht, as the following will summarize.

In ‘An Essay of Musically Ayre ...’ (c. 1715–1720), Roger North describes how ‘the use of non-harmonic tones and dissonances [could produce] “surprise and amazement”’ – recognized effects of the sublime.²⁴¹ In ‘The Musically Grammarian’ (1728), his notation of a ‘sublime passage’ by Corelli with a series of suspensions serves to confirm this.²⁴² The second movement of Handel’s 1713 *Te Deum* makes use of such suspensions in the clashing harmonies of the two alto soloists (bars 3–7 and 14–15). Handel’s ‘O go your way’ chorus from the *Jubilate* makes even more extensive use of ‘surprising’ suspensions, both in the vocal parts (bars 10–12), the instrumental parts (bars 18–23), and in both combined (bars 24–47). (See Example 3.2.)

²⁴⁰ Claudia L. Johnson, “Giant HANDEL” and the Musical Sublime’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 19 (1986), p. 524.

²⁴¹ Larsson, ‘The Beautiful, the Sublime’, p. 43, quoting North, ‘An Essay of Musically Ayre ...’ (c. 1715–1720), f. 22v from *Roger North on Music*, p. 80.

²⁴² North, ‘The Musically Grammarian’ (1728), ff. 54v–55r; Quoted in Larsson, ‘The Beautiful, the Sublime’, p. 45 from *Roger North on Music*, p. 90.

Example 3.2. Handel's *Utrecht Jubilate*, No. 4, bars 24–33(Based on *Jubilate: In Vocal Score*, W.T. Best (ed.) (Novello, 1955))

The musical score consists of three systems. The first system shows the vocal line with lyrics 'O go your way in - to His' and a keyboard accompaniment. The second system continues the vocal line with lyrics 'gates, gates with thanks' and the keyboard accompaniment. The third system shows the keyboard accompaniment continuing. The score includes dynamic markings such as *f* and *p*.

In 1747, John Baillie's *An Essay on the Sublime* gives the most detailed description of the musical sublime to date. Baillie writes '...all *grave* Sounds, where the Notes are *long*, exalt my Mind much more than any other Kind'. Likewise, Alexander Gerard's *An Essay on Taste* (1756) asserts that 'the length and gravity of the notes' produces the sublime. In the opening solos of the *Te Deum*'s fourth movement, Handel employs extensive melismas on the words 'glorious' (in 'The glorious company' (bars 14–20) and 'praise' (bars 43–50, 59–65). In the beginning of his *Jubilate*, Handel emphasizes 'long Notes' in the opening trumpet lines (bars 1–6) as well as the trumpet and alto duet (bars 13–32) as well as the phrase 'and come before his presence' in the second movement (bars 12–30 and 35–54). 'Long notes' are especially evident in the grand statement of 'Glory to the Father' beginning at bar 12 in the concluding *Gloria patri*, which is repeated three times and contains as many as three semibreves tied together. (See Example 3.3.)

Example 3.3. Handel's *Utrecht Jubilate*, No. 6, bars 12–16(Based on *Jubilate: In Vocal Score*, W.T. Best (ed.) (Novello, 1955))

The image shows a musical score for Handel's *Utrecht Jubilate*, No. 6, bars 12–16. The score is for a four-part vocal choir (SATB) and includes parts for 1st and 2nd Treble, 1st and 2nd Alto, 1st and 2nd Tenor, and 1st and 2nd Bass. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The lyrics are "Glo - - - - - ry,". The score is arranged in a system with two staves per voice part. The lyrics are written below the notes, with hyphens indicating the duration of the notes. The notes are all half notes, and the lyrics are "Glo - - - - - ry,".

In 1752, Charles Avison wrote *An Essay on Musical Expression*. While Baillie had claimed that ‘Wind-Instruments are the most fitted to elevate; such as the Hautboy, the Trumpet, and Organ...’, Avison asserted that ‘grand’ music is mostly choral, but also some instrumental, especially in the use of brass and percussion and the organ.²⁴³ Handel’s *Utrecht* works use all these timbres, with an emphasis on choral writing. More specifically, Movements I and VII of the *Te Deum* feature trumpets, and Movement V opens with solo oboe lines.²⁴⁴

²⁴³ See Baillie, *An Essay on the Sublime*, p. 38 and Avison, *An Essay on Musical Expression*, pp. 25 and 101–104.

²⁴⁴ Later adaptations of the work, not by Handel, added timpani.

Almost thirty years after Handel's *Utrecht* compositions, aesthetic treatises such as Baillie's and Avison's were just beginning to define the sublime in musical terms. However, these accounts consistently defined the musical sublime in ways that described Handel's music. With his *Utrecht Te Deum* and *Jubilate*, Handel accomplished in music what had previously been recognized in literature and landscapes. His 'expansive' settings of an ancient hymn and a biblical text helped define the musical sublime for the English public, establishing a musical rhetoric that was increasingly recognized as the musical sublime.

3. Mendelssohn and the Handelian Sublime

In the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, appreciation of Handel's 'sublime' music came to German lands. As Applegate has shown, during this time, appreciation of Handel far exceeded that of J.S. Bach, and, in fact, was an obstacle to the appreciation of Bach's choral works 'in practical as well as intellectual terms'.²⁴⁵ Due to Zelter's Handel performances in the 1820s, 'Concert going Berliners had ... heard much more of Handel by 1829 than they had of Bach ...'.²⁴⁶ Also, Handel's scores were more easily obtained and his music was more easily learned. Lastly, the sheer number of Handel's oratorios was so vast that his music crowded the German soundscape.

In intellectual terms, Handel's music was promoted as 'serious and German', both of which were important for Germans establishing their own nationalistic culture before the political unification of the German lands. As Applegate summarizes, 'Writers of the late eighteenth century forgave and forgot all of Handel's Englishness, translated the texts, and made him a shining light of German genius in foreign lands'.²⁴⁷ Thus, Handel's status as a sublime musical genius was alive and well in Germany during Mendelssohn's coming of age.

During the late 1820s Felix was increasingly interested in and inspired by Handel's works. This is evident in his compositions emulating Handel's vocal textures, themes, and various musical details.²⁴⁸ In the following, evidence of

²⁴⁵ Applegate, *Bach in Berlin*, p. 215.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

²⁴⁸ By the 1830s and 1840s, in his conducting role at the Lower Rhine Music Festivals, Mendelssohn would become an increasing advocate of Handel's works, leading large-scale performances of *Israel in Egypt*, *Solomon*, the ninth Chandos Anthem, *Joshua*, *Messiah*, and *Alexander's Feast*. See Todd, *MLM*, pp. 273, 304, 317, 366, 375, 435, and 516 for listings of the repertoire for Lower Rhine

Handel's sublime style will be found in Mendelssohn's early works, including the famous 1826 Octet for Strings, his 1826 *Te Deum*, and the 1830 setting of Psalm 115 for choir and orchestra. In these works, the Kantian process of study, emulation, and innovation clearly shows how the works of Handel's genius became 'the rule' for Mendelssohn to follow in creating his own masterworks.

3.1. Handelian Counterpoint and Quotation in the Octet

From the entrance of each successive instrument in the opening bars, the finale of the Octet for Strings (Op. 20) reveals Mendelssohn's familiarity with Handelian vocal polyphony.²⁴⁹ Each 'voice' of the eight-part string ensemble enters one at a time in ascending order (cello 2, cello 1, viola 2, viola 1, etc. (bars 1–24)). Later, in bars 189–204, Mendelssohn repeats his fugal exposition, but condenses it by pairing instruments for each entrance of the fugue subject. In addition, bars 290–354 present what Taylor calls a 'remarkable display of compositional ingenuity' involving contrapuntal juxtaposition of both Movement IV themes and the theme of the preceding scherzo movement.²⁵⁰

While these fugal string entrances may not immediately bring to mind Handelian choral fugues, the quotation of one of Handel's most famous themes from *Messiah* is sure to do so. As Taylor recognizes, one of the finale's themes 'bears a striking resemblance to one from Handel's *Messiah*, "and He shall reign forever"' (from the 'Hallelujah' Chorus).²⁵¹ This theme first occurs in bar 25 in the first violin, whose minim figure contrasts from the other parts' exuberant theme in quavers. This veiled reference to Handel's motive recurs in bar 205 (along with the quaver theme), and then is unveiled in bar 213 in a *forte* statement by the first viola, this time in a

Festivals from 1833–1846 which Mendelssohn took part in, including the 'obligatory Handel oratorio' (p. 366).

²⁴⁹ According to Taylor, the Octet also displayed Mendelssohn's deep admiration for Beethoven's ambitious instrumental works while also presenting both 'ancient' musical styles and modern instrumental developments (*MTM*, p. 86). Chamber works by Beethoven could have served as models, especially the four-part fugues and canons in the 'Razumovsky' Quartets (No. 1, I and IV and 2, III).

²⁵⁰ Taylor, *MTM*, p. 78. Analogies to Handelian choruses with ascending fugal entrances can be found in the 'Conquassabit' section of *Dixit Dominus* (concluding the 'Dominus a dextris tuis'), with its five-part stretto entrances; 'He Led Them though the Deep' (No. 23) and 'And I Will Exalt Them' (No. 27) in *Israel in Egypt* (both with four parts); as well as 'He Trusted in God' and the concluding 'Amen' of *Messiah*.

²⁵¹ Taylor, *MTM*, p. 86.

full five-bar, distinctive form, which leads into the modulatory scheme of the development.²⁵² (See Example 3.4.)

Example 3.4. Mendelssohn, Octet for Strings, IV, bars 213–231

(Based on Octett, Op. 20 in Es, in *Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdys Werke*, Julius Rietz (ed.) (Breitkopf & Härtel, n.d.))

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system includes the staves for Violin 1, 2; Violin 3, 4; Viola 1, 2; and Cello 1, 2. The key signature is three flats (E-flat major), and the time signature is 4/4. The first staff (Violin 1, 2) begins with a *sempre f* marking. The second staff (Violin 3, 4) is mostly silent. The third staff (Viola 1, 2) contains the lyrics: [and he shall reign for - ev - er]. The fourth staff (Cello 1, 2) is mostly silent. The second system continues the music, with the Viola part ending on a long note. The final staff (Cello 1, 2) ends with a *f* marking.

²⁵² The Octet demonstrates not only contrapuntal virtuosity, but also formal sophistication; the young Mendelssohn carefully crafts his thematic material to accomplish structural goals. For a recent summary of the ‘innovative’ form of the Octet, see Paul Wingfield and Julian Horton, ‘Norm and Deformation in Mendelssohn’s Sonata Forms’, in *Mendelssohn Perspectives*, ed. Nicole Gimes and Angela R. Mace (Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), p. 104 and Table 5.5 on p. 102.

In this, his first instrumental masterpiece, Mendelssohn emulated the choral masterworks of Handel. His eight-part string fugues evoke the complexity of sublime Handelian counterpoint. Furthermore, his clear quotation of a theme from *Messiah* hints at the ‘Grand Concept’ of the infinite, as expressed in Handel’s setting of ‘and He shall reign forever’.²⁵³

²⁵³ For an exploration of the German association of complex counterpoint with ideas of infinity, see David Yearsley, ‘C.P.E. Bach and the Living Traditions of Learned Counterpoint’ in *C.P.E. Bach Studies*, ed. A. Richards (Cambridge UP, 2006), pp. 173–201 especially p. 201.

3.2. Handelian Themes and Vocal Polyphony in the 1826 *Te Deum*

Although a lesser-known work, the *Te Deum* of 1826 warrants examination as further evidence of Handel's sublime style in Mendelssohn's early works. According to Barbara Mohn, 'the composition of the *Te Deum*, which Mendelssohn completed on the fifth of December 1826, belongs among the first works of his maturity, along with the Octet for Strings Op. 20, written during the previous year, and the *Overture to A Midsummer Night's Dream* Op. 21, composed during the summer of 1826'.²⁵⁴ The eight-part *Te Deum* (a work of 'baroque polychoral formations and ornate counterpoint') was conceived and given birth at the Berlin Singakademie, where *Te Deum* settings by Handel were also rehearsed and performed.²⁵⁵ For example, Handel's *Dettingen Te Deum* was performed at the Singakademie in 1813, 1814, and 1822 and Zelter also 'arranged Handel's *Utrecht Te Deum* for eight voices, to meet the needs of the Singakademie'.²⁵⁶ Not surprisingly, emulations of Handel's music appear in Mendelssohn's composition.

These emulations begin early on in the work. As Mohn points out, 'the melody of the principle theme [of the first movement, first in bars 5–8] and its continuo accompaniment are closely related to Handel's setting of the words "O Lord, in thee have I trusted" in [the final movement of] the *Utrecht Te Deum*'.²⁵⁷

Continued emulations occur in the seventh movement ('Tu rex gloriae'), where 'Handelian textures abound ... in the brisk double fugue'; and the tenth ('Per singulos dies'), which is set for two four-part choirs 'with sprightly, high-pitched figures in the sopranos that imitate the *clarino* register of Handel's trumpets'.²⁵⁸ More specifically, Mohn is reminded again of the *Utrecht Te Deum* theme when 'In bar 36 the male voices sing the words "in saeculum saeculi" in unison to a melody

²⁵⁴ Barbara Mohn, 'Forward' to Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, *Te Deum*, trans. John Coombs (Stuttgart: Carus-Verlag, 1996), p. v.

²⁵⁵ Todd, *MLM*, p. 157.

²⁵⁶ Mohn, 'Forward', p. v, with reference to Werner Bollert, *Die Singakademie zu Berlin, Festschrift zum 175jährigen Bestehen* (Berlin, 1966), p. 71. This source provides evidence that Mendelssohn likely sang the *Utrecht Te Deum* (and also the *Jubilate*) under Zelter at the Singakademie, exposing the young Felix to early examples of Handel's sublime style.

²⁵⁷ Mohn, 'Forward', p. v. Todd mistakenly identifies this chorus 'with the traditional D-major melody intoned over a "walking" bass line' as the final chorus of the *Dettingen Te Deum*, while giving a (mislabelled) score excerpt of the *Utrecht* final chorus. See Todd, *MLM*, p. 157 and Ex. 5.8 on p. 158.

²⁵⁸ Todd, *MLM*, 157.

[with] narrow intervals and long note values'.²⁵⁹ In texture and theme, these movements of Mendelssohn's *Te Deum* bear the marks of Handel's sublime style.

In Mendelssohn's final movement – the 'Fiat misericordia tua' (No. 12) – he returns to his artistic inspiration, reviving the Handelian textures of earlier movements. The opening *Adagio non troppo* section begins with choirs singing antiphonally (sopranos and altos followed by tenors and basses). (See Example 3.5.)

Example 3.5. Mendelssohn, *Te Deum*, No. 12, bars 1–11

(Based on *Te Deum*, Barbara Mohn and Paul Horn (eds.) (Carus-Verlag, 1997))

Adagio non troppo

Coro I
Soli
Fi - at mi - se - ri - cor - di - a tu - a,

Coro II
Soli
Fi - at mi - se - ri - cor - di - a tu - a,

Soli
tu - a Do - mi - ne su - per nos,

Soli
tu - a Do - mi - ne su - per nos,

²⁵⁹ Mohn, 'Forward', pp. v–vi.

Then, the *tutti* choruses speed into a bright *Allegro* in D major with a melodic reprise of the (Choir I) soprano theme from bars 1–5 of the opening movement. This quickly becomes a four-part ascending fugue on a variation on Handel’s *Utrecht Te Deum* theme beginning with basses in bar 26, who are followed by tenors, altos, and sopranos in turn. (See Examples 3.6 and 3.7.)

Example 3.6. Handel, *Utrecht Te Deum*, No. 10, bars 1–8

(Based on *Utrechter Te Deum* (HWV 278), Gerald Hendrie and Lars-Henrik Hysten (eds.) (Bärenreiter, 1998))

Allegro

O Lord, in thee have I trust -

ed: let me ne - ver be con - found - ed, let me ne - ver,

let me ne - ver be con - found - ed, let me ne - ver be con

Example 3.7. Mendelssohn, *Te Deum*, No. 12, bars 26–37

(Based on *Te Deum*, Barbara Mohn and Paul Horn (eds.) (Carus-Verlag, 1997))

Coro I and II

vi, In

in te Do - mi - ne spe - ra -

te Do - mi - ne In spe - ra - te Do - mi - ne spe - ra - vi, spe - ra - vi, spe - ra - in

Strikingly, the eight-part *fortissimo* conclusion on a repetition of the ‘Te Deum laudamus’ opening text phrase (bars 73–77) includes another melodic reprise of the opening movement theme, followed soon after by a *fortissimo* statement of the *Utrecht Te Deum* theme (bars 81–85) with the repetition of ‘In te Domine speravi’, which begins the last line of Latin text. In this majestic conclusion, Mendelssohn briefly quotes both his own melody as well as Handel’s borrowed theme. Again, Mendelssohn’s work emulates the Handelian sublime in both texture and specific thematic material. (See Example 3.8.)

Example 3.8. Mendelssohn, *Te Deum*, No. 12, bars 73–85(Based on *Te Deum*, Barbara Mohn and Paul Horn (eds.) (Carus-Verlag, 1997))

ff

Coro I

ter - num. *ff* Te De - um lau -

Coro II

ff Te De - um lau - da - mus: non con - fun - dar non con -
Te De - um lau - da -

Orchestra

ff

da - mus. In non con - fun - dar in ae -

in ae - ter - num. *ff* In non con - fun - dar in ae -

non con - fun - dar in ae - ter num. In non con - fun - dar in ae -

fun - dar non con - fun - dar mus, te, *ff* non con - fun - dar in ae -

The image displays a musical score for Mendelssohn's Psalm 115. It consists of four systems of staves. The first system shows the vocal parts (Soprano and Bass) and the piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "te Do - mi - ne spe - ra - vi, in te spe - ter". The second system continues the vocal parts and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "te Do - mi - ne spe - ra - vi, in te spe -". The third system shows the piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "te Do - mi - ne spe - ra - vi, in te spe -". The fourth system shows the piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "te Do - mi - ne spe - ra - vi, in te spe -".

3.3. Handelian Emulation in Mendelssohn's *Psalm 115*

In 1830–1831, Mendelssohn's interest in large-scale sacred works was heightened by his 'Grand Tour' to Italy. When in Rome in 1830, Felix did what other Roman composers did so well: write 'grand' choral works on Latin sacred texts. This resulted in his first publication in this genre, his *Psalm 115* (Op. 31) for choir, soloists, and orchestra.²⁶⁰ Despite the distance from Rome to Berlin, Mendelssohn's *Psalm 115* reveals the lingering memories of his 1829 revival of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* with the Singakademie, especially in its appropriation of chorale-like themes.²⁶¹ However, the direct inspiration for Mendelssohn's *Psalm 115* was a famous work by another German who spent formative years in Italy: Handel. Reversing the order of Handel's 1707–1710 travel (Italy-Germany-England), Mendelssohn began his study of a compositional model in England before returning to Germany for five months prior to his Italian journey. Here he was inspired by an

²⁶⁰ Dinglinger's *Studien zu den Psalmen mit Orchester von Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy* (Köln: Studio, Medienservice und Verlag Dr. Ulrich Tank, 1993) remains the authoritative monograph on Mendelssohn's large-scale Psalm settings. My study largely follows Dinglinger's terminology and formal analysis. Translations from Dingliner are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

²⁶¹ In particular, Mendelssohn evokes Bach with the brief 'chorale-motto' theme in Movement I (introduced in bars 41–44) and especially the soprano melody in the choral *Più animato* section of Movement II (bars 74–83), which is quite similar to the 'Passion' chorale ('O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden') melody.

autograph score of Handel's *Dixit Dominus*, a setting of Psalm 110 written in Rome in 1707.²⁶² In fact, Mendelssohn considered the work 'sublime'.

During his first visit to England in 1829, Mendelssohn was detained in London in October by an unfortunate injury sustained when his leg became pinned under an overturned cabriolet. This prevented him from returning home for his sister Fanny's wedding to Wilhelm Hensel (1794–1861).²⁶³ While he recovered, Felix requested a copy of *Dixit Dominus* from the King's Music Library. The custodian of the library, G.F. Anderson, obliged, and procured a manuscript that Felix then copied for Zelter. In an appreciative note to Anderson, he revealed his opinion of Handel's work by a comment in English: 'I think this work is one of the most energetic & *sublime* of the great composer'.²⁶⁴

What, specifically, did Mendelssohn admire about Handel's masterpiece? Without more specific references in his thank-you note to Anderson, I will rely upon the adage (contemporary to Mendelssohn) that 'Imitation is the sincerest [form] of flattery'.²⁶⁵ Dinglinger's comparison of Mendelssohn's *Psalm 115* with *Dixit Dominus* reveals particular correspondences that can be understood as 'sincere' flatteries. First, both works begin in G minor with an *Allegro* tempo indication (which Mendelssohn qualifies with 'con fuoco'). Secondly, their opening themes make use of unison textures: Handel's altos briefly introduce the 'Dixit, dixit Dominus Domino' theme (bar 18), and Mendelssohn's tenor and bass *Männerchor* introduces his first choral theme on 'Non nobis Domine' (bars 13–17). Thirdly, both works make use of fugal procedure in the latter parts of movements: Handel's concluding fugue in the *Allegro* section of the 'Gloria Patri' is imitated by Mendelssohn in his first movement, where vocal entrances from soprano to alto to

²⁶² Handel's *Dixit Dominus* can be seen as a 'sublime predecessor' to the English works for the Peace of Utrecht. Aspects of Handel's emerging 'sublime' style in the *Dixit*, learned from Italian masters such as Antonio Caldara (1670–1736) and Arcangelo Corelli (1653–1713), include the use of suspensions, complex counterpoint, long notes, and lengthy movements, especially the 'Gloria Patri' final chorus.

²⁶³ See Todd, *MLM*, pp. 218–219.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 219. Emphasis added. The letter from 16 October 1829 is quoted in Dinglinger as follows: 'Einen Tag darauf bedankt er sich bei dem Kustos der Bibliothek, George Frederick Anderson, schriftlich für das Ausleihen des Manuskripts. Über das *Dixit Dominus* bemerkt er dabei: "I think this work is one of the most energetic & sublime of the great composer"' (*Studien*, p. 30).

²⁶⁵ Charles Caleb Colton, *Lacon, Or, Many Things in a Few Words: Addressed to Those who Think*, 8th ed. (New York: S. Marks, 1824), p. 114, #217. The word 'form' is not in Colton's original.

tenor to bass are all doubled *colla parte* in the orchestra (bars 45–62).²⁶⁶ (See Example 3.9.)

Example 3.9. Mendelssohn, *Psalm 115*, No. 1, bars 45–62

(Based on *Der 115. Psalm*, Christian Rudolf Riedel (ed.) (Breitkopf & Härtel, 1989))

uns um leuch - ten, laß nicht die Hei-den spre - chen, wo ist die Macht ihres Got - tes? die Hei - den
 uns um leuch - ten, laß nicht die Hei-den spre -
 uns um leuch - ten,
 uns um leuch - ten,
 spre - chen, laß nicht
 chen, wo ist die Macht ihres Got - tes? die Hei - den spre - chen,
 laß nicht die Hei-den spre - chen, wo ist die Macht ihres Got - tes? laß nicht die
 laß nicht die Hei-den spre *tr*

As in the Octet and the 1826 *Te Deum*, Mendelssohn's first large-scale psalm setting takes Handel as a model. *Psalm 115* emulates the sublime style of his predecessor in particular details (such as choice of key and tempo), as well as in diverse textures (from simple monophony to complex polyphony). As the next section will

²⁶⁶ See Dinglinger, *Studien*, pp. 34–36, and note his section heading 'Das Händelsche Muster' ('The Handelian Model') for pp. 29–37.

demonstrate, these compositions also display early signs of originality in Mendelssohn's works – an originality that would prove exemplary.

4. Musical Genius in Handel and Mendelssohn

In Chapter One, the eighteenth-century idea of 'genius' was traced to the discourse of the sublime, including commentary on Longinus' treatise. Then, a particular pattern for the emergence of genius was discerned in Kant's Third Critique. In the following, I will present Peter Kivy's argument that the idea of a *musical* 'genius' began with the reception of Handel in eighteenth-century England, augmenting Kivy's work with support from eighteenth-century sources.²⁶⁷ Then, I will present Mendelssohn as an exemplar of a Kantian genius, giving further examples from his early Handelian works.

4.1. Handel, the First Musical Genius

In Kivy's book, he establishes one understanding of 'genius' (the 'possessor' view) on ideas detected in Longinus' treatise. According to Kivy, Longinus' genius is 'a figure of weight, spirit, nobility, loftiness of thought – in a word, a figure of *power*'.²⁶⁸ Then, in Chapter Four, he shows how Handel is described as just such a genius (a 'possessor' of creative artistic power and law-making authority), especially in Mainwaring's 1760 *Memoirs of the Life of the Late George Frederic Handel*, the first biography of any composer. Kivy recognizes that Mainwaring's first references to Handel as 'genius' are concentrated in the accounts of Handel's early 'prodigy' years. Later, he points to Mainwaring's 'Observations on the Works of ... Handel' as the place where 'the enshrinement of Handel as the first musical genius is completed in all its detail'.²⁶⁹

Indeed, Mainwaring's descriptions of Handel's works and abilities connect directly with the effects of Longinus' sublime and even Longinus' treatise itself.

²⁶⁷ Kivy summarizes his argument when he writes that

Handel's career in England was roughly contemporaneous with the development of that philosophy of genius.... His arrival in London coincided almost exactly with the publication of Addison's influential *Spectator* paper on literary genius, his death with the publication of perhaps the culminating document, in England, of the Longinian tradition, Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition*. The composer was there for the philosophy, the philosophy for the composer. (*The Possessor and the Possessed*, p. 78)

Kivy's full presentation of Handel as the 'first genius composer' is in his fourth chapter, entitled 'The Saxon or the Devil' (pp. 37–56).

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

Mainwaring puts forth the following explanation of the sublime effect of Handel's oratorios choruses. He states that 'This is probably owing to that grandeur of conception, which predominates in them; and which, as coming purely from Nature, is the more strongly, and the more generally felt'.²⁷⁰ This natural 'grandeur of conception' that Mainwaring attributes to Handel is distinctly Longinian, coming from his first 'spring of sublimity'. Furthermore, Mainwaring evokes Longinus when he is at a loss of words for describing Handel's abilities further, stating that '...there are no words capable of conveying an idea of his character, unless indeed I was to repeat those which LONGINUS has employed in his description of DEMOSTHENES, every part of which is so perfectly applicable to HANDEL, that one would almost be persuaded it was intended for him'.²⁷¹ Mainwaring views Handel as so appropriately described by Longinus' treatise that he even chooses a quote from Longinus' treatise as one of the opening epigraphs of the *Memoirs*. The quote reads, in William Smith's 1739 English translation, as follows: 'I readily allow, that Writers of a lofty and tow'ring Genius are by no means pure and correct, since whatever is neat and accurate throughout, must be exceedingly liable to Flatness'.²⁷² Thus, from opening epigraph to closing 'Observations', Mainwaring's *Memoirs* of Handel relate the composer to Longinian ideas of genius.

As Mainwaring's epigraph from Longinus indicates, the genius may not follow artistic rules perfectly in his works. Earlier in the century, Handel was arraigned on just such 'charges' in a fictional court. As early as 1733, the parody pamphlet entitled *Harmony in an Uproar* suggested to the music-listening public that (in Johnson's words) 'the sublime in music meant an expansiveness that renounced the constrictive quality of rules', and indicated that Handel had achieved this.²⁷³

In the farce trial which *Harmony in an Uproar* narrates, the 'prisoner' Handel is charged with numerous crimes, including 'Inchantments [*sic*]', 'good Musick [*sic*] and sound Harmony', and 'pleasing' and 'charming' the British people 'when we

²⁷⁰ Mainwaring, *Memoirs*, p. 192.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

²⁷² *Dionysius Longinus on the Sublime: Translated from the Greek, with Notes and Observations, and Some Account of the Life, Writings, and Character of the Author*, trans. William Smith (London, 1739), pp. 78–79; Quoted in Kivy, *The Possessor and the Possessed*, p. 47. (Note that Mainwaring's epigraph in the *Memoirs* was in Greek.)

²⁷³ Johnson summarizes her comments on the pamphlet by stating that '...this pamphlet initiated a tradition in criticism of contemporary music that viewed Handel's "bold strokes" and "daring flights" as aberrations from rule-bound correctness, and thus a welcome contrast with other composers' conservatism' ("Giant HANDEL", p. 518).

were positively resolv'd to be out of Humour'.²⁷⁴ After Handel admits that he is 'Guilty of the whole Charge', the Court begins to present reasons why he is 'no Composer, nor know[s] no more of Musick than ... of Algebra'. The Court argues that (1) Handel is 'not a Graduate' like 'Doctor *Pushpin* and Doctor *Blue*' who composed 'much better ... after the Commencement Gown was thrown over their shoulders' and that (2) Handel has 'never read *Euclid*, and [is therefore] a declar'd Foe to all the proper Modes, and Forms, and Tones of Musick, and [thus is] scorn to be subservient to, or ty'd up by Rules, or have [his] Genius cramp'd'.²⁷⁵ By thus charging Handel with rule-breaking in his compositions (operas in particular), the clever pamphleteer makes Handel out to be a sublime Longinian genius, in contrast with the 'learned' Doctors of music.

Late eighteenth-century commentary by Mainwaring, Charles Burney, and John Hawkins also attributes traits of genius to Handel due to his compositional powers. In the beginning of his 'Observations' (and seemingly in contrast with the Longinian idea of rule-breaking), Mainwaring presents his views on the 'rules and principles' of music. He states that 'A clear comprehension of those rules, and the ability to apply them, are called knowledge: and this alone, without any great share either of invention or taste, may make a tolerable Composer. But either of these joined with it, forms a master'.²⁷⁶ To Mainwaring, Handel was a 'master' of composition, not just a composer. In his *General History of Music*, Burney recognizes Handel's 'great original genius' and 'great powers of invention' in contrast to the 'timid' and 'superficial' in Giovanni Battista Bononcini.²⁷⁷ To Burney, Handel was an 'original genius' with the 'powers of invention' to prove it. In his *General History of the Science and Practice of Music*, Hawkins goes so far as to ascribe the 'discovery' of the musical sublime to 'the generosity and the inventive faculty of this great man'.²⁷⁸ To Hawkins, Handel was a musical explorer whose

²⁷⁴ Samuel Johnson, *Harmony in an uproar* (London, 1733), pp. 10–11. Available at *ECCO*.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13. Kivy builds his 'Possessor' view of genius on this Longinian idea of 'breaking the rules'. See *The Possessor and the Possessed*, pp. 17–20.

²⁷⁶ Mainwaring, *Memoirs*, pp. 160–161.

²⁷⁷ Charles Burney, *A General History of Music* (London, 1776–1789); Quoted in Johnson, "Giant HANDEL", p. 522. Based on a quote from Burney, Johnson summarizes five 'attributes of the musical sublime' as follows: '[1] boldness of design, [2] masses of harmony, [3] extremes of contrast, [4] profuse invention, and ... [5] the requisite "powerful agency" provided by correspondingly prodigious musical forces'.

²⁷⁸ John Hawkins, *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music*, 2 vols. (New York: Dover Publications, 1968), Vol. 2, p. 914; Quoted in Johnson, "Giant HANDEL", p. 533.

‘inventive faculty’ opened his listeners’ horizons to the musical sublime. In the writings of his first biographer (Mainwaring) and the first music historians (Hawkins and Burney), Handel is presented in terms of a musical genius, a great master of the musical art who displays originality and invention in line with contemporary descriptions of the sublime.

4.2. Mendelssohn as Kantian Genius

In the nineteenth century, the young Mendelssohn’s prodigious talent in musical performance and composition progressed along the pattern of ‘genius’ clearly described by Kant. His development as a composer exhibits a ‘genius’ following previous artistic models, including the works of Handel. Yet, his early works display innovations and originality that would ‘give the rule’ to later generations of composers.

As evident in the 1821 ‘Weimar tests’ for Goethe and friends, the twelve-year-old Mendelssohn demonstrated immense musical talent in improvisation, piano performance, and musical memory. Other performances by Mendelssohn in the 1820s confirmed his ‘talent for art’ with wider audiences. In 1822, a performance of Jan Dussek’s double concerto with a ‘Herr Schmidt’ was reviewed in the 3 March edition of Leipzig’s *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, which stated that his playing ‘revealed him as a master, and through his dexterity, precision, and purity gained universal applause’.²⁷⁹ After Mendelssohn’s performances in Paris in 1825, a French journal reported that ‘all artists and connoisseurs who heard his fine pianoforte quartets, in which he took a part in several private parties, are of unanimous opinion that he is deeply founded in his art, and holds forth the finest promise of future excellence’.²⁸⁰ In London in 1829, a reviewer even described Mendelssohn as ‘a pianoforte player of almost transcendent talent’.²⁸¹ Clearly, to those in his German homeland as well as French and English music correspondents, the young Mendelssohn possessed ‘a talent for art’, fulfilling Kant’s first prerequisite for genius.²⁸²

In his Third Critique, Kant continues his definition of genius by emphasizing that ‘genius must be considered the very opposite of a *spirit of imitation*’, but also

²⁷⁹ *AmZ* 24 (1822), p. 273; Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, p. 204.

²⁸⁰ *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review* 7 (1825), 312; Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, p. 205.

²⁸¹ *Athenaeum* 2 (1829), p. 462; Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, p. 206.

²⁸² See Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (trans. Pluhar), Ak. p. 307.

describes the genius as an artist ‘who needs nothing but an example in order to put the talent of which he is conscious to work’.²⁸³ For Kant, a true genius demonstrated ‘understanding’ of great works by emulating aspects of these works.

This continued description of a genius easily fits with Felix’s early development as a composer. For his examples, Mendelssohn turned to the recognised masters of the most current compositional genres (Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Weber) as well as ‘classic’ masters of more historic styles, especially those revered by Zelter.²⁸⁴ In 1830, Mendelssohn articulated his emulation of previous artistic masters in words. On his ‘Grand Tour’ to Italy, he wrote back to Zelter, stating, ‘I cling to the ancient masters, and study how they work’.²⁸⁵ As the above examination of the Handelian sublime in Mendelssohn’s Octet, 1826 *Te Deum*, and *Psalm 115* has demonstrated, the young composer found at least some of his compositional examples in ‘master’ Handel; he clung to these masterworks closely, not to slavishly imitate them, but to understand their methods so that he could produce masterworks of his own. As the following will show, these same early works also ‘go beyond’ the Handelian models, showing early signs of originality and producing exemplary new models.

Early Signs of Originality in the Octet and Te Deum

At age sixteen, Mendelssohn wrote one of the most innovative works of chamber music of his generation: the Octet for Strings. Taylor asserts that it is ‘the first – and so far the only really successful – composition for eight strings, effectively creat[ing] a genre of which it is both the originator and sole surviving member’.²⁸⁶ With regard to form, the Octet is one of the first and most important compositions in ‘cyclic form’, which Taylor defines as ‘a large-scale instrumental work ... in which the same or very similar thematic material is used in at least two different

²⁸³ Ibid., *Ak*, pp. 308–309. Emphasis in original.

²⁸⁴ In his study of Mendelssohn’s musical education, Todd confirms that ‘Mendelssohn was no doubt encouraged by Zelter to imitate (or emulate) the works of Bach, Mozart, and Haydn – tested models from the eighteenth century’ (*Mendelssohn’s Musical Education* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), Preface, p. x).

²⁸⁵ Quoted in Todd, *MLM*, p. 233. Although specifically referring to his admiration for Titian’s *Assumption* in the Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Todd asserts that ‘the same sentiment applied to [Felix’s] musical models’.

²⁸⁶ Taylor, *MTM*, p. 53. Taylor precedes this statement by acknowledging ‘[Louis] Spohr’s series of “Double Quartets”, distinguishing these four works (dated 1823–1847) as ‘in any way different in concept from Mendelssohn’s work’, according to Spohr himself. For a brief explanation of the distinction, see Todd, *MLM*, p. 149.

movements'.²⁸⁷ But, as the construction of the Octet reveals, Mendelssohn achieves more significant cyclic connections than those in previous works.

Mendelssohn 'goes beyond' his models for cyclic form with a 'Handelian' fugue incorporating earlier themes from the Octet as well as the famous quotation from Handel's *Messiah* (discussed above). Mendelssohn thereby gives tribute to his 'ancient master' Handel first before beginning a process of self-quotation of the scherzo theme in bar 273 (realized fully in G minor at bar 290).²⁸⁸ In addition to the interweaving of various themes at the close of the development section (bars 290–339), and brief reprise of Movement IV themes in the recapitulation (bars 339–386), the finale's coda (bars 387–429) incorporates 'an increasingly clear series of references to earlier parts of the Octet'.²⁸⁹ Thus, while emulating distinct models, Mendelssohn's Octet achieves an originality worthy of genius.

The originality of the Octet for Strings (Op. 20) was recognized by its early admirers, leading to attribution of 'genius' to Mendelssohn. In an 1848 obituary (the year after the death of the composer), George Macfarren presented the Octet as evidence of Mendelssohn's 'originality' which was 'identical with his genius'.²⁹⁰ According to Todd, the Octet 'catapulted Mendelssohn into the canon of "great" composers'.²⁹¹ As Taylor summarizes, the Octet's recognition 'helps sustain the myth of the young Mendelssohn emerging from nowhere as a fully formed genius like a musical Minerva'.²⁹² But, as demonstrated above, Mendelssohn did not emerge 'fully formed', but developed his genius through a natural process of emulation leading to originality.

Mendelssohn's 1826 *Te Deum* also shows this process. As described above, the work clearly follows Handelian models, both in overall affect and specific thematic material. Yet, Mendelssohn's *Te Deum* is more than a nineteenth-century rendition of an eighteenth-century masterwork. As Todd states, the work is 'an

²⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 7. According to Taylor, pre-Mendelssohn works in cyclic form include significant works by Beethoven: the Ninth Symphony; the Piano Sonata, op. 101; the Cello and Piano Sonata, op. 102, no. 1; and the Fifth Symphony (the immediate precedent for the Octet) (p. 54).

²⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 79. According to Taylor, this too was inspired by a model: the contrapuntal finale of Mozart's 'Jupiter' Symphony. As Todd accounts, 'No work of Mozart stimulated Felix as profoundly as the finale of the *Jupiter* Symphony, with its ne plus ultra synthesis of fugal counterpoint and sonata form' (*MLM*, p. 106).

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Macfarren, 'Mendelssohn', *Musical World* 24 (1849); Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, p. 441.

²⁹¹ Todd, *MLM*, pp. 148–149.

²⁹² Taylor, *MTM*, p. 53.

eclectic mixture of eighteenth- and even seventeenth-century styles'.²⁹³ As evidence of the latter, Todd points to the 'Sanctus' in the 'Tibi cherubim' movement (No. 4) which 'imitates seventeenth-century Italian polychoral music, as if transplanting us from Berlin to Venice to ponder the antiphonal mysteries of Gabrieli and Willaert in St. Mark's'.²⁹⁴ For the former, he asserts that the 'Te ergo quaesumus' for four soloists (No. 8) is 'redolent of Mozart'.²⁹⁵ This stylistic eclecticism testifies to another facet of Mendelssohn's emerging originality.

In the 'Dignare Domine' (No. 11 in G minor), Mendelssohn continues to distance himself from his Handelian model by going 'beyond' Handel in vertical complexity and melodic ingenuity. As Mohn states, 'All sixteen voices participate in this movement, which is constructed on the basis of two "Miserere" motives [first appearing in bars 23–27] and which no longer suggests the music of earlier ages'.²⁹⁶ The first of the two 'Miserere' motives is a haunting cry that ascends upward from dotted minim to dotted minim before sighing down a half tone. The other motive is a contrasting and concise four-beat pattern of crochets and quavers with tightly-spaced notes. Once introduced, the vocal lines to follow derive from one motive or the other, as they converge into a 'dense web of sixteen-part counterpoint' (compared with Handel's four- to eight-part textures).²⁹⁷ As Todd concludes, the 'Dignare Domine' is 'the most original section of the composition'.²⁹⁸

In these 1826 works, the young Mendelssohn demonstrates early signs of originality. The Octet establishes a new genre of chamber music and makes creative use of 'cyclic' form. The *Te Deum* established his 'eclectic' style and his ability to create textures and melodies that went 'beyond' previous models. As Applegate's summary of Mendelssohn's compositional development asserts, his 'best early compositions ... neither recycled his teacher's instructions nor copied the work of contemporaries but rather developed his own style out of what he discovered in others'.²⁹⁹ She confirms the Kantian pattern of an emerging genius in his

²⁹³ Todd, *MLM*, p. 157.

²⁹⁴ Ibid. See Ex. 5.9 on p. 158.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Mohn, 'Forward', p. vi.

²⁹⁷ Todd, *MLM*, p. 158.

²⁹⁸ Ibid. Mohn agrees that this is 'possibly the most original and most powerfully expressive movement in the *Te Deum* ('Forward', p. vi).

²⁹⁹ Applegate, *Bach in Berlin*, p. 19.

development by stating that the composer ‘was following a modern pattern of musical development, pursuing innovation based on incorporation of and reaction against the most daring of contemporary models’.³⁰⁰ These innovations were new works of musical genius, and, as such, new models to be followed.

Mendelssohn’s Exemplary New Models

In his theory of genius, Kant had insisted that a ‘genius’ not only demonstrate originality, but that originality must be ‘exemplary’. He must produce artistic products that give ‘the rule to art’ and serve as models for future geniuses.³⁰¹

Mendelssohn’s Octet was just such an artistic product, one whose originality then became the ‘rule’ for others to follow. As Taylor states,

... the cyclic model established by Mendelssohn in this work would become perhaps the most common type in the next century. By recalling the past movements toward the end of the finale, binding the work’s separate parts into one, Mendelssohn creates a design that would be taken up and imitated from Schumann, Brahms, and Franck to Bruckner, Tchaikovsky, Elgar, and Mahler.³⁰²

In the Octet, Mendelssohn’s understanding of previous compositional masters comingled with his own imagination to produce an innovation in genre and form and a new model for future composers to emulate.

Likewise, while the *Te Deum* follows a Handelian model, it also represents Mendelssohn’s imaginative ideas. As Mohn writes, ‘the *Te Deum* demonstrates the wide range of music to which Mendelssohn was receptive, his ability to integrate musical styles of the past with his own compositional idiom, but nevertheless attaining a world of expression and sound all his own – an element which was to characterize all his later creative achievements’.³⁰³ Through stylistic eclecticism and creative expression, Mendelssohn’s 1826 *Te Deum* was a model for his own future works.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (trans. Pluhar), Ak. p. 307.

³⁰² Taylor, *MTM*, p. 55. In his Chapter One on ‘The Idea of Cyclic Form’, Taylor does acknowledge examples of cyclic ‘recall’ as far back as the 1760s, including Haydn’s Symphonies No. 31 and 46, as well as Beethoven’s ‘rhetorical’ use of the procedure (see ‘Beethoven and Romantic cyclicism’, pp. 37–41). However, he argues that Mendelssohn’s cyclic form is ‘fused for the first time with the process of onward thematic development and the organic interconnection of material between separate movements’ (p. 41).

³⁰³ Mohn, ‘Forward’, p. vi. Indeed, Mendelssohn’s achievements in the 1828 *Te Deum* for the Singakademie would prove valuable in 1832, when he would write a *Te Deum* for the Anglican Morning Service. See Todd, *MLM*, pp. 265–266

In *Psalm 115*, Mendelssohn again goes beyond mere imitation of previous models. In his approach to form and free use of the biblical text, he goes beyond his flattering admiration of Handel's *Dixit Dominus*. As Dinglinger indicates in his section title, Mendelssohn's *Psalm 115* represents an 'Überwindung des Musters' – an 'overcoming of the model'.³⁰⁴ Dinglinger points out Handel's introduction of a cantus firmus in *Dixit Dominus*, which equates, to use Taylor's term for instrumental forms, to the 'cyclic' recall of thematic material from an earlier movement.³⁰⁵ In comparison, Mendelssohn's reuse of thematic material is more sophisticated, displaying formal ingenuity informed by the Classical principles of sonata form. In his recapitulation in Movement I, Mendelssohn makes use of (1) a recall of the opening theme in the upper strings (first in D at bar 83); (2) a return to the opening tonic of G (first in the major mode at bar 89, but quickly reverting to the minor mode; and (3) a repetition of the opening text by all four choral parts (with only the tenor-bass *Männerchor* on the original choral theme).

Mendelssohn finds further use of Movement I's material in the *Con moto* section of *Psalm 115*'s fourth movement. After the opening *Grave* introduction in E-flat major, he returns to the opening key of G minor, initiates a new setting of the opening text (beginning at bar 37), and then reintroduces Theme 2 from Movement I, now in an augmented form in 3/4 meter by sopranos and wind instruments (beginning in bar 60). As Annemarie Clostermann observes, 'With this thematic return, the circle of the track is completed'.³⁰⁶

However, Mendelssohn's cyclicism involves not only thematic recall (as in Handel's *Dixit*), but also reiteration (and thus rearrangement) of the psalm text. Dinglinger states that 'Mendelssohn concludes his psalm with recourse to the beginning of the work, but not as Handel does in repeating his cantus firmus, but by [returning to] the text of the beginning of "Non nobis Domine" once set to music, ... [and now setting the text] in [a] completely different form'.³⁰⁷ In the final movement of *Psalm 115*, Mendelssohn makes 'cyclic' use of the psalm text, repeating the

³⁰⁴ See Dinglinger, *Studien*, pp. 37–45.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 35. Per Dinglinger, 'Handel [resorts to] his cantus firmus in the last movement, the "Gloria Patri", ... not coincidentally on the words "sicut erat in principio"'. Here Handel's self-quotation from his opening movement becomes a play on 'as it was in the beginning'.

³⁰⁶ Annemarie Clostermann, *Mendelssohn Bartholdys Kirchenmusikalisches Schaffen: Neue Untersuchungen zu Geschichte, Form und Inhalt* (Mainz; London; New York: Schott, 1989), p. 62.

³⁰⁷ Dinglinger, *Studien*, p. 35.

opening incipit to indicate formal closure. This willingness to adapt the text is apparent throughout the setting, as Mendelssohn takes the liberty to omit several verses of the original psalm text – vv. 4–8 and 15–16 – asserting the priority of his innovative form over a slavish setting of the text (as necessitated in settings destined for the liturgy).

Overall, in *Psalms 115*, Mendelssohn demonstrates ‘freer treatment’ than his model Handel had in the *Dixit Dominus*, both in themes and text. Instead of simply quoting his earlier themes, he uses them as a ‘klassischen Muster’ (‘classical Model’).³⁰⁸ Instead of strictly following the order of the psalm text, he repeats, rearranges, and even omits text segments to produce the desired effect. Thus *Psalms 115* serves as an example of Mendelssohn studying a ‘sublime’ model (*Dixit Dominus*), selectively emulating its musical characteristics (such as key, tempo, and textures), and then freely innovating on these to produce a new work displaying formal invention and textual freedom.

Furthermore, in composing and publishing such a Psalm setting, along with his other settings of sacred texts not intended for liturgical use, Mendelssohn helped to establish a new concert genre of sacred music. This ‘imaginary church music’ (using Carl Dahlhaus’ term) became a model for future generations of composers, and stands as a testimony of the young Mendelssohn’s ability to evoke the religious sublime.³⁰⁹

5. Summary

Like Handel, the young Mendelssohn was recognized for his precocious musical gifts at an early age. Such evident talent qualified Mendelssohn to be considered as a possible ‘genius’ of Kantian standards. His emulation of previous musical masters and models such as Handel is obvious in the Octet for Strings, the 1826 *Te Deum*, and *Psalms 115*.

Like Handel, the young Mendelssohn also produced musical works displaying ‘genius’. By 1830, Mendelssohn had begun to write his own masterpieces that would serve as musical models for others. These works clearly demonstrated that

³⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 39.

³⁰⁹ This follows Carl Dahlhaus’ term in *Das Problem Mendelssohn, Studien zur Musikgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Regensburg: Gustav Bosse. Verlag, 1974), p. 58. Later examples of ‘imaginary’ sacred music intended for the concert hall include works by Charles Gounod (most famously his *Ave Maria*), Johannes Brahms’ *German Requiem*, and Antonín Dvořák’s *Stabat Mater*.

the young Mendelssohn understood the eighteenth-century musical sublime and could write new works capable of sublime effects. They also display early signs of originality, as required for a true Kantian ‘genius’.

The young Mendelssohn also wrote other works that did not follow eighteenth-century masters, ones that showed his more comprehensive understanding of aesthetic sublimity as well as his growing technical mastery and originality. In Chapter Four, the sublime will be found in early overtures by Mendelssohn, demonstrating his admiration for figures such as Shakespeare, Goethe, and Beethoven and his appreciation of sublime literature, landscapes, and legends.

4.

Sublimity in Mendelssohn's Early Overtures

... [T]here is another road to sublimity besides those already mentioned. What road is this? It lies in the imitation, and at the same time emulation, of the great writers and poets of old times.

– Longinus, *On the Sublime*³¹⁰

I count myself lucky that I still live in the last days of an age when I could understand him [Shakespeare]; and when you ... can still nurture the sweet dream worthy of your gifts, a dream that you will erect a monument to him in our degenerate land, drawn from our own age of chivalry and written in our language.

– Johann Gottfried Herder, *Shakespeare* (1773)³¹¹

Just as Mendelssohn's early life displays a prodigious genius impacted by multiple sublime influences, his early overtures demonstrate connections with a wide range of sublime objects and concepts. Mendelssohn's three most popular early overtures each demonstrate aspects of sublime aesthetics in their own way. These include the sublimity of a great writer and his dramatic work (Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), particular concepts considered sublime (as expressed in Goethe's evocative poems 'Meeresstille' and 'Glückliche Fahrt'), and the sublimity of Scottish landscapes and legends.

In this chapter, I will explore three Mendelssohn overtures to discover the nature of these connections, thus demonstrating Mendelssohn's development as a composer with an appreciation of sublime aesthetics. First, I will show how Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream* overture shows his understanding of the characters and dramatic logic in Shakespeare's play, as well as particularly sublime details of the play's plot. Secondly, I will examine the inspiration for Mendelssohn's *Meeresstille und Glückliche Fahrt* overture to demonstrate the influence of another musical master – Beethoven – but then show how Mendelssohn's overture emphasizes particularly sublime ideas in Goethe's poetry (both Burkean and

³¹⁰ Longinus, *On the Sublime*, trans. Thomas R.R. Stebing (Oxford: T. & G. Shrimpton, 1867), p. 51 (Chapter 13).

³¹¹ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Shakespeare*, trans. Gregory Moore (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 63.

Kantian) without recourse to a sung text and with less ‘characteristic’ musical motives than his musical predecessor. Thirdly, my discussion of *The Hebrides* overture will explain how Mendelssohn expressed his impressions of the coast of Scotland through music, ultimately composing a work open to multiple readings due to its sublime musical ‘obscurity’. I will argue that the progression of these three overtures demonstrates that Mendelssohn’s early compositional style was increasingly sublime in itself, giving further evidence of his artistic ‘genius’.

1. Sublimity in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*

In his first celebrated overture, Mendelssohn makes use of ‘characteristic’ themes and formal invention to programmatically represent the dramatic work of a sublime genius. In doing so, the work revealed the young Felix’s ‘understanding’ of sublimity in the work of another genius: William Shakespeare (1564–1616).

1.1. Shakespeare’s Sublimity

Shakespeare’s dramas had become exemplars of ‘the sublime’ in English literature. To demonstrate that Shakespeare was capable of Longinus’ sublime, William Smith wrote an essay (in 1739) relating particular aspects of Longinus’ sublime to Shakespeare. Smith gives examples of how ‘The Pathetic, as well as the *Grand*, is expressed as strongly by Silence or a bare Word as in a Number of Periods’ in *Julius Caesar*.³¹² Due to his ability to portray an ‘Image of Consternation’ as well as – or better than – those in *Euripedes*, Smith adds that ‘no Poet in this Branch of Writing can enter into a Parallel with *Shakespeare*’.³¹³ As Longinus had admired ‘sublime’ literary technique in the works of his famous classical predecessors, so did English authors admire ‘the sublime’ in Shakespeare’s writing.

In Germany, Felix’s grandfather Moses Mendelssohn had put forth Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* as an example of the ‘heroic sublime’ in literature (demonstrating the ‘extensive sublime’), quoting the ‘To be or not to be’ monologue in its entirety.³¹⁴ But he also states that ‘No one is more successful than Shakespeare’

³¹² William Smith, ‘Shakespeare and the Sublime’ (1739), in Brian Vickers, *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage* (London, Boston: Routledge and K. Paul, 1974), p. 96. See also the laudatory poem by James Thomson, who admires the ‘simple plain sublime’ in ‘Shakespeare’s art’ (*Summer*, lines 1563ff).

³¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

³¹⁴ Moses Mendelssohn, ‘On the Sublime’, in *Philosophical Essays*, pp. 205–206.

in representing the ordinary in sublime ways (the ‘intensive sublime’), citing other examples from *Hamlet*, especially the impressive dialogue with Guildenstern.³¹⁵

A generation later, Shakespeare’s accomplishments were recognized in Germany by Herder. Herder’s collection *On German Character and Art (Von deutscher Art und Kunst*, Hamburg, 1773) included his famous essay on Shakespeare.³¹⁶ Through his advocacy of Shakespeare over more recent French and German Neo-classical drama (as endorsed by Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700–1766)), Herder endorsed new ways to appropriate historical dramatic forms. In the closing paragraphs of his essay, Herder challenges his reader to take up Shakespeare’s legacy in a German context and in the German language. He writes:

I count myself lucky that I still live in the last days of an age when I could understand him [Shakespeare]; and when you, my friend, who feel and recognize yourself when you read him, and whom I have embraced more than once before his sacred image, when you can still nurture the sweet dream worthy of your gifts, a dream that you will erect a monument to him in our degenerate land, drawn from our own age of chivalry and written in our language.³¹⁷

As his ‘friend’ Goethe would do in his Shakespeare-inspired play *Götz von Berlichingen* (1773), so would the young Mendelssohn in his overture of 1826.³¹⁸

Broader familiarity with Shakespeare’s works in the German lands came with A.W. Schlegel’s German translations of seventeen Shakespeare plays from 1797–1810, including *Ein Sommernachtstraum*. These were reissued in 1825 by Ludwig Tieck (1773–1853), and read by many young Germans, including Felix.³¹⁹ German appreciation of the genius and sublimity of Shakespeare continued throughout Mendelssohn’s lifetime, as evidenced in the writing of Hermann Ulrici (1806–84), whose preface to *Ueber Shakespeares dramatische Kunst und sein Verhältnis zu*

³¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 213–214.

³¹⁶ See Gregory Moore, ‘Introduction’, in Herder, *Shakespeare*, pp. viii–ix.

³¹⁷ Herder, *Shakespeare*, p. 63. Moore comments that Herder’s ‘coda’ to the essay is a ‘lament’, ‘with Herder complaining that his will be the last generation truly able to understand Shakespeare’ (pp. xxxviii–xxxix).

³¹⁸ Moore, ‘Introduction’, in Herder, *Shakespeare*, p. xvii.

³¹⁹ See Larry Todd, “GERADE DAS LIED WIE ES DASTEHT”: On Text and Meaning in Mendelssohn’s *Lieder Ohne Worte*, in *Musical Humanism and Its Legacy: Essays in Honor of Claude V. Palisca*, ed. by Nancy Kovaleff Baker and Barbara Russano Hanning, (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1992), p. 358.

Calderon und Goethe states,

I have therefore confined myself to set forth the profundity and sublimity of his [Shakespeare's] poetical view of life.... For this reason, my first endeavour has been to point out the organic gravitating centre of each of his dramas, i.e. to discover in each that inmost secret spark of life, that unity of idea, which pre-eminently constitutes a work of art a living creation in the world of beauty.³²⁰

Indeed, to German readers of the nineteenth century, William Shakespeare was considered an artistic genius of the highest rank, capable of writing sublime literature filled with natural as well as divine beauty.

1.2. Sublimity in Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream*

In 1826, when Mendelssohn (under the influence of Adolf Bernhard Marx (1795–1866)) decided to compose a strictly musical representation of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, he undertook an ambitious challenge.³²¹ To meet Marx's high expectations, he set out to 'give a true and complete reflection of the drama' through both 'characteristic' themes and formal inventiveness.³²²

Shakespeare's drama brings together contrasting characters; indeed, the story occurs where the sublime meets the ridiculous. First, the royal characters Theseus and Hippolyta are to be wed in a woodland occupied by fairies, a setting which met both naturalistic and supernatural criteria for the nineteenth-century sublime. Furthermore, the royal rank of the couple brings its own sublime associations. And third, Theseus' title as 'Duke of Athens' connects his royalty with the home of Greek divinity: Athens, Greece.

Mendelssohn represents these 'sublime' characters beginning with his recurring motive of 'sempre staccato' quavers which signal the entrance of fairy creatures (first at bar 8ff). He continues by representing the 'Court of Athens' in his

³²⁰ Hermann Ulrici, *Ueber Shakespeares dramatische Kunst und sein Verhältnis zu Calderon und Goethe*, trans. A. J. W. Morrison (Halle, 1839; 1846), x–xi. Quoted in Judith M. Kennedy and Richard F. Kennedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream: Shakespeare, the Critical Tradition* (London; New Brunswick, NJ: Athlone Press, 1999), p. 153.

³²¹ Marx's theories, as articulated in the *Berliner allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* and *Über Malerei in her Tonkunst* (1828), seem to have applied a 'programmatic push' on the young Mendelssohn's instrumental works. According to Taylor, 'The succession of poetic overtures written partly under the influence of Marx and in some ways as an aesthetic realisation of his [Marx's] system – *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*, *The Hebrides*, *The Fair Melusine* – can be viewed as a successful refutation of the idea that music could not communicate meaning without recourse to words' (*MTM*, p. 222).

³²² Todd, *Mendelssohn, The Hebrides and Other Overtures* (Cambridge Music Handbooks; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 13.

‘first forte passage for full orchestra, with its majestic descending scale’ (bar 62ff) as well as the ‘royal hunting party’ theme with its horn calls involving martial dotted rhythms (bar 222ff).³²³

Meeting these ‘high’ characters in Shakespeare’s play are characters of a lower status: the pairs of human lovers (Hermia and Lysander, Helena and Demetrius) and the rustic ‘Mechanicals’ who present a play within a play. Thanks to the interventions of Puck and Oberon and other happenings, the lovers’ affections become especially confused and the Mechanicals antics become particularly ludicrous.

Mendelssohn represents these aspects of the play by first stating the ‘Pairs of lovers’ theme in B major in the exposition (bar 138ff), but placing the theme in E major in the recapitulation, allowing the lovers to find their proper partners. His ‘tradesmen’ theme cleverly depicts the Mechanicals through open harmonies (‘rustic drones’) and descending intervals of a ninth, recognizable as ‘a braying figure for Bottom’ (bar 198ff).³²⁴ Through this proliferation of ‘characteristic’ themes, Mendelssohn succeeds in representing the diverse characters of Shakespeare’s play.

While seeking to ‘give a true and complete reflection of the drama’ through themes appropriate to Shakespeare’s characters, Mendelssohn also structures his overture carefully: the work evinces the compositional processes of Classical sonata form. However, modern listeners informed by textbook presentations of this form may suspect Mendelssohn of ‘deformations’ to the ‘norm’: he seems to disguise the transition to the recapitulation and rearranges its thematic material.³²⁵ Instead of a dominant pedal driving to resolution to the tonic as the recapitulation commences, Mendelssohn reuses the opening wind chords to pause the action momentarily (bars 394–403) before the staccato quavers return quietly in E minor. (See Example 4.1.)

³²³ Todd, *MLM*, p. 162. For justification of this programmatic interpretation, see Frederick Niecks, *Programme Music in the Last Four Centuries: A Contribution to the History of Musical Expression* (London, New York; Novello and Company, limited, 1906), p. 174.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

³²⁵ According to recent research by Wingfield and Horton, ‘... Mendelssohn’s sonata forms can be grasped without recourse to a distinction between norm and deformation’ (‘Norm and Deformation’, p. 110). Their study reveals that Mendelssohn’s works regularly make use of so-called ‘deformations’ from textbook sonata form such as ‘truncated recapitulations’ and ‘reversed or partly reversed recapitulations’ to such an extent that these cannot be considered ‘deformations’ (see data summary in Table 5.6, p. 103). Therefore, these practices should not be considered unusual in Mendelssohn’s approach to sonata structure.

Example 4.1. Mendelssohn, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, 'Dream' Transition

(Based on *Overture zu Shakespeares Sommernachtstraum*, Op. 21, in *Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdys Werke* (Breitkopf & Härtel, n.d.))

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system is for WOODWINDS, with a treble clef and a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). It begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and features a series of chords, some with a fermata. The second system is for VIOLINS, with a treble clef and the same key signature. It begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and features a melodic line with a fermata, followed by a section marked *pp* (pianissimo) with a more active, rhythmic pattern.

Also, the 'Court of Athens' theme is relocated to now follow both the 'Pairs of lovers' and 'tradesmen' themes (all now in E major). Thus dramatic logic informs Classical processes in Mendelssohn's programmatic overture.

Most significantly for this study, Mendelssohn's particular use of recurring wind chords seems to demonstrate his 'understanding' of a sublime idea essential to Shakespeare's play. At the end of Act IV, Scene 1, when the weaver Nick Bottom awakes from his 'dream' of being an ass loved by Titania, Queen of the Fairies, he states that, 'I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream, *past the wit of man* to say what dream it was: man is but an ass, if he go about to expound his dream' (emphasis added).³²⁶ Likewise, when Puck states his final lines at the conclusion of Act V (to ensure that 'all is mended'), he suggests that the audience think 'that you have but slumber'd here / while these visions did appear' and that 'this weak and idle theme [was] no more yielding but a dream'.³²⁷ By closing the play this way, Shakespeare relocates the setting of his play from the land of empirical reality to a place beyond rational thought. His fantastic tale intermixing the sublime and the ridiculous has all occurred in the subliminal confines of the mind.

Mendelssohn's recurring sequence of wind chords accentuates this transition from reality to a sublime dreamworld. As Macfarren wrote in 1899, 'The four magical chords with which the Overture opens are the boundary between the real and

³²⁶ William Shakespeare, 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' in *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* (Stamford, CT: Longmeadow Press, n.d.), p. 169.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

the ideal, and on passing them the hearer finds himself in a new world, compounded of the elements that “dreams are made of”.³²⁸ As Todd states, they ‘frame the overture ... evok[ing] a timeless quality and assist[ing] the audience in suspending belief and accepting the ensuing illusions’.³²⁹ Thus, the composer’s motto-chords help the listener cross the liminal boundary both to and from a sublime musical world.

The *Midsummer Night’s Dream* overture as a whole reinforced early views of Mendelssohn as an emerging genius, while providing a new model for programmatic overtures. As Marian Kimber writes, ‘The Overture, op. 21, composed in 1826 when Mendelssohn was still in his teens, came to represent the composer’s precocious genius’.³³⁰ By the late 1820s, it had been performed in both Germany and England, and became ‘a seminal work of German musical romanticism’.³³¹ Following Beethoven’s programmatic overtures such as *Leonora* No. 3 (Op. 72b) and *Egmont* (Op. 84), and influenced by Weber’s compositions (especially *Oberon*), Mendelssohn helped separate the overture from its role as opening music for opera, and thus provided a model for concert overtures by Berlioz, Schumann, Grieg, Elgar, and Tchaikovsky, among many others.³³² Again, the work of genius established ‘the rule of art’ for future geniuses to follow.

2. Sublimity in *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*

After attending Hegel’s lectures at the University of Berlin and hearing his pronouncement on the death of art, Mendelssohn exclaimed: ‘It is unbelievable. Goethe and Thorwaldsen are still living, and Beethoven died only a few years ago, and yet Hegel proclaims that German art is as dead as a rat. *Quod non!* If he really feels thus, so much the worse for him, but when I reflect for a while on his

³²⁸ George Macfarren, *The Musical Times* 40 (1 Aug. 1899), 532; Quoted in Marian Wilson Kimber, ‘Victorian Fairies and Felix Mendelssohn’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in England’, *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* 4 (2007), p. 59.

³²⁹ Todd, *MLM*, p. 162.

³³⁰ Kimber, ‘Victorian Fairies’, p. 55.

³³¹ Todd, *MLM*, p. 160.

³³² Mendelssohn played violin in a performance of Weber’s *Oberon* Overture during the time he was composing *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and quoted from the opera in his coda. See Todd, *MLM*, pp. 161 and 164.

conclusions they appear to me very shallow'.³³³ Mendelssohn's reflections assured him that German art was not dead. Indeed, it was still capable of sublimity.

Mendelssohn's admiration for Beethoven, as that for Bach and Handel, resulted in emulation. According to Rosen, 'the model that [the young] Mendelssohn imitated and made his own, despite Zelter's tutelage, ... [was] Beethoven, and more unexpected yet, the demanding, difficult Beethoven of the late sonatas and quartets'.³³⁴ While it is evident from Mendelssohn's compositional output that he followed multiple models, Beethoven's influence is obvious in Mendelssohn's early instrumental works, bearing witness to this particular emulation.³³⁵

However, some evidence suggests that Mendelssohn's genius was perceived to excel even that genius of Beethoven. Fanny's letter to her brother Felix on 17 February 1835 (following the composition of her Beethovenian Quartet in E flat) indicates that both of the talented siblings were highly influenced by Beethoven. She writes: 'we were young precisely during Beethoven's last years, and it was thus reasonable for us to absorb his way of doing things'. But Fanny acknowledged her brother's progress beyond Beethoven's 'way', while decrying her own status as 'stuck': 'You've lived through it and progressed beyond it in your composing, and I've remained stuck in it'.³³⁶ In Johann Christian Lobe's 1855 publication of his conversations with Felix – according to Todd 'a sort of musical analogue to Goethe's *Conversations with Eckermann*' – we find Felix professing his debt to Beethoven, while expressing his own ideas:

You have forgotten that what I understand by 'new ground' is creations that obey newly discovered and at the same time more sublime artistic laws. In my overture I have not given expression to a single new maxim. ... My ideas are different, they are Mendelssohnian, not Beethovenian [*sic.*], but the maxims according to which I composed it are also Beethoven's maxims. It

³³³ Letter to his sisters, Naples, 28 May 1831; Quoted in Taylor, *MTM*, p. 89. Recent consensus argues that, while Mendelssohn initially questioned Hegel's assertions (as in the 1831 letter), he later rejected and reacted to Hegel's views more strongly. See James Garratt, 'Mendelssohn and the Rise of Musical Historicism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*, ed. Peter Mercer-Taylor (Cambridge UP, 2004), p. 64; Michael Steinberg, 'Mendelssohn and Judaism' in *The Cambridge Companion* (2004), p. 35; and Taylor, *MTM*, pp. 87 and 221–222.

³³⁴ Rosen, *The Romantic Generation*, p. 569; Quoted in Applegate, *Bach in Berlin*, p. 19.

³³⁵ Early works that show Beethoven's influence include 1824 Capriccio in E flat, Piano Sextet, Viola Sonata, Symphony No. 1 in C minor (Op. 11), and Double Piano Concert in A flat; the 1825 Piano Quartet No. 3 in B Minor (Op. 3); and the 1827 Piano Sonata in B flat major, Op. 106. See Todd, *MLM*, pp. 129–130, 133, 144–145, 173.

³³⁶ Fanny Hensel, *The Letters of Fanny Hensel to Felix Mendelssohn*, ed. and trans. Marcia J. Citron (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon, 1987), p. 490; Quoted in Taylor, *MTM*, p. 212.

would be terrible indeed if, walking along the same path and creating according to the same principles, one could not come up with new ideas and images.³³⁷

In this statement, Felix himself seems to understand Kant's view of the artistic genius, 'giving the rule' for art by discovering 'more sublime artistic laws' while 'walking along the same path' as previous geniuses.

In 1828, Mendelssohn sought to follow the sublime works of both Beethoven and Goethe by composing a concert overture inspired by Beethoven's setting of Goethe's pair of poems: 'Meeresstille' and 'Glückliche Fahrt'. In the following pages, I will examine sublime aspects of these two poems by Goethe and how these are represented in Beethoven's and Mendelssohn's compositions. But before doing so, the significance of the musical sublime in Beethoven's works on a larger scale will be established.

2.1. Beethoven and the Representation of Sublimity

No less a figure than Richard Wagner declared Beethoven's music as 'winning ... a faculty' of the 'absolutely Sublime'.³³⁸ Although a full study of how Beethoven's music won such a 'faculty' is far beyond the scope of this study, a basic understanding of his representation of the sublime in symphonic works is important for our exploration of sublimity in Mendelssohn's early overtures. As will be summarized, recent scholarship demonstrates that Beethoven's symphonic works rely upon both natural and religious sublimity, but are also understood as depicting sublime emotions, at least partially through their use of Handelian techniques.

According to Leon Botstein, 'In the most complex versions of the eighteenth-century tradition of characteristic symphonic music, ... music depicted real events – lighting, thunder, shepherd's pipes, processions, dances, battles, and scenes'.³³⁹ Although the work was written in the first decade of the nineteenth century, Botstein includes Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony* in this tradition, and his statement alludes

³³⁷ Johann Christian Lobe, 'Gespräche mit Mendelssohn'; Quoted in Todd, *Hebrides and Other Overtures*, p. 43.

³³⁸ Richard Wagner, *Beethoven*, trans. William Ashton-Ellis (London, 1870), pp. 103–104; Quoted in Charlotte Purkis, 'Listening for the Sublime: Aural-Visual Improvisations in Nineteenth-Century Musical Art' *Tate Papers*, Issue 14 (2010), online at <<http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers>> (accessed 20 October 2012).

³³⁹ Leon Botstein, 'Wagner as Mendelssohn: Reversing Habits and Reclaiming Meaning in the Performance of Mendelssohn's Music for Orchestra and Chorus,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*, ed. Mercer-Taylor, p. 263.

to various phenomena in the natural world, many of which are represented in the work's five movements. Beethoven depicts the 'Scene by the Brook' with undulating string quavers and semiquavers in Movement II and uses low string tremolos, timpani rolls, sudden dynamic changes, and other means to represent a 'Gewitter' (thunderstorm) in Movement IV. Such 'characteristic' depictions of natural events are easily understood by audiences.

Less clear to the average listener today is the depiction of nature in Beethoven's Fifth Symphony in C Minor. However, informed nineteenth-century audiences would associate his dramatic segue into the *C major* finale as a sublime transition from darkness to light, following the musical rhetoric established in Joseph Haydn's sacred oratorio *The Creation*.³⁴⁰ Beethoven's shift from minor to major in his 'absolute' Fifth Symphony makes much of a rhetorical gesture closely associated with the natural sublime, but also filled with religious significance.

This mixture of the natural and religious sublime in these two famous symphonies is not limited to one instance. According to Richard Will, the 'Storm' movement of the *Pastoral* evokes 'a long-standing association between thunder and the wrathful voice of God'.³⁴¹ Furthermore, the fifth movement's 'Hirtengesang' (shepherd's song) is thereafter given 'a religious tone' in its depiction of 'feelings of thanksgiving after the storm'.³⁴² As Matthew states, 'the pseudochoral *Hirtengesang* is prompted by the passing of a thunderstorm – a progression from sublime force of nature to collective celebration that owed a great deal to the storm and evensong that conclude Summer from Haydn's *The Seasons*'.³⁴³

Furthermore, Matthew points to A.B. Marx's recognition of the religious sublime in Beethoven's Fifth Symphony:

Summarizing Beethoven's symphonic development more than twenty years later, A.B. Marx compared the symphony to a hymn: both genres embodied

³⁴⁰ Swedish diplomat Samuel Silverstolpe 'imagined that "light rays darted from [Haydn's] eyes" with his setting of the words "Let there be light!" – the divine utterance in Genesis that aestheticians had, from Longinus onward, regarded as the epitome of the biblical sublime'. See Nicholas Matthew, 'Beethoven's Political Music, the Handelian Sublime, and the Aesthetics of Prostration', *19th-Century Music*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Fall 2009), pp. 115–116. Matthew quotes Silverstolpe's remark as recorded in H. C. Robbins Landon, *Haydn Chronicle and Works*, vol. IV (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), p. 318.

³⁴¹ Richard Will, *The Characteristic Symphony in the Age of Haydn and Beethoven* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 26.

³⁴² *Ibid.*

³⁴³ Matthew, 'Beethoven's Political Music', p. 146.

emotions ‘expressed by a multitude’, he wrote. He subsequently described as ‘the most sublime hymn’ not the Ninth Symphony – which he had yet to learn of – but the finale of the Fifth.³⁴⁴

Therefore, both these symphonic works evoke religious sublimity through references to choral genres.

Yet, as alluded to in Matthew’s reference to the fifth movement of the *Pastoral*, these works can be read as more than the ‘characteristic’ depiction of natural phenomena or religious ideas. This symphonic music was intended to represent the feelings that an encounter with such phenomena produced. As Beethoven’s title for the first movement of the *Pastoral* suggests: ‘Awakening of Cheerful Feelings on Arrival in the Country’ (‘Erwachen heiterer Empfindungen bei der Ankunft auf dem Lande’), his symphony sought to represent the emotions experienced more than the pastoral landscape viewed. A description of the *Pastoral* given by Beethoven (and reported by Niecks) further confirms this: ‘not a picture, but something in which are expressed the emotions aroused in men by the pleasure of the country (or), in which some feelings of country-life are set forth’.³⁴⁵ As Charlotte Purkis observes, ‘...the emotions expressed are responsive to the experience of nature. The music depicts both a storm and the sensation of being in a storm’.³⁴⁶ In the ‘Storm’ movement of the *Pastoral* Symphony, Beethoven thus depicted both a sublime natural event and the sublime emotions that accompany the event.³⁴⁷

Furthermore, as many scholars have observed, it was E.T.A. Hoffmann’s famous 1810 review of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony that elevated the genre of the

³⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 142–143. Marx’s comment is from the 12 May 1824 edition of the *Berliner allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, as reported and translated in Senner, *The Critical Reception of Beethoven’s Compositions* (Lincoln : University of Nebraska Press, 1999), I, pp. 63 and 65.

On Marx’s early views of Beethoven, see Scott Burnham, ‘Criticism, Faith, and the "Idee": A.B. Marx’s Early Reception of Beethoven’, *19th-Century Music*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Spring, 1990), pp. 183–192. For more recent commentary on the spiritual aspects and reception of Beethoven’s music, see Elizabeth Kramer, *The Idea of Kunstreligion in German Musical Aesthetics of the Early Nineteenth Century* (Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2006), pp. 196–197 as well as Chapter Five, ‘Transforming Church Music: *Kunstreligion* and the “New Religious Music”’ and Chapter Six, ‘*Kunstreligion* in the Reception of Beethoven’s Works’ (pp. 217–282).

³⁴⁵ Niecks, *Programme Music*, p. 123.

³⁴⁶ Purkis, ‘Listening for the Sublime’.

³⁴⁷ Richard Will describes Beethoven’s ‘storm’ as a theophany, citing an early review by Michael Gotthard Fischer, Michaelis’ description of the musical sublime, and the movement’s unexpected form and expanded harmonies and timbres. See ‘Time, Morality, and Humanity in Beethoven’s “Pastoral” Symphony’, *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (1997), pp. 319–321.

symphony to sublime status. In this review, Hoffmann credits Beethoven with opening to us a ‘tiefer Nacht’ (deeper night) which is described as

the realm of the monstrous and the immeasurable. Fiery beams shoot through the deep night of this realm and we become aware of giant shadows that wave up and down, draw closer and closer in upon us, and annihilate everything in us, except the pain of infinite yearning in which every desire that rushed upwards in jubilant tones sinks down and perishes; and only in this pain, in which love, hope, joy are consumed, but not destroyed, and which must burst our hearts with a full-voiced chorus of all the passions, do we live on as enraptured spiritual visionaries.³⁴⁸

Hoffmann’s emphasis on the Fifth Symphony’s power to produce ‘pain’ and ‘passions’ relates directly to Burke’s explanations of ‘How the Sublime is produced’ and ‘the Passion caused by the Sublime’ in his *Enquiry*.³⁴⁹

Hoffmann’s 1813 essay on ‘Beethoven’s Instrumental Music’ furthers this connection between Beethoven’s music and the Burkean sublime by stating the presumed effect on the hearer. He states, ‘Beethoven’s music sets in motion the lever of fear, of awe, of horror, of suffering, and awakens just that infinite longing which is the essence of romanticism’.³⁵⁰ Henceforth, Beethoven’s symphonic music was understood more and more as depicting sublime feelings more than specific phenomena or narratives (although many speculative and programmatic readings of the Fifth Symphony have been put forth).

In addition to the natural and religious sublimity in Beethoven’s symphonic works and the sublime feelings evoked, Matthew has shown how Beethoven’s music owes a debt to the Handelian musical sublime. Despite modern historiographical emphasis on Beethoven’s symphonic output, many of his compositional works involved chorus and orchestra. As Matthew asserts,

³⁴⁸ E.T.A. Hoffman, *Schriften zur Musik: Nachlese*, ed. Friedrich Schnapp (Munich, 1963), p. 36; Quoted in in Stephen Rumph, ‘A Kingdom Not of This World: The Political Context of E.T.A. Hoffmann’s Beethoven Criticism’, *19th-Century Music*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Summer 1995), p. 60. See also Mark Evan Bonds, *Music As Thought: Listening to the Symphony in the Age of Beethoven* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), especially p. 45.

³⁴⁹ See Burke, *Enquiry*, Part IV, Sections III–VI and Part II, Sections I–II, respectively, as well as the discussion of the Burkean sublime in Chapter One. In addition, Michael Spitzer states that ‘Beethoven’s heroic style seems to have been the most obvious analogue of the sublime in music, on the basis of E.T.A. Hoffmann’s celebrated review of the Fifth Symphony’ (*Music as Philosophy: Adorno and Beethoven’s Late Style* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), p. 203).

³⁵⁰ E.T.A. Hoffmann, ‘Beethoven’s Instrumental Music’ (1813); Quoted in Donald Jay Grout and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 5th ed. (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), p. 560.

Beethoven's career can be described as much through a series of large-scale choral pieces as through his symphonies, even though these choral pieces are now considered unrepresentative of his musical voice, not to mention his place in the history of music: *Christus am Ölberg*, the Mass in C, the Choral Fantasy, *Der glorreiche Augenblick*, the cantata *Meeresstille und glückliche Fahrt*, and the *Missa solemnis*—the piece that Beethoven famously called ‘the greatest work which I have composed so far’.³⁵¹

Furthermore, as Donald Grout and Claude Palisca recognize in Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*, (Op. 123), ‘The choral treatment owes something to Handel, whose music Beethoven revered. One fugal subject of the *Dona nobis pacem* ... is adapted from Handel's setting of “And He shall reign forever and ever” in the Hallelujah Chorus, and the lofty style of the whole is in the spirit of Handel’.³⁵² Like Mendelssohn in his Octet less than a decade later, Beethoven would borrow from the master of choral counterpoint and author of the sublime style in one of his most important compositions.

Furthermore, as Matthew argues, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony should be understood not as an instrumental work overflowing with such feeling that additional choral forces must be introduced in the fourth movement, but instead as a symphonic culmination of the Handelian sublime.³⁵³ Matthew states that ‘...[Beethoven's] symphonies are often best understood as orchestral transmutations of the grand Handelian chorus. Against this background, the appearance of an actual chorus in the Ninth might be reconceived as a moment when the genre's aesthetic debt is most apparent, rather than a shocking generic transgression’.³⁵⁴ He further explains that

The chorus [added in the last movement] only came to be seen as a serious generic transgression – that is, as ‘pure’ instrumental music becoming vocal – in the era of Wagner and Brahms. Instead, one could argue that the finale of the Ninth, which so plainly recapitulates the primary musical topics of the choral sublime in its ultimate recourse to hymn and double fugue, openly revealed what the symphony had been for decades: a genre that drew heavily upon the aesthetic and the culture of the sublime chorus.³⁵⁵

³⁵¹ Matthew, ‘Beethoven's Political Music’, p. 141; Quoting a letter from 5 June 1822 in *The Letters of Beethoven*, vol. 1, trans. Emily Anderson (London: Macmillan, 1961), II, no. 1079.

³⁵² Grout/Palisca, *History of Western Music*, p. 558.

³⁵³ This familiar narrative for the Ninth Symphony is rehearsed in Grout/Palisca, who state that ‘The [Ninth Symphony's] most striking innovation is its use of chorus and solo voices in the finale. ... Beethoven was troubled by the apparent incongruity of introducing voices at the climax of a long instrumental symphony. His solution to this esthetic [*sic*] difficulty determined the unusual form of the last movement’ (*History of Western Music*, p. 559).

³⁵⁴ Matthew, ‘Beethoven's Political Music’, p. 150 (from the abstract).

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

Beethoven's admiration for Handel is confirmed by Dahlhaus, who states that 'Beethoven found his models for the sublime style in Handel's oratorios, rather than in earlier instrumental music. He admired Handel's oratorios above all, it seems, because they embodied in vocal music the monumentality that he sought to achieve in the symphony'.³⁵⁶

These statements by modern scholars resonate with an account by Johann Reinhold Schultz's of a dinner he shared with Beethoven in 1823. According to Schultz, Beethoven declared to him that Handel was 'the greatest composer that ever lived' and said 'I cannot describe to you with what pathos, and I am inclined to say, with what sublimity of language, he spoke of the *Messiah* of this immortal genius'.³⁵⁷ Once again, the Kantian pattern is apparent: a musical genius (Beethoven) emulates the work (*Messiah*) of a previous master (Handel) and produces new artistic models (e.g. *Missa Solemnis*, the Ninth Symphony) that future composers must acknowledge as 'new rules' to follow.

2.2. Sublime Concepts in Goethe's Poetry

In the case of Beethoven's choral work *Meeresstille und Glückliche Fahrt*, it was the sublime concepts in Goethe's poems that led to a new musical work. But what particular aspects of these poems express sublimity? Consider the themes of silence and vastness in 'Meeresstille':

<p>Tiefe Stille herrscht im Wasser, Ohne Regung ruht das Meer, Und bekümmert sieht der Schiffer Glatte Fläche ringsumher. Keine Luft von keiner Seite! Todesstille fürchterlich! In der ungeheuern Weite Reget keine Welle sich.</p>	<p>Silence deep rules o'er the waters, Calmly slumb'ring lies the main, While the sailor views with trouble Nought but one vast level plain. Not a zephyr is in motion! Silence fearful as the grave! In the mighty waste of ocean Sunk to rest is ev'ry wave.³⁵⁸</p>
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First, the 'silence deep' that 'rules o'er the waters' brings forth a 'slumb'ring' state. Unlike Shakespeare's playful use of sleep in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, this

³⁵⁶ Carl Dahlhaus, *Ludwig van Beethoven: Approaches to His Music*, trans. Mary Whittall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 71, 77; Quoted in Matthew, 'Beethoven's Political Music', p. 110. See also Dahlhaus, "E.T.A. Hoffmanns Beethoven-Kritik und die Ästhetik des Erhabenen," *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 39 (1981), p. 72–92.

³⁵⁷ Johann Reinhold Schultz, "A Day with Beethoven," *Harmonicon* (Jan. 1824), 11; Quoted in Matthew, 'Beethoven's Political Music', p. 110.

³⁵⁸ Goethe, 'Meeresstille', in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. K. Richter (München: C. Hanser, 1988), Vol. 4.1, p. 666; English translation by Edgar Alfred Bowring. Note the regular rhyme scheme (ababcbcd) and metric scheme (87878787) in this translation, as in the original.

sleepy stillness threatens ‘trouble’ and even death for the sailor in Goethe’s poem. His ‘calm’ while at sea is not a tranquil state, but one of anxiety where each wave ‘sunk to rest’ (line 8) foretells of his own burial at sea, if conditions do not improve. This is not a Kantian sublime experience of overcoming nature and reveling in one’s cognitive abilities, but a Burkean one full of fear and awe due to one’s inability to overcome.

However, the ‘one vast level plain’ (line 4) does align with Kant’s mathematical sublime; the ocean’s flat surface seems to have no end. As Sterling Lambert has explored in Franz Schubert’s two settings of Goethe’s poem, the apparently boundless sea is an evocative image for an unfathomable eternity:

The sea has always been compelling, for its apparent boundlessness and sheer insusceptibility to rational measurement hold the potential for both fascination and fear. It is hardly surprising that in all areas of the art its power as a metaphor for the unfathomable has shown itself time and time again to be especially potent. Perhaps the most unfathomable concept of all is that of eternity, or timelessness, and the sea has perhaps always been suggestive of this elusive state, at no time more powerfully than in the first half of the 19th century.³⁵⁹

Thus the ‘mighty waste of ocean’ (line 7) in Goethe’s poem evokes the sublime of an incalculable distance as well as an unfathomable eternity.

Continuing on in ‘Glückliche Fahrt’, the idea of distance is used to evoke another sublime thought, while signs of life reappear.

<p>Die Nebel zerreißen, Der Himmel ist helle, Und Äolus löset Das ängstliche Band. Es säuseln die Winde, Es rührt sich der Schiffer. Geschwinde! Geschwinde! Es teilt sich die Welle, Es naht sich die Ferne; Schon seh’ ich das Land!</p>	<p>The mist is fast clearing. And radiant is heaven, Whilst Aeolus loosens Our anguish-fraught bond. The zephyrs are sighing, Alert is the sailor. Quick! nimbly be plying! The billows are riven, The distance approaches; I see land beyond!³⁶⁰</p>
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Here the slowing silence and deathly stillness of the ‘calm sea’ is replaced by ‘sighing’ winds and ‘riven’ waves. Instead of an unending vastness, a destination is quickly coming into view. The exclamation of ‘I see land beyond’ is one of sublime

³⁵⁹ Sterling Lambert, ‘Franz Schubert and the Sea of Eternity’, *The Journal of Musicology* 21, no. 2 (2004), p. 241.

³⁶⁰ Goethe, ‘Glückliche Fahrt’, in *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. 4.1, p. 666; English translation by Bowring. In this case, note the irregular rhyme scheme and more static metric scheme (6665666665) in the translation, as in the original.

joy for the sea-weary sailor; he has been saved from the depths of the sea by the light of heaven. Through the expression of sublime ideas (both Burkean and Kantian) in ‘Meeresstille’ and their contrasts in ‘Glückliche Fahrt’, Goethe achieves a range of sublime effects through the poetic word.

In Beethoven’s setting of Goethe’s poems, all of these sublime aspects of the poetry have been given particular attention. Beginning in *Meeresstille*, Beethoven gives a *Sostenuto* indication and *sempre pianissimo* dynamic marking through the first 20 bars for the text ‘Tiefe Stille herrscht im Wasser’ (‘Deep silence rules the water’), sung by full choir with sustained chords in the strings. These dynamics markings return at bar 52 when Beethoven reiterates the opening lines of the ‘Meeresstille’ poem.

Beethoven’s setting of ‘Todesstille’ (‘deathly stillness’) in bars 23–24 is more dramatic. The basses, doubled by pizzicato cellos, sing the four-syllable word on a descending diminished chord, which leads immediately to the full choir’s *subito forte* declaration of its ‘fürchterlich’ (‘dreadfulness’) in bars 25–26. As Lambert writes, ‘The drastic reduction in texture at [bars 23–24] has all the characteristics of stammering fright that finally breaks into a full-throated shriek at the explicit acknowledgement of its cause...’.³⁶¹ The cause of such dreadful stillness is the vastness of the sea. Beethoven again makes use of dramatic changes in forces and dynamic to depict such vastness. In bars 28–30 (and again in 36–38), the word ‘Weite’ (vastness) is depicted by long, openly-spaced *forte* chords in the choir, along with the first notes of the full orchestra (save trumpets and timpani). The depth of the ocean is also represented by the distance (over four octaves) between the high A in the sopranos and first flutes and low G in the basses and low strings. (See Example 4.2.)

³⁶¹ Lambert, ‘Franz Schubert and the Sea of Eternity’, p. 254.

Example 4.2. Beethoven, *Meeresstille*, bars 23–30

(Based on *Meeresstille und Glückliche Fahrt* (Goethe), Op. 112 (1815) in *Beethovens Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Breitkopf & Härtel, 1862–1865))

The musical score for Example 4.2 shows two staves: a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (bass clef). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The vocal line has lyrics: "To - des - stil - le fürch - ter - lich! In der un - ge - heu - ern Wei - te". The piano accompaniment features dynamic markings: *pp*, *sfz* > *p*, *cresc.*, and *f*. The score includes slurs, ties, and various note values, including triplets in the piano part.

Beethoven contrasts these sustained tones in the *Meeresstille* with signs of life and movement in *Glückliche Fahrt*. As the tempo and metre change to *Allegro vivace* and 6/8 time, quaver scales begin to pass throughout the orchestra on triplet rhythms. This pattern as a representation of waves was prepared by the first use of triplet patterns over the word ‘Weele’ (waves) in *Meeresstille* – there in crochets at a much slower tempo (bars 41, 45, and 49). These billowing waves return at bar 55, helping lead to the climax of the movement at bar 71.

Beethoven also constructs *Glückliche Fahrt* to emphasize the sublime experience of seeing land in the distance. After its first ‘sighting’ in bar 48, the exhilarating text is repeated in bars 49–55: ‘ja schon seh’ ich das Land’ (‘yes, already I see the land’). Continuing in bar 55, Beethoven relives this dramatic development again, resetting Goethe’s entire poem. The sighting of land in the distance is even more dramatic this time, with full choir repetitions of ‘schon seh’ ich das Land’ leading to an ascending statement of ‘das Land’ first in the basses, then tenors, then altos, before the full choir ‘arrives’ in bar 140 on a stable D major chord, sustained in bar 142 with a fermata, and repeated in bars 148–156. The travelers have arrived at their destination, saved from a certain death in the vast sea.

Beethoven’s setting emphasizes both sublime ideas and the sublime experience expressed in Goethe’s pair of poems by using carefully detailed performance indications and dynamic contrasts as well as carefully chosen harmonic and melodic material. But, in *Meeresstille und Glückliche Fahrt*, most of Beethoven’s depictions rely upon the sung text to identify specific meaning in musical expressions. These include: (1) the ‘dreadful’ setting of the word ‘Todesstille’ in the basses; (2) the suddenness of the following ‘fürchterlich’ chord in the full choir; (3) the characteristic ‘wave’ motive, first defined by the triplet’s used with the word ‘Welle’ in *Meeresstille*; (4) the extensive repetition of particular

phrases and words for emphasis, such as ‘schon seh’ ich das Land’; and (5) the overall structure of both movements, following the repeat of opening lines of text in *Meeresstille* and the entire poem in *Glückliche Fahrt*. When Mendelssohn ‘sets’ the same poems for orchestra alone in 1828, he will have to rely upon different means of musical expression.

2.3. Sublimity in Mendelssohn’s Op. 27 Overture

According to Todd, ‘Undoubtedly the primary musical influence on Mendelssohn’s *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage* was Beethoven’s cantata setting of Goethe’s two poems, composed in 1816, published in 1822 as Op. 112 with a dedication to the poet, and reviewed by A.B. Marx in 1824’.³⁶² However, it was Mendelssohn’s appreciation for Goethe’s poetry and the ‘programmatic push’ of Marx that led Mendelssohn to attempt a ‘setting’ without recourse to words. According to Marx’s 1828 treatise *On Painting in Music (Über Malerei in der Tonkunst)*, he was successful in doing so. As Taylor summarizes,

For Marx, the young composer’s *Meeresstille* had surpassed Beethoven’s own setting of the same pair of poems, published only a few years previously, which had unfortunately still relied upon a choral expression of Goethe’s text. Indeed, with this work, held Marx, Mendelssohn had gone one stage further than Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, by expressing solely through musical means what previously had been the preserve of words.³⁶³

In *Programme Music in the Last Four Centuries*, Niecks agrees, stating that Mendelssohn ‘illustrates first a fear-inspiring, deathlike stillness and the motionlessness of the sea and air, of an immense expanse of smooth surface; and then (in the *Molto Allegro e vivace*) the parting of the mist, the clearing of the sky, the ship dividing the waves, and approaching distance, and the appearance of land’.³⁶⁴ But how did Mendelssohn express these sublime ideas inherent in Goethe’s poems?

Instead of multiple themes depicting various ideas, Mendelssohn’s overture depicts the ‘calm sea’ and the sailor’s ‘prosperous voyage’ through less ‘characteristic’ means. As Botstein asserts, ‘The thematic material is formed in a

³⁶² Todd, *Hebrides and Other Overtures*, p. 44.

³⁶³ Taylor, *MTM*, p. 222. Todd states that ‘Marx observed that Beethoven, in his cantata on *Meeresstille*, had not dared to dispense with Goethe’s words; rather, this task was left to one of Beethoven’s “students”, Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, who has realized this idea, to express *Meeresstille und glückliche Fahrt* without words’ (*Hebrides and Other Overtures*, p. 21).

³⁶⁴ Niecks, *Programme Music*, pp. 176–177.

manner that does not reveal, in some illustrative fashion, the subject of its depiction, with the possible exception of moving water. For example, in the opening of *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*, the sense of stillness and expanse is orchestrated and evoked by the tempo and sonority'.³⁶⁵ With regard to tempo, the opening string and woodwind chords (in D major, as in Beethoven's *Meeresstille*) are played *Adagio*. With regard to sonority, Todd has shown how Mendelssohn expresses stillness through 'static' music on several levels: 'First of all, it is tonally static: the music is centred on the tonic D major. ... Second, *Calm Sea* contains a series of four pedal points that further heighten the sense of utter motionlessness'. Todd also shows how the movement is thematically static: 'the music is filled with the contrabass motive of the first bar', including a mirror version in the violins (bars 3–4) and various other statements in strings and clarinets (bars 5–44).³⁶⁶

Mendelssohn also avoids 'characteristic' motives in expressing the idea of vastness. Here he relies upon formal means to represent the immeasurable distance of the 'calm sea', namely his extensive transition in bars 49–98. The idea of vastness continues to be represented formally in *Prosperous Voyage*. As Todd states, 'Mendelssohn expand[ed] Beethoven's relatively compact *Prosperous Voyage* into a full-fledged movement in sonata form'.³⁶⁷ But in Mendelssohn's work the divisions between the exposition and development as well as the development with the recapitulation are 'obscured'. First, the exposition is linked to the development by the continuation of a variant of the *Calm Sea* theme in bars 99–148. Next, the recapitulation is obscured through untraditional plagal harmonies and thematic displacement. Todd points out how Mendelssohn uses three tonalities – C, G, and D – to avoid the traditional dominant-tonic (A-D) harmonic emphasis at the end of the development, first with his use of the secondary theme in C major in bars 335–366, then with an emphasis on G in bars 367–378 before the subtle return to the tonic D major in bar 379. Also, in the recapitulation the secondary theme (bars 379–400) occurs *before* the primary theme (bars 401–416). Due to its close proximity to the secondary theme in the development (bar 335ff), a further connection between

³⁶⁵ Botstein, 'Wagner as Mendelssohn', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*, ed. Mercer-Taylor, p. 263.

³⁶⁶ Todd, *Hebrides and Other Overtures*, pp. 58–59.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 44. Other scholars have compared Mendelssohn's approach to sonata form in *Prosperous Voyage* to the form of Weber's *Oberon* Overture. See Joel Haney, 'Navigating Sonata Space in Mendelssohn's *Meeresstille und Glückliche Fahrt*', *19th-Century Music*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2004), pp. 108–132, especially pp. 124–127.

sections is created, elongating a sense of aural continuity for the listener.³⁶⁸ In Burkean style, Mendelssohn's represents vastness in *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage* through a more 'obscure' use of Classical sonata processes.

Mendelssohn represents the exhilarating contrast inherent in the two poems by distinguishing the deep dark of the 'Calm Sea' with the light above and land beyond experienced in 'The Prosperous Voyage'. His uniquely dark and barely audible opening motive in the contrabasses (bars 1–2) descends almost to lowest extent of the instrument's range. However, the radiant heavens can be seen in the ascending scale in the *Allegro maestoso* coda that climbs almost three octaves (bars 482–487). The orchestra then plummets dramatically to arrive on a sustained and pregnant pause on a G-sharp diminished chord (bar 495), after which (as Todd summarizes), 'The whole [overture] culminates in a coda organized around a jubilant fanfare for three trumpets, evidently hailing the vessel's safe arrival at port'.³⁶⁹ Interestingly, this triumphant conclusion seems to focus on a shared emotion, not the individual experience of the sailor. As Mercer-Taylor observes,

Mendelssohn here sets forth as his musical point of arrival the musical language of public, communal celebration.... As choral music – music for use by an amateur public in a convivial setting – was threatening to edge out instrumental concert music in Mendelssohn's compositional programme, even his instrumental music seems to move towards valorising the moment of collective music-making as its logical goal.³⁷⁰

Thus, in the instrumental genre of the concert overture, Mendelssohn 'goes beyond' Beethoven by depicting Goethe's sublime text not with 'characteristic' motives tied to vocal proclamations of the text, but with 'static' thematic material and an 'obscure' approach to form, along with a triumphant conclusion informed by the tradition of music for grand occasions.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 62–63. Todd states that 'By ... linking the development to the exposition, Mendelssohn has once again interpreted sonata form as a flexible, organic process which appears to evolve from what has preceded' (p. 62). In this case, Mendelssohn's approach to sonata form in *Prosperous Voyage* displays his not uncommon practice of using 'non-standard tonal oppositions' and 'reversed or partially reversed recapitulations'. See Wingfield and Horton, Table 5.6, in 'Norm and Deformation', p. 103.

³⁶⁹ Todd, *Hebrides and Other Overtures*, p. 63. Todd cites W.A. Lampadius, *Life of Mendelssohn*, trans. W.L. Gage (Boston, 1872), pp. 57–58, as evidence for this interpretation.

³⁷⁰ Mercer-Taylor, *Life of Mendelssohn*, p. 70.

3. Sublimity in *The Hebrides*

As evident in his love for Shakespeare's plays and Goethe's poems, the young Mendelssohn developed a taste for the sublime in all of life. This was demonstrated no less in his love for the visual arts, especially in his depictions of sublime landscapes.

Mendelssohn's drawings of landscapes are well known. As part of his carefully-planned education, he became 'an accomplished landscape artist' through the teaching of painter Gottlob Samuel Rösel.³⁷¹ This visual perspective affected his outlook throughout his life, adding to his view of sublimity through the natural realm. As Juliette Appold summarizes, '[Mendelssohn's] ways of describing nature correspond with the nineteenth-century philosophical interpretations of landscape as a visible sign of an immanent and transcendent creator, as a window to unboundedness and therefore as a moment of eternity'.³⁷² But the relationship between his avocation as a visual artist and his primary artistic expressions through musical composition is difficult to discern and even more difficult to articulate.

One musical composition that has invited study into this relationship is Mendelssohn's Op. 26 overture known (among other names) as *The Hebrides*. The work evokes images of the Scottish coast and Fingal's Cave as well as mythic legends of Ossian (as popularized by James Macpherson in the late-eighteenth century), all cast in sonata form. But, compared to previous overtures, Mendelssohn's musical language becomes less 'characteristic' and more 'obscure', making it difficult to identify the precise relationship between the visual and narrative associations and the music itself. In doing so, it achieves a sublimity less dependent on the representation of the sublime, and more demonstrative of an original musical language with its own sublime characteristics.

3.1. Sublime Images of Scotland

Original inspiration for the composition came during the summer of 1829 when Felix and his friend Karl Klingemann (1798–1862) traveled by a steamer along the western Scottish coast, with Felix sketching landscapes and Klingemann journaling their

³⁷¹ See Mercer-Taylor, 'Mendelssohn and the Institution(s) of German Art Music', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*, ed. Mercer-Taylor, p. 13. For representative landscapes by Mendelssohn from 1822–1847, see Brown, *Portrait*, figures following p. 48.

³⁷² Juliette Appold, 'Felix Mendelssohn's Theological Friendship with Schleiermacher', *Lutheran Forum* (Summer 2008), p. 32. See also her monograph *Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy: Landschaften in Briefen, Bildern und Musik* (Essen: Die Blaue Eule, 2007).

experiences.³⁷³ In a letter to his family in Berlin, Felix also recorded his experience another way. He wrote, ‘In order to make you understand how much the Hebrides affected me, the following came into my mind there’, after which he sketched the opening bars of the overture, with many details that would remain unchanged despite its many revisions. This sketch contained the opening theme built on a descending B minor triad, which, in its many transformations, provides the melodic material for bars 1–42, as well as its wavelike accompaniment.³⁷⁴ (See Example 4.3.)

Example 4.3. Mendelssohn, *Hebrides*, Opening theme, bars 1–5

(Based on *Ouverture zu den Hebriden (Fingalshöhle)*, Op. 26, in *Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdys Werke* (Breitkopf & Hartel, n.d.))

Over two years after this sketch, Felix was still revising the work. Todd states that, ‘From his letter of 21 January 1832 to Fanny, ... we know that Mendelssohn’s typically thorough revisions were undertaken to remove suggestions of artifice, of musical craft, in order to capture a primitive, rough-hewn quality, to grasp musically something of the desolate, uninhabited scenes he recorded in his album with Klingemann during the 1829 walking tour’.³⁷⁵ Thus, the composer intended his overture to depict through sound his visual and emotional memories of the Hebrides Islands along the Scottish coast.

Mendelssohn’s *Hebrides* overture was received as the ‘quintessential Mendelssohnian “landscape” composition’.³⁷⁶ According to Edward Dannreuther,

³⁷³ See Todd, *MLM*, illustration 10 for a facsimile of Mendelssohn’s drawing ‘Ein Blick auf die Hebriden’ which captures one of his views from 7 August 1829.

³⁷⁴ Although the overture is sometimes referred to as ‘Fingal’s Cave’, in fact Felix was too seasick to disembark at Staffa to see the famous basalt pillars and caverns and had to rely upon Klingemann’s description of the natural edifice. See Todd, *Hebrides and Other Overtures*, p. 29.

³⁷⁵ Todd, *Hebrides and Other Overtures*, p. 47. The work was not premiered until 14 May 1832, in a performance by the London Philharmonic which Mendelssohn attended.

³⁷⁶ See Thomas S. Grey, ‘Tableaux Vivants: Landscape, History Painting, and the Visual Imagination in Mendelssohn’s Orchestral Music’, *19th-Century Music* 21, no. 1 (1997), p. 69.

Wagner viewed *The Hebrides Overture* as the ‘masterpiece’ of a ‘landscape-painter of the first order’.³⁷⁷ As Grey states, ‘Nearly all subsequent commentators have followed Wagner’s suit But bewitched by the utterly original, evocative soundscape that opens the *Hebrides Overture* – with its masterful evocations of wind and wave, light and shade, and its play of subtly patterned textures – few have paused to reflect on the precise nature of such a musical landscape, or how it might serve to frame a variety of other implicit visual and subjective experiences’.³⁷⁸ Following Grey’s observation, the question may be asked: what other ‘experiences’ might *The Hebrides* evoke?

One way to ‘experience’ *The Hebrides* is to listen to Mendelssohn’s overture as a subjective and imaginary encounter with Scottish coastal scenes. Niecks advised the listener as follows: ‘...abandon yourself to its influences, and the sensations, thoughts, and feelings that engendered it will rise up in your imagination – you will think of yourself in a ship, gliding along over rocking waves, about you a vast expanse of sea and sky, light breezes blowing, the romantic stories of the past colouring the sights seen’.³⁷⁹ Essentially, the listener is encouraged to relive Mendelssohn’s sublime encounter with the Hebrides Islands. As Botstein states, ‘the listener is introduced to composer’s internal reaction evoked by visual scene. We encounter a musical diary, so to speak. We hear the composer as reader, or as dreamer, responding in the time of memory to images generated by poetry’.³⁸⁰

Musically, Grey describes the secondary theme of Mendelssohn’s exposition (marked *cantabile* for cellos and bassoons (bars 47–56)) as an invitation to hear the work in this way.

The lyrical, arching line [of the second theme] superimposed over the rippling ‘natural’ patterns of the accompaniment invites one to construct a subject to occupy and experience the scene. Yet the lack of a distinctive topical profile to this new idea, its intervallic derivation from the foregoing ‘seascape’ motives, and its pensive, tranquil cast seem to mark the subject

³⁷⁷ Edward Dannreuther, ‘Wagner’ in *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. George Grove (London: 1893), 4:369; Quoted in Todd, *Hebrides and Other Overtures*, p. 1.

³⁷⁸ Grey, ‘*Tableaux Vivants*’, pp. 69–70.

³⁷⁹ Niecks, *Programme Music*, p. 176.

³⁸⁰ Botstein, ‘Wagner as Mendelssohn’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*, ed. Mercer-Taylor, pp. 263–264.

less as a visible ‘figure’ than as an expression of the viewing subject him- or her-self.³⁸¹ (See Example 4.4.)

Example 4.4. Mendelssohn, *Hebrides*, Secondary Theme, bars 47–50

(Based on *Ouverture zu den Hebriden (Fingalshöhle)*, Op. 26, in *Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdys Werke* (Breitkopf & Hartel, n.d.))



While primarily consisting of arpeggiated chords, this instrumental ‘vocalise’ adds a sense of subjective, human experience to the overture, and leads to more dramatic statements of the primary theme motive in section three of the exposition, including militaristic fanfares in the trumpets and additional dotted figures in the winds (bars 77–95). Through these ‘calls to arms’, the overture invites listeners to hear the work as more than a musical landscape. Indeed, these Scottish coasts are populated with mythic heroes.

As *The Hebrides* progresses from exposition to development, a transition from picturesque landscape to ancient legend can be heard – specifically, the legends attributed to Ossian.³⁸² As Grey states, ‘the center of the composition merges this (musical) imagery with a more formal iconographic tradition: the Ossianic dream vision in the sublime-heroic manner’.³⁸³

In Grey’s reading, the development section depicts a battle involving Fingal and other Ossianic warriors against foreign invaders. But, as Grey points out, ‘Formal context, scoring, dynamics, and articulation, however, all conspire to convey a visionary, phantasmagoric battle scene rather than a concrete, historical one’.³⁸⁴ The militaristic wind motives first introduced in section three of the exposition appear here and there across the score, along with a new ‘Scottish’ motive (bars 112–122), while strings continue permutations of the opening ‘sea’ motive and waves

³⁸¹ Grey, ‘*Tableaux Vivants*’, p. 70. As Grey summarizes, ‘The musical “story” is rather about the experience of landscape, a progression from the (objective) viewing of natural phenomena to the (subjective) projection of imaginary, visionary fragments of epic history onto them’ (p. 74).

³⁸² *The Hebrides* is not the only music by Mendelssohn related to Ossian myths. For a sum of Todd’s work on Mendelssohn’s music in ‘Ossianic manner’, see Taylor, *MTM*, p. 257.

³⁸³ Grey, ‘*Tableaux Vivants*’, p. 72. Grey emphasizes the popularity of these Ossian myths in contemporary paintings, such as those by François Gérard, J. A. D. Ingres, and Anne-Louis Girodet-Trioson. (See pp. 73–75)

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 70, 72.

depicted by measured tremolos. Grey further envisions the ‘tempestuous, climactic retransition’ (bars 165–178) as ‘merg[ing] the musical characteristics of battle and storm, shattering the visionary reveries of our constructed subject and returning the listener back to the original, phenomenal landscape’.³⁸⁵ Thus, *The Hebrides*’ development adds the narrative of Ossianic legend to the already evocative depiction of the Scottish islands and coastline, an association supported by some of Mendelssohn’s variously proposed titles for the work, including ‘The Isles of Fingal’ and ‘Ossian in Fingal’s Cave’.³⁸⁶

3.2. Burkean ‘Obscurity’ in Mendelssohn’s Op. 26 Overture

However, are Mendelssohn’s musical depictions clear enough to definitively associate the work with any of these sublime images? Could this seascape be located somewhere else, far from Scotland? Compared to previous overtures (especially *Midsummer Night’s Dream*), this work certainly lacks ‘characteristic’ motives and innovative structural features that portray a narrative or follow a succession of poetic ideas. Instead, Mendelssohn’s music is now more ‘obscure’.

According to Burke’s *Enquiry*, ‘the obscure idea, when properly conveyed’ can be ‘more affecting than the clear’ because ‘[i]t is our ignorance of things that causes all our admiration, and chiefly excites our passions’.³⁸⁷ In Part II of his *Enquiry*, Burke details the nature of artistic ‘obscurity’. After quoting a ‘portrait of Death’ by Milton, Burke praises the poet for his description in which ‘all is dark, uncertain, confused, terrible, and [therefore] sublime to the last degree’.³⁸⁸ Similarly, in Milton’s description of Satan, Burke states that ‘The mind is hurried out of itself, by a croud [*sic*] of great and confused images; which affect because they are crouded [*sic*] and confused’.³⁸⁹ Likewise, Burke refers to the effect of ‘obscure and imperfect idea[s]’ conveyed by instrumental music and their ‘acknowledged and powerful effects’.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

³⁸⁶ See Todd, *Hebrides and Other Overtures*, pp. 26–36 for a full account of the ‘genesis’ of the overture, including the variety of names given to overture from 1829–1835.

³⁸⁷ Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry* (Oxford World’s Classics), p. 57 (Part II, Section IV).

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 55 (Part II, Section III).

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 57 (Part II, Section IV).

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 55–56 (Part II, Section IV). See Chapter Two for discussion of how Burke’s sublime ‘obscurity’ relates to the musical sublime.

It is this effect of sublime obscurity that the music of Mendelssohn's *Hebrides* seems to have on its listeners. Along with definite associations with the Scottish coast (confirmed from Mendelssohn's statements) and probable connotations of ancient Ossianic legends (based on proposed titles for the overture), the music of *The Hebrides* overture includes 'dark' sounds and 'uncertain' or 'confused' musical images. In the first bars, the B minor tonality signifies this darkness, along with the timbre of the low strings and bassoons that present the theme. The construction of this primary theme on a descending B minor triad takes us further down into musical darkness. The secondary theme, while in major and ascending, is still initially presented by the sombre tones of cellos and bassoons. Especially when compared to other scores by Mendelssohn (e.g. the bright ascending coda to *Glückliche Fahrt* or the A major opening of the 'Italian' Symphony), *The Hebrides* conveys musical darkness much more than radiant light.

Also, the thematic material presented has an uncertain connection with the programmatic 'meaning' of the composition.³⁹¹ As Mendelssohn's musical friend Ignaz Moscheles (1794–1870) reported soon after the London premiere, no one 'seemed to understand' the overture.³⁹² This uncertainty of musical meaning in the overture points to the development of Mendelssohn's unique 'musical language'. As Botstein states,

[Mendelssohn] tells of his experience by fashioning his own characteristic musical symbolism using distinct and pithy themes that are not illustrative but yet evocative. ... The integration of the musical and visual imagination is achieved by Mendelssohn's exploitation of music's power to suggest associations, rather than its capacity to describe or compete with linguistic notions of clarity and specificity.³⁹³

³⁹¹ Although Grey's reading of *The Hebrides* as a musical landscape infused with mythic figures common in contemporary heroic paintings has much support from the historic reception of the work, others have suggested that Mendelssohn's overture has a closer connection with the oceanic paintings of J.M.W. Turner, especially *Staffa, Fingal's Cave*. See Purkis, 'Listening for the Sublime' with reference to Edward Lockspeiser, *Music and Painting: A Study in Comparative Ideas from Turner to Schoenberg* (London: Cassell, 1973).

Annette Richter has presented more recent research interacting with both Lockspeiser's and Grey's readings of the *Hebrides*. In her paper, Richter emphasizes the depiction of 'man against nature' in the development of the *Hebrides*, making further analogies to Turner's oceanic paintings ('The Visual Imagination of a Romantic Seascape: Mendelssohn's *Hebrides* Overture Revisited', presented at the 19th-Century Music Conference, Edinburgh, June 2012).

³⁹² See Todd, *MLM*, p. 260.

³⁹³ Botstein, 'Wagner as Mendelssohn', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*, ed. Mercer-Taylor, p. 264.

Grey's thesis further supports the idea of Mendelssohn composing in a more sophisticated musical medium:

The images called up in the listener's mind are animated by musical (temporal) designs that, without attaining any unequivocal discursive meaning, are continuously (if elusively) suggestive of such meanings. Sounding analogues to light, shade, color, character, figure, and configuration are choreographed as complex, nuanced, and fantastic actions. The result is not strictly narrative, dramatic, or pictorial, as a representational mode, but reconstitutes these in a peculiar, yet familiar and readily intelligible manner.³⁹⁴

In the case of Mendelssohn's *Hebrides*, the 'peculiar' and 'uncertain' nature of Mendelssohn's music led to its reception as the work of one 'of the most original geniuses of the age'.³⁹⁵ By depicting a variety of sublime images and myths through more subjective and 'obscure' musical methods, Mendelssohn achieves a sublimity in *The Hebrides* less dependent on clearly identifiable sublime ideas, and more demonstrative of his own sublime musical language.

4. Summary

The three works examined in this chapter help confirm Mendelssohn's status as a 'genius' of Kantian standards: his overtures exhibit originality and became new artistic models for others to follow. As Todd concludes,

What [Mendelssohn] essentially accomplished [in his early overtures] was to separate further the overture from its traditional role on the stage, and to free orchestra music from the conventions of the symphony – in short, to secure for instrumental music unexplored avenues of romantic expression, at once 'fascinating, original, and perfectly new'.³⁹⁶

These works of art thus established 'the rule for art' for future composers.

All the while, these works show Mendelssohn's connection with distinctly sublime figures, literature, landscapes, and legends. The *Midsummer Night's Dream* overture demonstrates his understanding of the dramatic genius of Shakespeare in its 'characteristic' themes, approach to sonata form, and use of musical transitions that represent 'a dream, *past the wit of man*'. *Meeresstille und Glückliche Fahrt* conveys the ideas of fearful (Burkean) stillness and seemingly infinite (Kantian) vastness in

³⁹⁴ Grey, 'Tableaux Vivants', p. 41.

³⁹⁵ According to William Ayrton, as quoted in Todd, *MLM*, p. 260.

³⁹⁶ Todd, *Hebrides and Other Overtures*, p. 3, quoting *The World* (1 June 1892), included in *Shaw's Music: The Complete Music Criticism*, ed. D. Laurence (London, 1981), vol. 2, p. 632.

Goethe's poems through less 'characteristic' musical means, thus going 'beyond' Beethoven in its musical ingenuity. *The Hebrides* overture is clearly associated with Mendelssohn's impressions of the Scottish coast and related legends. However, this last work proves to be equally sublime in its own musical 'obscurity'.

In the next two chapters, I will consider further developments in Mendelssohn's musical language in the 1830s and 1840s. Competing aesthetic influences as well as contextual musical constrictions will necessitate changes in style for the maturing composer. The goal of the continued study will be to determine whether musical sublimity can still be accomplished in such challenging circumstances.

5.

Genius and Sublimity in the *Lobgesang*

... Demosthenes followed a great master, and drew his consummate excellences, his high-pitched eloquence, his living passion, his copiousness, his sagacity, his speed – that mastery and power which can never be approached – from the highest of sources. These mighty, these heaven-sent gifts (I dare not call them human), he made his own both one and all.

– Longinus, *On the Sublime*³⁹⁷

[Mendelssohn's] whole life ... was made up of such mysterious conflicts as we may ... trace in his music; and the deeper he descended, the more exalted the height to which he afterwards rose.

– *Fraser's Magazine* (1869)³⁹⁸

After 1830, Mendelssohn's biography continues along a trajectory parallel to his ever-increasing accomplishments and associations. After two years of meandering (but artistically productive) 'Wanderlust' around Europe (1830–1832), the composer accepted (at age 23) a three-year appointment to direct church music and up to eight concerts a year in Düsseldorf.³⁹⁹ In 1835, the opportunity to direct Gewandhaus concerts in Leipzig pulled Mendelssohn away from Düsseldorf. The 'decided superiority' of the Gewandhaus orchestra over the one in Düsseldorf and the stellar network of musical colleagues – including Robert Schumann (1810–1856) and Clara Wieck (1819–1896) – made this a fortuitous choice for Felix.⁴⁰⁰ In 1840, the accession of Friedrich Wilhelm IV (1795–1861) to the Prussian throne led to negotiations with the new king over various cultural duties for Mendelssohn in the Prussian capital, including the title of *Generalmusikdirektor* over all Prussian church music. These duties (and continued negotiations) kept the composer returning to Berlin from 1841–1844.

³⁹⁷ Longinus, *On the Sublime*, trans. H.L. Havell (London: MacMillan and Co., 1890), p. 67.

³⁹⁸ F.R. [Statham, F. Reginald], 'Mendelssohn as an Influence', in *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, Vol. 79, No. 472 (April 1869), p. 533. *19th Century British Library Newspapers*. Available online at the Gale Newsvault (accessed 28 March 2013). This statement appears in an extended review of Mendelssohn's *Hymn of Praise (Lobgesang)*, Op. 52, which compares the work to Handel's *Messiah* and Mozart's *Requiem*.

³⁹⁹ Todd, *MLM*, p. 285.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

Meanwhile – after his first visit in 1829 – Mendelssohn travelled to England nine more times from 1832 to 1847, twice staying for two months or more (22 April–22 June 1832 and 8 May–13 July 1844).⁴⁰¹ Soon after the composer’s unexpected death due to stroke in November of 1847, English journalists were referring to Mendelssohn as ‘the adopted son of England’ (the *Atlas*) and ‘the great and rising genius of the age’ (*Fraser’s Magazine*).⁴⁰² With his second oratorio *Elijah* having been premiered in Birmingham in August of 1846 and a revised version performed in Manchester, Birmingham, and London in 1847, Mendelssohn’s personal contributions to musical cultural in his ‘adopted’ country were only curtailed by his much grieved demise.⁴⁰³

This chapter will seek to connect the upward trajectory of Mendelssohn’s achievements with sublime aesthetics, thereby countering a more subversive reading of Mendelssohn’s post-prodigy accomplishments. This intriguing biographical narrative regarding Mendelssohn’s later years is known as the ‘narrative of decline’. As Friedhelm Krummacher states:

For a long while the image persisted of a fortunate prodigy who had the advantages of a wealthy home and splendid training but who, after a series of absolutely astounding early works, exhausted himself into formal smoothness. Spoiled by the success of a brilliant career, the composer presumably then fell into mere repetition of his ‘mannerisms’, finally becoming an epigone of himself.⁴⁰⁴

Mercer-Taylor sums up ‘the popular rendition of this narrative’ by describing how Mendelssohn ‘attained, as a teenager, a level of sophistication and originality unrivalled by any other child prodigy in music history, but succumbed, from his mid-twenties onward, to a flagging of energy, creativity, and quality in general’.⁴⁰⁵

Recent scholars, including Krummacher and Mercer-Taylor, have questioned the legitimacy of this ‘narrative of decline’. Still, perceptible changes in

⁴⁰¹ For accounts of these longer sojourns, see Todd, *MLM*, pp. 258–262 and pp. 471–477.

⁴⁰² From the *Atlas* (reprinted in *Musical Times* 2 (1848), p. 154) and *Fraser’s Magazine* (1847), p. 737; Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, p. 436.

⁴⁰³ For a catalogue of all of Mendelssohn’s known public performances in England over the course of his ten visits, including the 1846 and 1847 performances of *Elijah*, see Colin Eatock, *Mendelssohn and Victorian England*, Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain (Farnham, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), Appendix B.

⁴⁰⁴ Friedhelm Krummacher, ‘Art – History – Religion: On Mendelssohn’s Oratorios *St. Paul* and *Elijah*’ in *The Mendelssohn Companion*, ed. Seaton (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), p. 330.

⁴⁰⁵ Peter Mercer-Taylor, ‘Introduction: Mendelssohn as Border-Dweller’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*, ed. Mercer-Taylor, p. 4.

Mendelssohn's style in the 1830s, as well as reasons for these changes, must be acknowledged. As Todd summarizes (regarding the Opus 44 string quartets of 1839–1840),

The surface clarity and balance ... may indeed reflect his stable domestic life and the adoption of a conservative compositional outlook – understandable enough for a new husband and father. But, the cultural temper of the Restaurationszeit, which in German realms promoted political and domestic stability, surely played a role as well. Then there was the increasingly demanding regimen of duties at the Gewandhaus, which more and more required Felix to confine composition to the summer months and thus rely upon well-tested compositional models.⁴⁰⁶

However, Todd argues that a 'minimizing of romantic *Angst* and his elevation of the enjoyable in the quartets does not mean *per se* a decline in quality. The inner movements of the third quartet ... offer anything but complacent music and can stand with Felix's best work'.⁴⁰⁷ Likewise, Mercer-Taylor points out that

This narrative of decline has always admitted a rich and diverse body of exceptions, including the D minor Piano Trio op. 49, the Variations sérieuses op. 54, the incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* op. 61, the 'Scottish' Symphony op. 56, the Violin Concerto op. 64, and the F minor String Quartet op. 80. These works sit with no special pleading whatever alongside the masterpieces of his early years, and had Mendelssohn composed nothing but these later works he would still cut a towering figure among composers of his generation.⁴⁰⁸

Clive Brown, in his collection of biographical documents on Mendelssohn's life, actually designates the period of 1836–1847 as 'The Years of Mastery' for Mendelssohn.⁴⁰⁹ Notably, this span includes the Opus 44 Quartets discussed by Todd and all of the instrumental works listed by Mercer-Taylor, as well as Mendelssohn's two completed oratorios (*St Paul* and *Elijah*) and numerous other large-scale works involving choir and orchestra, including his Symphony-Cantata *Lobgesang*.

In this chapter and the next, I advance a view of Mendelssohn's late aesthetics informed by early nineteenth-century aspects of the sublime. I will argue that, by acknowledging Mendelssohn's identification as a 'genius' and his aesthetic

⁴⁰⁶ Todd, *MLM*, p. 369. For a related study on the question of Mendelssohn's accommodation to Victorian culture, see Krummacher, 'Composition as accommodation? On Mendelssohn's music in relation to England', in *Mendelssohn Studies*, ed. Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 80–105.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 370.

⁴⁰⁸ Mercer-Taylor, 'Mendelssohn as Border-Dweller', p. 5.

⁴⁰⁹ See Brown, *Portrait*, chapters 45–47, pp. 388–423 in section IX 'Critical Reception'.

commitments to historical models as well as ‘genuine’ feeling, developing aspects of nineteenth-century sublimity can assist in understanding both the reception of his late works and his complex aesthetic priorities. In this view, Mendelssohn can be seen as a confirmed ‘genius’ who communicates sublime concepts and feelings both through ‘ancient’ devices as well as expressive means.

First, this chapter will seek to place the ‘narrative of decline’ in historical perspective, considering Mendelssohn’s recognition as genius both in his German homeland and among his English admirers during his lifetime. In response to ‘German degradation’ of Mendelssohn’s music that began in the 1840s and fed later English criticisms, I will suggest measures that will help understand the composer and his works according to ‘sublime’ standards.

Next, Mendelssohn’s penchant for historicism and practice of appropriating historical musical styles will be explored with relation to both ‘ancient’ and Classical genres and forms. The influence of Goethe will be noted, and examples of Mendelssohn’s historicism, as well as his increasing formalism, will be mentioned.

The last section of the chapter will present an investigation of Mendelssohn’s *Lobgesang* Symphony-Cantata (1840, rev. 1841) for signs of genius and sublimity. I will argue that Mendelssohn’s continued appropriation of historical forms and models can be understood to demonstrate a ‘genius’ that unifies diverse historic forms and styles to create an original musical genre. The *Lobgesang*’s use of ‘ancient’ models and presentation of ‘sublime’ ideas will show the continued connection between sublime aesthetics and Mendelssohn’s acknowledged ‘genius’.

1. Contemporary Recognition of Mendelssohn’s Genius

As discussed in the previous chapters, the young Mendelssohn can be understood as a ‘genius’ based on his prodigious talent, his understanding of artistic models, and his ability to produce exemplary new models. This section will give evidence of the persistence of this attribution in Mendelssohn’s lifetime, while acknowledging challenges to his ‘genius’ status both in Germany and England. As these challenges resulted in the ‘narrative of decline’ in Mendelssohn’s reception history, appropriate measures will then be proposed to build a response, one that recognizes the significant relationship between sublime aesthetics and the concept of genius and assists in understanding Mendelssohn’s works according to ‘sublime’ standards.

1.1. German Recognition, Both Elite and Universal

In Stettin, Germany, in 1827, signs of ‘genius’ were recognized at Mendelssohn’s ‘first important public appearance as a composer and performer outside his native city [of Berlin]’.⁴¹⁰ In reference to his Double Piano Concerto in A-flat major, an unnamed reviewer noticed how ‘this concerto shows *genius*, taste, charm and, above all, the cultivated composer’s good school’.⁴¹¹ Thus the ascent began. But, according to Brown, Mendelssohn’s arrival as a leading composer was not reached until 1836:

The decisive stage in the establishment of Mendelssohn’s reputation was reached with the appearance of the oratorio *St Paul* (*Paulus*, première at Düsseldorf in 1836 and published the following year), which set the seal upon his recognition within the German- and English-speaking worlds as the leading young composer of the day.⁴¹²

Even those critical of his oratorios recognized Mendelssohn’s genius. In an article in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* published soon before Mendelssohn’s death, Eduard Krüger (1807–1885) expressed his wishful prayer: ‘May heaven and the muses grant that this beautiful power might be directed from the field of oratorio ... to that of opera! Who, admittedly, can counsel *genius*!’⁴¹³

A private journal entry by Heinrich Brockhaus in 1840 acknowledges the general public’s exalted view of the composer. After attending a chamber music concert in Leipzig where Mendelssohn performed, he wrote that ‘Only the Mendelssohn mania [*Mendelssohnomanie*] which rules here can explain why the public was so electrified [after Mendelssohn’s performance of Bach’s Chromatic Fantasia] No-one can value Mendelssohn’s *genius* higher than I, and acknowledge his great significance, especially for Leipzig; but they practice a real idolatry with him’.⁴¹⁴ As the following will show, the *Mendelssohnomanie* would extend beyond German lands.

⁴¹⁰ Brown, *Portrait*, p. 334.

⁴¹¹ ‘Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy in Stettin (ingesand [sent in])’, *BamZ* 4 (1827), pp. 83–84; Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, p. 336. Emphasis added.

⁴¹² Brown, *Portrait*, p. 362.

⁴¹³ Krüger, ‘Ueber die heutige Oper’, *Neue Zeitung für Musik* 12 (1840), pp. 58–59; Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, p. 437. Emphasis added.

⁴¹⁴ Brockhaus, *Tagebüche*, I, p. 385; Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, p. 158. Emphasis added.

1.2. Victorian Adoration

In the 1830s and 1840s, performances of Mendelssohn's works also convinced English journalists, audiences, and royalty that he was a 'genius'. During his second visit to England, a review of *The Hebrides* in 1832 considered it to be by 'one of the finest and most original *geniuses* of the age'.⁴¹⁵ Likewise, *The Morning Post* issued an article entitled 'A Tribute to Genius' after Mendelssohn's last public performance during this visit – a performance that included the *Midsummer Night's Dream* overture and his Piano Concerto No. 1. The brief review comments on Mendelssohn's 'eminent talents as a composer and practical performer' and describes his 'superlative' performance on the organ at St Paul's as well as 'his extemporaneous efforts on the pianoforte [that] have never been excelled'.⁴¹⁶ Several years later, in 1842, the *Morning Post* recognized 'transcendant [*sic*] power and exquisite beauty' in the 'Scottish' Symphony, as well as 'all the characteristics of Mendelssohn's *genius*; [namely] a grand simplicity of form, great clearness of design, an increasing flow of charming and expressive melody, and the most rich and beautiful orchestral effects'.⁴¹⁷ Later that year, after the English premiere of the 'Italian' Symphony in A minor, Macfarren – perhaps Mendelssohn's most admiring reviewer – identified the composer as a 'new star in the firmament of *genius*'; he then celebrated that 'this generation has added one to the great Trinity of Genius that has stood alone in instrumental music': 'Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Mendelssohn'.⁴¹⁸ For English music journalists, Mendelssohn's instrumental works provided evidence that the young German composer merited the title 'genius'.

The positive reviews of Mendelssohn and his works in the English press reflected (and further instigated) a mass response among in the English public. By the 1840s, 'Mendelssohn Mania' had reached England. According to Eatock, whenever Mendelssohn's name appeared on a concert advertisement it 'all but

⁴¹⁵ 14 May 1832 issue of the *Harmonium*; Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, p. 356. Emphasis added.

⁴¹⁶ 'A TRIBUTE TO GENIUS', *Morning Post* [London, England], 23 June 1832: n.p. *19th Century British Library Newspapers*. Available online at the Gale Newsvault (accessed 28 March 2013).

⁴¹⁷ 'PHILHARMONIC SOCIETY', *Morning Post* [London, England], 14 June 1842: 5. *19th Century British Library Newspapers*. Available online at the Gale Newsvault (accessed 28 March 2013). Emphasis added.

⁴¹⁸ Macfarren, Review of Mendelssohn's Symphony in A Minor in *Musical World* 17 (1842), pp. 185–187; Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, pp. 404–405. Emphasis added.

guaranteed a full hall'.⁴¹⁹ If the composer himself were present, the response was even more exuberant. Near the end of his 1842 visit, Mendelssohn wrote to his mother Lea, commenting on the audience's reaction to his appearance at a concert:

Lately I went to a concert in Exeter Hall where I had nothing whatever to do, and was sauntering in quite coolly with Klingemann, – in the middle of the first part, and an audience of about three thousand present, – when just as I came in at the door, such a clamour, and clapping, and shouting, and standing up ensued, that I had no idea at first that I was concerned in it; but I discovered it was so. On reaching my place, I found Sir Robert Peel and Lord Wharncliffe close to me, who continued to applaud with the rest till I made my bow and thanked them. I was immensely proud of my popularity in Peel's presence. When I left the concert they gave me another hurrah.⁴²⁰

This response was remarkable for an event at which Mendelssohn did not perform and even arrived late.

Queen Victoria (1819–1901) herself recognized the composer's 'genius'. In her journal after Mendelssohn's visit to Buckingham Palace on 30 May 1842, she described Mendelssohn as 'such an agreeable, clever man. ... [His] countenance beams with intelligence and *genius*'.⁴²¹ The private performances that Mendelssohn gave for the Queen and Prince Albert (1819–1861) endeared the German genius to the royal couple, and assured him of their longstanding admiration. Both privately and publically, the royal couple acknowledged Mendelssohn's genius, agreeing with the English press and people.

1.3. German Degradation and English Doubt

In Germany and England, the praise of Mendelssohn's 'genius' was almost universal during his lifetime. His early death in 1847 (at age 38) further secured a poignant appreciation of him, one that overflowed in many obituaries and events of remembrance.⁴²² In an extensive obituary by Macfarren written in 1848,

⁴¹⁹ Eatock, *Victorian England*, p. 86. Based on this phenomenon, note that Eatock entitled his Chapter Four (pp. 67–92) 'Mendelssohn Mania'.

⁴²⁰ Mendelssohn, Letter to mother Lea from 21–22 June 1842, in *Letters ... from 1833 to 1847*, trans. Wallace, p. 255. Mendelssohn also describes the 'great success' of his own performances at Christ Church and Exeter Hall as well as his reception by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert at Buckingham Palace.

⁴²¹ Queen Victoria, From a diary entry dated '30 May 1844, Buckingham Palace'; Quoted in Roger Nichols, *Mendelssohn Remembered* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997), p. 139. Emphasis added.

⁴²² As Eatock notes, '[Mendelssohn's] canonization [as a pre-eminent artist] did not merely coincide with his early death, it was also inextricably bound up with it, crystallizing his stature where it stood in the year 1847, in the wake of his most beloved work, *Elijah*' (*Victorian England*, p. 132). See Brown's Chapter 48, 'Obituaries and Contemporaneous General Assessments', pp. 427–448 and

Mendelssohn's 'genius' was exalted 'above the world around [mankind]'.⁴²³ But, not long after his demise, some in his German homeland began to bring his reputation back down to earth.

In 1850, Krüger – admittedly not one of his more sympathetic reviewers – indicated that Mendelssohn had gone off course in his pursuit of ecclesiastical music with the publication of the *Three Psalms* (Op. 78). He asserted that 'Choosing a wrong path is in itself a blunder that does not happen to the true genius, or more rarely happens to him than to searching, confused talents'. He then declared that '[Mendelssohn's] whole direction in ecclesiastical music is an unsuccessful one'.⁴²⁴ But Krüger not only accused the composer of misjudgement, he denied him 'every exalted path' and announced that 'the broad wealth of heroic forms remained unreachable, to the soft, amiable virginal feelings of our Mendelssohn'.⁴²⁵ Clearly, at least one German critic had a lower view of Mendelssohn's artistic achievements.

However, much more damaging comments came from the pen of a more famous critic: Richard Wagner. Wagner's famous diatribe *Das Judentum in der Musik* – published anonymously in 1850 – questioned Mendelssohn's artistic aptitude not on the grounds of misjudgement, but on his racial heritage. As Brown summarizes,

Wagner's article was an explicit and extensive exposition of the idea not only that the Jews as a race, regardless of whether they had converted to Christianity, were in the some sense disabled from achieving the heights of artistic expression but also that there was a Jewish conspiracy in artistic matters, by which the activities of Jews were to be promoted by any means available, while non-Jews were to be suppressed.⁴²⁶

Instead of viewing Mendelssohn's achievements as evidence of natural-born genius, Wagner's libellous commentary asserted that, due to his Jewish heritage, Mendelssohn possessed an intrinsic *inability* for great artistic achievements.

Eatock's Chapter 6, 'Apotheosis', pp. 115–132 for sample obituaries and firsthand accounts of events following Mendelssohn's death.

⁴²³ Macfarren, 'Mendelssohn', *Musical World* 24 (1849), pp. 33–37, 56; Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, p. 437.

⁴²⁴ Krüger, 'Drei Psalmen', *Neue Berliner Musikzeitung* 4 (185), pp. 3–5; Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, p. 449.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*; Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, p. 451.

⁴²⁶ Brown, *Portrait*, p. 473. Wagner's essay was first published in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* in September, 1850 under the pseudonym 'K. Freigedank' ('K. Free-thought').

Furthermore, Wagner's diatribe accused Mendelssohn of imitation, and denied him artistic profundity. Wagner continued this critique of imitation by stating that, 'In the same way as a confused heap is made of words and phrases in this jargon does the Jewish composer [implying Mendelssohn] make a confused heap of the forms and styles of all ages and masters'.⁴²⁷ He went on to assert directly that '...[Mendelssohn] was obliged [in his oratorios] to appropriate without scruple any individual feature which he could gather from this or that predecessor, according to whom he had taken for his model for the time being'.⁴²⁸ Such assertions were aesthetic deathblows for artists in the mid-nineteenth century.

Furthermore, Wagner's writing denied Mendelssohn the ability to express profound feeling in his music. Using the deceased composer as his example, Wagner declares:

By him [Mendelssohn] we have been shown that a Jew may be gifted with the ripest specific talent, he may have acquired the finest and most varied education, he may possess the highest and most finely-tempered sense of honour – and yet, notwithstanding all these advantages, he may remain unable, even in so much as one solitary instance, to bring forth that deep effect upon our hearts and souls which we expect from Art⁴²⁹

As Botstein summarizes, 'What Wagner succeeded in doing was to set Mendelssohn apart as essentially an epigone, a composer of superficiality, fashion, and virtuosity, whose command of the craft of composition, despite many overt claims to the contrary, did not result in music of profundity'.⁴³⁰ After 1850, German reception of Mendelssohn would continue to question whether the superior 'genius' was in fact an inferior and incapable artist. And, in the twentieth century (beginning in 1936), the Nazi regime appropriated Wagner's argument and sought to systematically dismantle Mendelssohn's musical heritage, prohibiting performances of his works.⁴³¹

⁴²⁷ Wagner, *Das Judentum in der Musik*; Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, p. 478.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*; Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, p. 481.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*; Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, p. 480. More generally, Wagner has asserted that 'The Jew ... has no real passion – or, in any case, no passion of a nature to impel him to art-creation' (p. 478).

⁴³⁰ Botstein, 'Wagner as Mendelssohn', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*, ed. Mercer-Taylor, p. 252.

⁴³¹ For a sample of Nazi-era anti-Mendelssohn criticism written by Karl Blessinger, see Brown, *Portrait*, pp. 494–497. For a brief summary of the Nazi-era defamation of Mendelssohn's reputation and prohibition of his works, see Jeffrey S. Sposato, *The Price of Assimilation: Felix Mendelssohn and the Nineteenth-Century Anti-Semitic Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 3–5.

1.4. 'Is Mendelssohn in Danger?'

Around 1850, Mendelssohn's genius status in England was safe.⁴³² However, as the nineteenth century progressed, even some in his 'adopted' country began to question his artistic position. While publications such as the *Musical World* and *Musical Times* remained firmly pro-Mendelssohn, in 1877 the *Musical Standard* commented that 'It is impossible not to notice that an immense majority hold Mendelssohn in no very high esteem'.⁴³³ In response, the *Musical Times* published an article in his defence entitled 'Is Mendelssohn in Danger?', which coincided with Wagner's appearance as conductor of a concert series at Albert Hall.⁴³⁴

Within a decade, the critic George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) was declaring Mendelssohn 'no profound thinker' (1885), leading up to his famous critique of his 'kid glove gentility, his conventional sentimentality and his despicable oratorio mongering' (1888).⁴³⁵ The next year, he viewed Mendelssohn as more dangerous, writing that '[F]or the musical critic in England, Mendelssohn is the Enemy'.⁴³⁶ Shaw, along with 'an artistically inclined minority' known as the 'Decadents', rejected Mendelssohn and many other aspects of Victorian culture.⁴³⁷ As Botstein states, 'Ultimately Mendelssohn's extraordinary popularity among middle-class amateurs came to be held against him. In the wake of a reaction against mid-nineteenth-century Victorian conceits, Mendelssohn emerged as emblematic of a musical culture of social affirmation, lacking in a necessary dialectical and problematic complexity adequate to modern life'.⁴³⁸ Thus, some late-nineteenth-

⁴³² However, by 1858 William Sterndale Bennett was calling for a 'faithful biography' of his friend and mentor Mendelssohn. Bennett 'knew and loved the man himself too well to like to see him so absurdly idealized' (*Fraser's Magazine* (July 1875); Quoted in Roger Nichols, *Mendelssohn Remembered* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), p. 205.

⁴³³ *Musical Standard* (1877); Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, p. 487.

⁴³⁴ See Eatock, *Victorian England*, p. 135. Eatock's Chapter 7, 'Fragmentation and Legacy' (pp. 133–150), gives a full documentary account of the challenges to Mendelssohn's legacy in the late Victorian era.

⁴³⁵ George Bernard Shaw, *How to Become a Musical Critic* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1960), p. 91; Quoted in Eatock, *Victorian England*, p. 137.

⁴³⁶ George Bernard Shaw; *London Music in 1888–1889 as Heard by Corno di Bassetto (Later Known as George Bernard Shaw) with Some Further Autobiographical Particulars* (London: Constable, 1937), p. 69; Quoted in Eatock, *Victorian England*, p. 138.

⁴³⁷ Eatock, *Victorian England*, p. 139. Eatock names the artist Aubrey Beardsley as one such 'Decadent' including his ridiculous caricature of Mendelssohn as evidence (see Illustration 6, p. 140).

⁴³⁸ Botstein, 'Wagner as Mendelssohn', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*, ed. Mercer-Taylor, p. 253.

century English progressives saw Mendelssohn as complicit in Victorian aesthetic complacency.

Even more troubling, however, was the influence of Wagner's anti-Semitic libel of Mendelssohn's stature and a more 'scientific' form of racism that emerged in late-nineteenth-century England. Eatock documents how, in his lifetime, Mendelssohn was viewed among English journalists as 'German' not 'Jewish', citing the *Musical Journal* reference to 'the great German' Mendelssohn in 1840 and *The Musical Examiner's* use of 'the illustrious German' in 1844.⁴³⁹ But, as the century progressed, race – not religion or nationality – mattered more. By the twentieth century, Mendelssohn was viewed among even more of the English public as a 'superficial, derivative, Jewish composer' and not a German genius.⁴⁴⁰

Regardless of whether anti-Mendelssohn sentiments were due to aesthetic, political, or racist motivations, Mendelssohn's reputation was clearly damaged. In 1909, English journalists such as Ernest Walker were alarmed that '... a great mass of Mendelssohn's music is apparently being simply forgotten by almost everyone'.⁴⁴¹ This fact prompted C.L. Graves to issue an explanation for 'the decline in Mendelssohn's reputation' in the *Spectator*:

While Mendelssohn's fame suffered from the 'sixties' onward from legitimate competition as the genius of Schubert, Schumann and Brahms gained wider recognition in the concert-room, and the tremendous influence of Wagner made itself felt on the stage, he gradually became the special aversion of those who base their claim to enlightenment on the extent of their divergence from the opinion of the majority.⁴⁴²

Thus, the competition of other geniuses and the aesthetic snobbery of Wagnerites threatened Mendelssohn's continued 'greatness' and set the stage for twentieth-century Mendelssohn scholarship, which often proliferated the 'narrative of decline' or dismissed the composer completely (at least as a true 'Romantic').⁴⁴³

⁴³⁹ 'Mendelssohn's "St Paul"', *The Musical Journal* 23 (9 June 1840), p. 35 and *The Musical Examiner* 93 (10 August 1844), p. 211; Quoted in Eatock, *Victorian England*, p. 142.

⁴⁴⁰ Eatock, *Victorian England*, p. 147. Eatock notes that even George Grove refers to the 'Jewish blood' of Mendelssohn in his reference to the Psalm 114 setting, *When Israel out of Egypt Came* in 1880 (p. 145).

⁴⁴¹ Ernest Walker (*Manchester Guardian*, 3 February 1909); Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, p. 490.

⁴⁴² C.L. Graves, *Post-Victorian Music* (London, 1911), pp. 149; Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, p. 491.

⁴⁴³ Brown refers to Gerald Abraham's *A Hundred Years of Music* (1938) where Mendelssohn is 'written out of the history of romantic music' (*Portrait*, p. 493). Even a 1972 biography that retained the 'genius' attribution qualified the composer as a 'Gentle Genius', implying diminished artistic

1.5. Recognizing ‘Genius’ in Mendelssohn’s Works

The complexities of Mendelssohn’s reception history were not lost on scholars of the late-twentieth century. A collection of essays entitled *Das Problem Mendelssohn* (1974), edited by Carl Dahlhaus, helped draw attention to these issues. As Brown summarizes, Dahlhaus’ volume ‘focused sharper attention on the vicissitudes of Mendelssohn’s reputation and their relationship to changing aesthetic criteria as well as the extra-musical factors that influenced the reception of the work’.⁴⁴⁴ The work was followed by numerous volumes of additional studies as well as new biographies and monographs.

Perhaps Mendelssohn’s most outspoken modern champion is the scholar and conductor Leon Botstein, whose 1991 essay ‘The Aesthetics of Assimilation and Affirmation’ sought to retrace the major influences on Mendelssohn’s aesthetic view, and (in Mercer-Taylor’s words) ‘develops a persuasive vocabulary for legitimizing at once the “sentimental” and the retrogressive dimensions of Mendelssohn’s art’.⁴⁴⁵ Most significantly for this study, Botstein points towards a contextual understanding of Mendelssohn’s reception according to pre-Wagnerian aesthetic standards. In his 2001 essay, ‘Wagner as Mendelssohn’, Botstein writes that

in Mendelssohn’s lifetime [his] music was not only celebrated and revered, it was understood as being dramatic, spiritual, and certainly more than pretty. It was heard as intense, emotional, and profoundly moving, and devotional in a religious sense. It was not only beautiful but, in the language of eighteenth-century aesthetics, *sublime* and therefore astonishing and deeply affecting.⁴⁴⁶

If Botstein is correct, then the popular ‘narrative of decline’ in Mendelssohn’s biography, accusations of ‘slavish imitation’, and lack of profound feeling can all be dismissed. This chapter and the next seek to use the resources of sublime aesthetics to do just that.

As the rest of this chapter will show, Mendelssohn’s genius was understood to be able to *create original* works *unifying* ‘classic’ forms and ‘ancient’ methods in order to communicate ‘sublime’ ideas. Instead of ‘a confused heap of the forms and

power. See George R. Marek’s *Gentle Genius: the Story of Felix Mendelssohn* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1972).

⁴⁴⁴ Brown, *Portrait*, p. 499.

⁴⁴⁵ Mercer-Taylor, ‘Mendelssohn as Border-Dweller’, p. 6. Botstein’s essay appeared in Todd’s edited volume *Mendelssohn and His World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 5–42.

⁴⁴⁶ Botstein, ‘Wagner as Mendelssohn’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*, ed. Mercer-Taylor, p. 255. Emphasis added.

styles of all ages and masters', the composer's historically-informed works will be seen as a unification of recognizably 'sublime' music in imaginative new ways. Then, in Chapter Six, Mendelssohn's communication of ineffable, yet 'genuine' feeling will be explained using analogous concepts from Friedrich Schleiermacher, as well as analysis of works that did indeed 'bring forth ... deep effect'. These measures will counter accusations (raised by Wagner and others) that Mendelssohn's historicism was 'slavish imitation' and that his works did not provoke profound feelings in his hearers.

2. Musical Historicism, Classical Form, and the Ancient Sublime

Any consideration of a nineteenth-century German composer must relate the figure to Romanticism, including aspects of both expressivism and historicism.⁴⁴⁷ Chapter Six will seek to understand Mendelssohn's distinct expressivist aesthetic. But first, Mendelssohn's acknowledged historicism must be understood within his artistic context.

In the nineteenth century, the recognition of 'the infinite' in finite moments and particular works of arts (as Schelling had proposed) was accompanied by an increasingly sophisticated understanding of history, as each individual, culture, and (nascent) nation sought to understand (or undergird) its significance. However, although many romantics sought to claim (or even create) cultural traditions going back continuously for centuries, there remained a boundary between present 'reality' and what had come before. The past was something temporally distant and distinctly 'other'.⁴⁴⁸ The distant past was therefore 'sublime', beyond the temporal boundary of conceivably-proximate historical events. To access these 'sublime' times, cultural artefacts of past eras were used as passageways – experiential gateways to 'remote' eras.

An important early voice in the move toward romantic historicism was Herder. According to Gregory Moore, Herder's goals were to 'restor[e] continuities in German history and society' and 'renew shared traditions that had been neglected,

⁴⁴⁷ As scholars have increasingly articulated, 'Romanticism' is difficult, if not impossible, to define, emphasizing both individual artistic expression as well as a growing appreciation of historical art. As Robert Richards explains, 'Romanticism' was 'less of a common aesthetic view and more of a collective movement' (*The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 105).

⁴⁴⁸ See Applegate's section on 'Romanticism, Historicism, and the Crisis of Protestant Church Music' in *Bach in Berlin* (pp. 177–188) for a helpful summary of the relationship of historicism to romanticism, and the affect of both on early nineteenth-century Prussian church music.

interrupted, extinguished, or buried beneath a superficial and alien civilization'.⁴⁴⁹ As demonstrated by the contents of Herder's *On German Character and Art* (1773), Herder drew upon remote historic objects and legendary figures to 'renew' the 'traditions' of German culture.

Thus, despite Berlioz's critique that Felix was too fond of the dead, Mendelssohn's antiquarian tastes were in line with an important movement in German thought that had begun in the eighteenth century.⁴⁵⁰ As Krummacker notes, at this time 'historical art achieves a new position'. Commenting on the 'durability factor' of historical art, he states that

nothing would be entirely art if it could easily be forgotten, since the position of art is demonstrated directly by its ability to last through changing times. From this point on, therefore, historical works were assembled into a canon of exemplary patterns, which, as historical models, thus also validate normative demands.⁴⁵¹

Mendelssohn played an important part in this canonization process. Taylor writes that 'The series of "historical concerts" that Mendelssohn organized in Leipzig, where the music of the past was presented in chronological order up to the present day, played an important role both in deepening the public's awareness of their cultural past and in the formation of the Austro-German symphonic "canon"'.⁴⁵² Through the presentation of 'classical' and 'ancient' musical works from previous eras as a 'normative history', Mendelssohn enabled his audiences to encounter music previously inaccessible, music that was beyond the temporal boundaries of their musical experience.

Influenced by his mentor Goethe and other contemporaries, Mendelssohn embraced a view of musical historicism that esteemed eighteenth-century forms and techniques as well as more 'ancient' models of musical sublimity. In his works from the late-1830s and beyond, Mendelssohn 'translated' these for his audiences, producing new works combining 'original invention' with sublime traditions.

⁴⁴⁹ Moore, 'Introduction', in Herder, *Shakespeare*, p. x.

⁴⁵⁰ See Todd, *MLM*, p. xx.

⁴⁵¹ Krummacker, 'Art – History – Religion', p. 309.

⁴⁵² Taylor, *MTM*, pp. 94–95.

2.1. Goethe's Influence on Mendelssohn's Historicism

Although in his 'Sturm und Drang' period Goethe rejected the 'Neo-Classical' approach to tradition, the influence of Herder assured that his new German works were connected to the past. Goethe was taking 'as his subject history itself' and as his setting 'Germany's own "age of chivalry"', thus enacting 'the very essence of poetic practice: revisiting the past'.⁴⁵³

His travels to Italy from 1786–1788 would result in an even more positive view of his relationship to the past and his artistic predecessors.⁴⁵⁴ The impact of this journey (especially his Roman Sojourns) is made explicit late in life when he published his *Italienische Reise* (Parts One and Two (1816–1817)), based on letters and reports from his journey years before. Inspired by his encounters with the art and architecture of 'Roman antiquity' – and with the assistance of Johann Joachim Winckelmann's *History of the Art of Antiquity* – Goethe had acquired a new interest in history; as his entry dated 3 December 1786 makes clear:

Roman antiquity is beginning to give me about as much pleasure as Greek. History, inscriptions, coins, in which hitherto I took no interest, are forcing themselves on my attention. My experience with natural history is repeating itself here, for the entire history of the world is linked up with this city, and I reckon my second life, a very rebirth, from the day when I entered Rome.⁴⁵⁵

Goethe would consider further how this new view of history affected his view of artistic creation. In a report compiled 'In Retrospect' from his journal entries and letters from December 1787 (during his second Roman sojourn (1787–1788)), he shares his reflections:

The observation that all greatness is transitory should not make us despair; on the contrary, the realization that the past was great should stimulate us to create something of consequence ourselves, which, even when, in its turn, it has fallen in ruins, may continue to inspire our descendants to a noble activity such as our ancestors never lacked.⁴⁵⁶

Thus, Goethe's call to 'create something of consequence' is one rooted in, not removed from, the great artistic creations of history (*das Große*); and, based on the

⁴⁵³ Moore, 'Introduction', in Herder, *Shakespeare*, pp. xli–xlii.

⁴⁵⁴ On the influence of 'the historical analysis of nature' on Goethe, see Richards, *Romantic Conception of Life*, p. 506.

⁴⁵⁵ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Italian Journey, 1786–1788*, trans. W. H. Auden and Elizabeth Mayer (New York: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 148. Goethe was reading a 'new edition' of Winckelmann (1717–1768) 'translated by Fea'.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 434–435; This quote is from Part Three, added in 1828–1829.

particular ‘remoteness’ of his Roman inspirations, Goethe found the most ‘stimulation’ in ancient works. Although these works were ‘transitory’ and ultimately beyond contemporary experience, Goethe viewed them as seminal to the continued creation of artistic work.

Scholarship from the last fifty years traces Mendelssohn’s historicism directly to this ‘classicism’ of Goethe. According to Susanna Großmann-Vendrey, during ‘Mendelssohn’s last significant encounter with Goethe’ in Weimar ‘Mendelssohn was affected for life by the practical “lessons in music history”, organized by Mendelssohn along with Goethe, and the exchange of ideas, [which] particularly ... sharpened his view of historical events’.⁴⁵⁷ Likewise, Taylor asserts that ‘The figure to whom Mendelssohn’s aesthetic viewpoint corresponds most closely in the matter of time and history is undoubtedly the ... great figure of German culture and Mendelssohn’s major spiritual mentor, Goethe’.⁴⁵⁸ Just how the young musician was influenced can be seen in their similar views on the role that ‘the great’ (*das Große*) works from the past played in the inspiration of significant new ‘living’ works.

Mendelssohn’s last visit with Goethe to Weimar occurred en route to his own ‘Italian Journey’, from which we have direct evidence of Goethe’s influence. As Großmann-Vendrey has shown, Mendelssohn nearly paraphrases a comment from Goethe’s *Italian Reise* in a letter to Zelter on 18 December 1830 (from Rome). Mendelssohn states that

... [I]mitation is the same as the most superficial appearance of the most foreign thoughts. ... [But] no one can prevent me from enjoying and continuing to work at what the great masters have bequeathed to me, because not everyone should start from scratch, but it should be a continued working from one’s own powers, not a lifeless repetition of what already exists.⁴⁵⁹

In this letter, Mendelssohn is defending himself against the charge of imitation, while acknowledging his admiration for and debt to previous masters. As Taylor explains,

⁴⁵⁷ Susanna Großmann-Vendrey, *Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy und die Musik der Vergangenheit* (Regensburg: Bosse, 1969), p. 40 (translation mine).

⁴⁵⁸ Taylor, *MTM*, p. 90. Taylor provides a summary of recent studies on ‘the artistic relationship’ between Goethe and Mendelssohn, citing a list of recent studies by Lawrence Kramer, Leon Botstein, and Julie Prandi, as well as John Michael Cooper’s *Mendelssohn, Goethe, and the Walpurgis Nacht: The Heathen Muse in European Culture, 1700–1850* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2007), among others (see note 83, p. 93).

⁴⁵⁹ Mendelssohn, Letter to Zelter of 18 December 1830, *Reisebriefe*, pp. 96–97; identified by Großmann in ‘Mendelssohn und die Vergangenheit’ in Fritz Thyssen-Stiftung and Arbeitskreis Musikwissenschaft, *Die Ausbreitung des Historismus über die Musik* (Regensburg: Bosse, 1969), p. 80; translated in Garratt, ‘Musical Historicism’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*, ed. Mercer-Taylor, p. 66.

For Mendelssohn, the great works of the past were constantly alive, reinventing themselves anew. There is no antithesis between the classical and the modern; the truly classical is the eternally modern (the traditional *stile antico e moderno*), as summed up in Mendelssohn's words 'daß alles Alte Gute neu bleibt' (that everything old and good remains new).⁴⁶⁰

Mendelssohn's fondness for works by 'the dead' led him to revive great works from the past in new performances as well as incorporate the 'old and good' of historic styles into his own works, which were 'a continued working from [his] own powers'. In Botstein's words, the influence of Goethe resulted in 'a decisive validation of a neoclassical outlook [in Mendelssohn] and its potential to serve as the basis of a nonatavistic musical aesthetic'.⁴⁶¹

As I will show at the end of this chapter and in Chapter Six, Mendelssohn's continued appropriation of historical forms and models in works from the 1840s can be understood to demonstrate a genius that unifies diverse genres and 'sublime' traditions. For now, a brief overview of the composer's (post-Goethe) musical activity in the 1830s will suffice to show that historicism was a significant aspect of his aesthetic views throughout his life, leading to an increasing emphasis on formal clarity.

2.2. 'The Want of a Well-Defined Form'

Mendelssohn's understanding of music as a developing continuum of great works is already evident in his earlier visits to Weimar in the 1820s. There the young Mendelssohn enlightened the less musically-literate Goethe by playing works by various great composers arranged chronologically.⁴⁶² In turn, Goethe's 'anti-Romantic, neoclassical aesthetics' encouraged Mendelssohn's pursuit of J.S. Bach's music.⁴⁶³ In a letter to Zelter dated 9 June 1827, the sage had declared Bach 'a phenomenon of God' who was 'lucid, but ultimately not susceptible to lucidation'.⁴⁶⁴ Such shared admiration from his mentor Goethe helped sustain Mendelssohn through the challenges of reviving Bach's *St Matthew Passion* in Berlin in 1829.

⁴⁶⁰ Taylor, *MTM*, p. 96.

⁴⁶¹ Leon Botstein, 'Neoclassicism, Romanticism, and Emancipation: The Origins of Felix Mendelssohn's Aesthetic Outlook' in *The Mendelssohn Companion*, ed. Douglass Seaton (Westport, CT; London: Greenwood Press, 2001), p. 4.

⁴⁶² See Taylor, *MTM*, p. 95.

⁴⁶³ Botstein, 'Neoclassicism, Romanticism, and Emancipation', p. 14.

⁴⁶⁴ Goethe, Letter to Zelter from 9 June 1827; Quoted in Heinrich Eduard Jacob, *Felix Mendelssohn and His Times*, trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), pp. 83–84.

A notable example of the composer's historicism in the early 1830s is the *Reformation* Symphony (1830; premiered 1832; posthumously published as Symphony No. 5, Op. 107). Intended initially for the celebration of the tercentenary of the (Lutheran) Augsburg Confession (1530), this programmatic symphony proceeds from the use of 'Catholic' polyphony and the 'Dresden Amen' in the first movement to a 'symphonic fantasy' on Luther's 'Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott' chorale in the finale.⁴⁶⁵ But Mendelssohn's dismissal of the work as 'youthful *juvenilia*' has puzzled scholars and modern fans of the work.

In *Mendelssohn, Time, and Memory*, Taylor discusses the *Reformation* Symphony to help explain 'classicism' in Mendelssohn's later works. He refers to the mixed reviews of the work after its 1832 premiere, including the critic Ludwig Rellstab's patronizing comment that 'To music is open only the world of feelings ...', not 'intelligible thoughts'.⁴⁶⁶ In response to such comments, Mendelssohn considered that his symphony was not 'sufficiently comprehensible', and resolved not to publish the work.⁴⁶⁷ Summarizing the composer's self-critical conclusions, Taylor states that 'if the music ... require[s] a programme then the musical ideas must be insufficiently well formed and therefore ambiguous'.⁴⁶⁸ Thereafter, the composer sought to write instrumental works with a clear formal structure understandable to the listener.

Examples of Mendelssohn's move towards more clear 'classical' forms can be seen in two of his most important instrumental works from the period, but not premiered until later. *The Hebrides* overture (discussed in Chapter Four), was begun in 1829, premiered in 1832, but revised again before publication. The end result was an artistically sophisticated programmatic overture with 'a relatively uncomplicated ternary sonata form with coda'.⁴⁶⁹ Likewise, Mendelssohn began his *Scottish* Symphony in Scotland in 1829, and continued composing the work during his 1830 stay in Rome, but did not complete and premiere the piece until 1842 – the last of his

⁴⁶⁵ See Todd, *MLM*, pp. 225–226.

⁴⁶⁶ Taylor, *MTM*, p. 215. Taylor dates the trend towards 'classicim' to after Mendelssohn's 1829 E-flat Quartet (Op. 12) in 'cyclic' form.

⁴⁶⁷ Taylor, *MTM*, p. 219.

⁴⁶⁸ Taylor, *MTM*, p. 217.

⁴⁶⁹ Todd, *The Hebrides*, p. 64. For a sum of Mendelssohn's multiple revisions, see p. 26.

five symphonies – ostensibly to achieve greater perfection of form, as evidenced in the clear sonata structures of the first and third movements.⁴⁷⁰

Mendelssohn demonstrates a continued commitment to formal clarity when he returns to chamber music in the Opus 44 Quartets (1837), his first works in the genre since the Opus 12 Quartet of 1829.⁴⁷¹ As mentioned above, Todd refers to the ‘surface clarity and balance’ of these works as well as the composer’s reliance ‘upon well-tested compositional models’ during this period.⁴⁷² Likewise, Taylor observes in the Opus 44 works a Mendelssohn that is ‘more conscious of the musical past’.⁴⁷³ According to Toews, this set of three string quartets ‘achieved a fully articulated expression of the transformative revisions of classical sonata form first adumbrated in his confrontation with Beethoven’s late work in the late 1820s’.⁴⁷⁴ In the quartets, as in the concert overture and symphonic genres, the composer showed his understanding of late eighteenth-century Classical forms.

Continuing into the 1840s, a direct statement of Mendelssohn confirms his formalistic convictions. When an unidentified admirer (‘Herr X____’) requested advice on how to improve an overture that he submitted to Mendelssohn for review, the composer responded with the following ‘friendly criticisms’:

If I were to find any fault, it would be one with which I have often reproached myself in my own works [I]n many passages, especially at the very beginning, but also here and there in other parts, and towards the close again, I feel the want of a well-defined form, the outlines of which I can recognize, however misty, and grasp and enjoy.⁴⁷⁵

Thus, the mature Mendelssohn asserted that the form must be apparent. As Botstein concludes, Mendelssohn sought for the ‘form and content’ of the music to ‘reach the audience, unambiguously, in musical terms’. He asserts that ‘A surface that to us

⁴⁷⁰ For a recent study of the form of the *Scottish* Symphony (as well as critical appraisal of its various programmatic interpretations), see Taylor, *MTM*, pp. 233–280.

⁴⁷¹ Two important collections completed in 1837 also demonstrate Mendelssohn’s appropriation of specific historic styles from the eighteenth century and before: the six Preludes and Fugues (Op. 35) for piano and the three Preludes and Fugues (Op. 37) for organ. (See Todd, *MLM*, pp. 331–333.)

⁴⁷² Todd, *MLM*, p. 369.

⁴⁷³ Taylor, *MTM*, p. 213.

⁴⁷⁴ John E. Toews, ‘Musical Historicism and the Transcendental Foundation of Community: Mendelssohn’s *Lobgesang* and the “Christian German” Cultural Politics of Frederick William IV’, in Michael S. Roth (ed.), *Rediscovering History: Culture, Politics, and the Psyche* (Stanford UP, 1994), p. 189.

⁴⁷⁵ Mendelssohn, Letter to ‘Herr X____’ dated 22 January 1841; in *Letters ... from 1833 to 1847*, p. 215.

might seem lacking in complexity and ambiguity, that does not “puzzle” or “raise questions” arbitrarily or capriciously, is precisely what Mendelssohn sought’.⁴⁷⁶

By the 1840s, Mendelssohn advocated and practised a formalism informed by the genres and techniques of the eighteenth century (e.g. sonata, quartet, symphony, fugue). But his appreciation of historic music would not stop with the previous century. Along with some of his nineteenth-century contemporaries, he would also explore historic styles from a more remote past.

2.3. Sacred Music and the Ancient Sublime

Many romantics perceived a distinct boundary between the present and the past. The past was something temporally ‘remote’ and distinctly ‘other’ and therefore ‘sublime’. The most ‘remote’ music early nineteenth-century German listeners were likely to encounter was that of the church. Mendelssohn’s romantic contemporaries (including notable authors and artists) developed an appreciation for various genres of historic sacred music, including Catholic a cappella music (especially that of Palestrina), Protestant chorales (especially Bach’s four-part chorale harmonisations), and Baroque oratorio (especially those of Handel). Their allegiances to one category or another sometimes created divisive aesthetic camps.

First, some German romantics were enamoured by a cappella church music. As Applegate summarises, the dramatist Ludwig Tieck claimed that ‘true church music’ was purely choral.⁴⁷⁷ His fellow writer and friend Wilhelm Wackenroder declared that a cappella music was ‘the noblest and most exalted’.⁴⁷⁸ As the philosopher-poet Herder claimed in his *Kalligone*, ‘The appeal ... of a cappella church music lay in its evocation of lost times and sublime, almost inaccessible emotions’.⁴⁷⁹ Herder’s comment represents the understanding of music from an unfathomable time before as sublime.

In particular, admiration of a cappella church music of the sixteenth-century had become prominent in Protestant lands, especially the music of Giovanni Pierluigi

⁴⁷⁶ Botstein, ‘Neoclassicism, Romanticism, and Emancipation’, pp. 18–19.

⁴⁷⁷ Applegate, *Bach in Berlin*, p. 180, quoting an introduction by David Charlton in *E.T.A. Hoffmann’s Musical Writings: Kreisleriana, The Poet and The Composer, Music Criticism*, ed. Charlton, trans. Martyn Clarke (Cambridge: New York; Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 352–353.

⁴⁷⁸ Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, *Phantasien über die Kunst für Freunde der Kunst* in Lippman, *Western Musical Aesthetics*, pp. 16 and 18; Quoted in Applegate, *Bach in Berlin*, p. 180.

⁴⁷⁹ Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Kalligone*; Quoted in Applegate, *Bach in Berlin*, p. 180 from Lippman, *Western Musical Aesthetics*, p. 40.

da Palestrina (1525/1526–1594). This movement had support from some of the most respected artists and authors of the day. According to the composer Johann Friedrich Reichardt (1752–1814), Palestrina was ‘the greatest known composer of works in the noble, solemn church style’.⁴⁸⁰ E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *Old and New Church Music (Alte und neue Kirchen musik*, 1814) tells the now-familiar story of how Palestrina saved church music by revealing to Pope Marcellus the Second ‘the sacred wonders of music in its most essential form’ when the Pope was ‘on the point of banning all music from the church and thus of robbing worship of its greatest glory’.⁴⁸¹ To early nineteenth-century Germans, Palestrina’s setting of Latin sacred texts in strictly-controlled and perfectly-balanced modal counterpoint seemed sublimely remote from the tonal music with which they were more familiar.

Moreover, it impressed upon them that pure a cappella singing was most fitting for the sacred service. As Hoffman declared, ‘Praise of the highest and holiest should flow straight from the human breast, without any foreign admixture or intermediary’ (referring to instrumental accompaniment).⁴⁸² Thus the ideal church music for many German romantics was Catholic polyphony without the support of instrumental ensembles or even an organ.

In contrast to the ‘remoteness’ of a cappella Catholic polyphony, a musical genre that nineteenth-century Germans in Protestant lands knew well was the accompanied and congregational Lutheran chorale. From the time of Luther himself, these strophic hymns with rhyming vernacular texts in metrical form were sung by the people in the Divine Service and around the home fire. As Applegate states, summarizing Marx’s early nineteenth-century view, ‘The Protestant chorale ... developed as an expression of the “spontaneous devotion of the people”; it enabled the people to “express their religious beliefs clearly and collectively”’.⁴⁸³ In contrast with the ‘heavenly speech’ of Palestrina, the chorale was earthly and familiar in its mode of expression.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸⁰ Charlton, *E.T.A. Hoffmann’s Musical Writings*, p. 352; Quoted in Applegate, *Bach in Berlin*, p. 179.

⁴⁸¹ Hoffmann’s ‘Alte und neue Kirchen musik’, in *Hoffmann’s Musical Writings*, ed. Charlton, p. 357.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, in *Hoffmann’s Musical Writings*, ed. Charlton, p. 358.

⁴⁸³ Applegate, *Bach in Berlin*, p. 199, quoting A.B. Marx, ‘Allerlei’, *BamZ* 1, no. 27 (8 July 1824), p. 245.

⁴⁸⁴ See Applegate, *Bach in Berlin*, pp. 198–199.

However, the form of the chorale had reached a developmental apogee in the early-eighteenth century in the works of J.S. Bach. Almost immediately after their first publication in the early-sixteenth century, monophonic chorale melodies had been enhanced by four-part harmonisations such as those by Johann Walther (1496–1570). Yet Bach’s harmonisations brought chorales to their artistic culmination. For romantic singers, organists, and congregations, his rapidly changing harmonies and poignant suspensions distinguished themselves from the more simplistic vocal music of the Enlightenment era, leading to views of Bach himself as ‘timeless’ and his chorales ‘like cathedrals’, inspiring awe.⁴⁸⁵

Yet, as discussed in Chapter Three, the eighteenth-century German composer that early nineteenth-century Germans were most likely to hear and admire was Handel, not J.S. Bach. Goethe (per his correspondence with Zelter) was ‘strangely attracted to Handel’ and A. F. J. Thibaut (1772–1840), author of *On the Purity of Music (Über die Reinheit der Tonkunst, 1824)* considered Handel ‘the equal of Palestrina, “soaring above the clouds” with his “splendid powers”’.⁴⁸⁶ Due to the increasing prominence and popularity of Handel’s Baroque oratorios, the most-admired ‘ancient’ composer of sacred music in Mendelssohn’s day was an expatriate whose most famous works were unstaged theatrical ones, not functional liturgical music.

Marx himself set Handel as the prototype of all Protestant music, versus Palestrina’s Catholic music. As Applegate summarizes, Marx proposed that ‘All religious music ... followed the model of either Palestrina or Handel, Catholicism or Protestantism: either religion as mystery, closed to all but the initiated, or religion as clarity, “the open declaration of belief by the unified Christian community.”’⁴⁸⁷ Understood according to Marx’s proposal, the performances of Handel’s oratorios on Old Testament themes (such as those Mendelssohn conducted at the Lower Rhine Music Festivals) were public professions of religious belief.

But again, the musical form of such expressions was distinct from early nineteenth-century forms. Handel’s oratorios, drawing from a wide range of Baroque musical genres, represented a historic idiom different from late-eighteenth and early

⁴⁸⁵ See Jacob, *Mendelssohn and His Times*, pp. 80 and 82.

⁴⁸⁶ A. F. J. Thibaut, *Über Reinheit der Tonkunst*; Quoted in Applegate, *Bach in Berlin*, p. 216.

⁴⁸⁷ Applegate, *Bach in Berlin*, pp. 198–199, quoting Marx’s review of *Charinomos: Beiträge zur allgemeinen Theorie und Geschichte der schönen Künste von Karl Seidel* in *BamZ* 3, no. 9 (1 March 1826), p. 68.

nineteenth-century styles, yet immediately recognizable to many listeners. Also, due to the large forces often used, the performance of Handel's oratorios often produced awe-inspiring spectacles. Thus the 'Handelian sublime' was a powerful musical force in early nineteenth-century German lands.⁴⁸⁸

2.4. 'Slavish Imitator' or Translator of 'Ancient' Music Models?

As the following will show, Mendelssohn appropriated each of these historic genres in his late works, following *both* of Marx's models (sometimes Palestrina and frequently Handel) as well as continuing to emulate J.S. Bach in some works.

However, in an era where one's genius was evaluated by one's *originality*, Mendelssohn ran the risk of being equated with a 'slavish imitator' not capable of continued creativity. Was his continued emulation of past models and masters, as well as his increasing dedication to Classical formalism, a sure sign of his 'decline'?

Some reviewers of Mendelssohn's music in the 1830s and 1840s did accuse the composer of the artistic crime of imitation (or 'stylistic dependence'). In a section of his essay on 'Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy's Sacred Music' entitled 'Slavish Imitation?', Georg Feder provides a brief summary of these accusations. These include the comments of Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), who – writing on *St Paul* in 1842 – described Mendelssohn's 'almost obtrusive imitation of classical pattern' and portrayed him as 'slavishly copying Handel or Sebastian Bach'.⁴⁸⁹ Feder also mentions critiques of Mendelssohn's use of Protestant chorales (either complete or in phrase quotation) in the 'Reformation' Symphony, the *Lobgesang*, and *St Paul*.

The danger of following historical patterns or models is summarized by Krummacher, who states that 'The more closely composers cling to historical patterns, the more the freedom of movement for their originality narrows: tradition and innovation become a dichotomy as two facets of the concept of art'.⁴⁹⁰ Thus the perceived closeness between Mendelssohn's compositions and their historic models brought on a questioning of the composer's originality and his ability to create truly innovative works of art.

⁴⁸⁸ Matthew's article on 'Beethoven's Political Music' (discussed in Chapter Four) affirms a similar potency of the 'Handelian sublime' in early nineteenth-century Vienna, where 'the aesthetics and social practice of grand choral singing [were] associated primarily with some of Handel's oratorios, but also with the late choral works of Haydn' (p. 150 (from the abstract)).

⁴⁸⁹ *Lutezia* 43 (1842), pp. 227, 224–225; Quoted in Georg Feder, 'On Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy's Sacred Music', in Douglass Seaton (ed.), *The Mendelssohn Companion* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), p. 262.

⁴⁹⁰ Krummacher, 'Art – History – Religion', p. 309.

However, even the young Mendelssohn was sensitive to possible accusations of imitation and repetition. Early on in his compositional career, he was aware of such and sought to explain his more sophisticated view of how his own music related to past masterworks. In his December 1830 letter to Zelter (quoted above in relation to Goethe and historicism), he addressed the fear that he would ‘make myself a lot of church music to indulge myself [in] imitation’ (‘mich viel an Kirchenmusik machen, um mich einer Nachahmung hinzugeben’).⁴⁹¹ Yet, surrounded by the inspirations of classical antiquity in Rome, he asserted that his new compositions ‘should be a continued working from one’s own powers, not a lifeless repetition of what already exists’ (‘es soll auch ein *Weiterarbeiten* nach Kräften sein, nicht ein todes Wiederholen des schon Vorhandnen’).⁴⁹² As Taylor summarizes: ‘Any similarity between his own music and that of his great predecessors results not from “dry, sterile imitation” but from a spiritual penetration into the essence of the past and a shared empathy with the eternal truth that gives rise to this correspondence’.⁴⁹³ Similar to late-nineteenth-century ‘plagiarism apologists’, Mendelssohn viewed his treasured historical models as ‘an inheritance handed down’; his original works then became ‘sublime echoes or shadows’ of their models’ true essence.⁴⁹⁴ In this sense, he sought to bring the ‘ancient sublime’ into his own aesthetic domain through appropriation of key stylistic features.

Recent scholars of Mendelssohn’s music sometimes contend that his later works communicated to his audiences through intelligible references to historic styles and established musical forms. One such scholar that studies Mendelssohn’s use of diverse historic styles is James Garratt, who writes that ‘...Mendelssohn’s historicism – until recently a source of embarrassed bewilderment for his devotees – is increasingly viewed as one of the most significant and valuable aspects of his

⁴⁹¹ Mendelssohn, Letter to Zelter of 18 December 1830, in *Sämtliche Briefe. Auf Basis der von Rudolf Elvers angelegten Sammlung*, ed. Juliette Appold and Regina Back (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2008), i, p. 172.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, following Garratt’s translation in ‘Musical Historicism’, p. 66.

⁴⁹³ Taylor, *MTM*, p. 94, paraphrasing Mendelssohn’s Letter to Zelter from Rome on 18 December 1830 in *Briefe* (5th edn., 1863), Vol. I, p. 97.

⁴⁹⁴ According to Macfarlane, ‘plagiarism apologists’ of the late-nineteenth century showed that all great literary figures (including Shakespeare!) borrowed and built upon the works of their literary predecessors. (See *Original Copy*, pp. 41–49, with reference to Nick Groom, *Forger’s Shadow: How Forgery Changed the Course of Literature* (Picador, 2002))

creativity'.⁴⁹⁵ Garratt seeks to re-evaluate Mendelssohn's historicism apart from nineteenth-century views which either critiqued it as 'a matter of passive dependency, a parasitical reliance on historical styles as a means of manufacturing a religious idiom' or complemented it as 'a seamless welding together of old and new'.⁴⁹⁶

Among various strategies suggested for interpreting Mendelssohn's stylistic pluralism, Garratt suggests that one consider Mendelssohn's engagement with the music of the past 'as akin to the activities of the translator'.⁴⁹⁷ In this view, Mendelssohn sought to communicate to his hearers by 'translating' the styles of other eras and composers into a contemporary idiom of expressive music.

This strategy aligns itself well with Mendelssohn's early training and experiences. As a boy, he was tutored in classic literature and languages by C.W.L. Heyse (1797–1855), a classical philologist. As a birthday gift to Heyse – and on the very day Mendelssohn completed his Octet – the teenage Felix produced in 1825 a German translation of the comedy *Andria* by the classical Roman playwright Terence (195/185–159 BC). The translation (from the Greek) retained its classical metres and versification, and was published by Heyse the following year. Mendelssohn also sent the translation to Goethe for him to consider its value as an opera libretto.⁴⁹⁸

Just as he and other German readers were translating great literature works into their native tongue in the early-nineteenth century, Mendelssohn 'translated' the sublime musical models of the past into works that his generation could understand. This required diligent study of his models, but brought great rewards for his own creative work. As Mendelssohn had written to Zelter from Italy in 1830: 'I cling to the ancient masters, and study how they work'.⁴⁹⁹ As the analytical sections of this chapter and the next will reveal, Mendelssohn's 'study' of 'ancient masters' was on particular display in his own sacred works.

⁴⁹⁵ Garratt, 'Musical Historicism', p. 70. See also Mercer-Taylor, 'Rethinking Mendelssohn's Historicism: A Lesson from *St. Paul*', *Journal of Musicology* 15 (1997), pp. 208–230.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 69. See also Garratt's article, 'Mendelssohn's Babel: Romanticism and the Poetics of Translation', *Music & Letters* 80 (1999), pp. 29–46.

⁴⁹⁸ See Todd, *MLM*, p. 154. See also Botstein discussion of Felix's translation in 'Neoclassicism, Romanticism, and Emancipation', pp. 5–9.

⁴⁹⁹ Mendelssohn, Letter to Zelter of 1830; Quoted in Todd, *MLM*, p. 233.

In obituaries written after Mendelssohn's death, the effect of Mendelssohn's historically-informed work began to be acknowledged. Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl was impressed with 'how many thousands [Mendelssohn] has driven to the study of Handel and Bach' and asserted that the composer had 'created through his works a new understanding of these men'.⁵⁰⁰ Likewise, Gustav Kühne's obituary of Mendelssohn asserted that he 'opened up to us a new sound world which for sublimity finds its like only in Handel and Bach'.⁵⁰¹ Thus, the sublimity of Mendelssohn's 'ancient' pre-nineteenth-century masters became even more widely recognized and admired as the nineteenth century progressed due to parallels with Mendelssohn's own music. Mendelssohn's historicism can thus be understood not as 'slavish dependence', but as a facet of his 'original genius' due to his ability to 'translate' sublime models for contemporary audiences.

3. Mendelssohn's *Lobgesang*

In this, the final part of the chapter, I will give evidence of Mendelssohn's 'Goethean' historicism in the *Lobgesang* (Op. 52; 1840, rev. 1841), which begins with the occasion for which the work was written. *Lobgesang* (later published as Symphony No. 2) was commissioned for and premiered at the 1840 Gutenberg Festival in Leipzig, commemorating the 400th anniversary of Gutenberg's invention of moveable type.⁵⁰² As Todd summarizes, 'the symphony tied together the principal threads of the festival into a patriotic offering of thanksgiving. The work, three orchestral movements chain-linked to a cantata of nine movements, traced the triumph of light over darkness and celebrated Gutenberg's invention as the disseminator of God's word through the printed Lutheran Bible'.⁵⁰³ Although often viewed as an example of Mendelssohn's 'decline', the following analysis will

⁵⁰⁰ Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, *Musikalische Charakterköpfe*, 8th ed. 2 vols. (Stuttgart, 1899; 1st edition of 3 volumes published 1853–1856), pp. 91–116; Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, p. 468.

⁵⁰¹ Ferdinand Gustav Kühne, 'Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy', *Europa* (13 November 1847), pp. 757–759; Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, p. 429. According to Botstein, Mendelssohn even became the (unrecognized and unappreciated) 'model' for Richard Wagner. See 'Wagner as Mendelssohn', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*, ed. Mercer-Taylor, pp. 262–263.

⁵⁰² Todd, *MLM*, p. 397. For more on the background of Leipzig's Gutenberg Festival, see Mark Evan Bonds, *After Beethoven: Imperatives of Originality in the Symphony* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), Chapter 3, 'The Flight of Icarus', pp. 73–108, and Ryan Minor, *Choral Fantasies: Music, Festivity, and Nationhood in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), Chapter 2 'Memory and Multiplicity in Felix Mendelssohn's "Gutenberg" Works', pp. 33–67.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*

demonstrate how the *Lobgesang* helped confirm Mendelssohn's contemporary reception as a 'genius', one able to create an original genre unifying an eclectic range of musical styles to express distinctly sublime concepts.

3.1. A 'Historicizing Eclecticism' of Sacred Styles

In the *Lobgesang*, Mendelssohn merged diverse musical genres into one epic form, uniting the secular symphony with the sacred cantata while incorporating 'ancient' styles and baroque techniques throughout. Aspects of 'secular' Classical form will be discussed below; but first the prominence of 'sacred' genres and styles with sublime associations (as identified above) will be considered.

First, while beginning with three movements of purely instrumental music in recognizable Classical forms, the *Lobgesang* begins with musical material clearly related to a cappella sacred music. The opening 'motto' theme is based on a modal collection of notes (without a 'leading tone') and is presented by the trombones and full orchestra in antiphonal texture. (See Example 5.1.)

Example 5.1. Mendelssohn, *Lobgesang*, 'Motto' Theme, bars 1–6

(Based on *Lobgesang*, Op. 52, Douglass Seaton (ed.) Carus-Verlag, 1990))

The musical score for Example 5.1 shows the 'Motto' Theme from Mendelssohn's *Lobgesang*, Op. 52, bars 1–6. The score is in 4/4 time and marked 'Maestoso con moto'. It features two staves: the upper staff is for the ORCHESTRA and the lower staff is for TROMBONES. Both staves begin with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The music is in a modal collection of notes, characteristic of the Eighth Psalm mode.

As Toews writes, 'Although this simple, memorable opening hymn is not a direct citation from the liturgical tradition, Mendelssohn constructed its intervals according to the requirements of a pre-modern modal system connected to liturgical music (the Eighth Psalm mode), thus highlighting its sacred, and ancient, character'.⁵⁰⁴ Todd refers to this segment as an imitation of 'responsorial psalmody', thus linking the

⁵⁰⁴ Toews, 'Musical Historicism', pp. 192–193. Roger Fiske provides a summary of proposed plainchant origins of the 'motto' theme, including 'the Intonation to the 2nd Tone for the Magnificat' (per George Grove, 1879), 'the intonation of the eighth tone as sung to the Magnificat' (per Edward Dannreuther, 1931), and 'the Magnificat of the Third Tone' (following Eric Werner's 1963 description of the *Reformation* Symphony opening). See Fiske's preface to Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Symphony No. 2, Op. 52, Lobgesang (Hymn of Praise)* (London; New York: Eulenburg, 1980), pp. iv–v.

gesture with Renaissance-era liturgical works.⁵⁰⁵ Thus, from the beginning Mendelssohn's 'symphony' evokes the 'sublime' sounds of Renaissance choral music and the even more 'ancient' modal melody of Medieval plainchant.

In the second movement of Mendelssohn's opening *Sinfonia* – linked to the first with a reiteration of the 'motto' theme and a recitative-like clarinet solo – another clear reference to sacred styles is apparent. The 'Trio' of this Scherzo and Trio form presents a melody that is not a historical Lutheran chorale, but certainly resembles such in its sustained phrases and primarily stepwise melodic construction. And, as Mark Evans Bonds points out, the 'motto' theme appears as 'a contrapuntal inner voice' in the first two phrases of this 'chorale' theme.⁵⁰⁶ Between each of these, and continuing throughout the Trio section, Mendelssohn inserts contrasting phrases echoing the 'Scherzo' theme. To Bonds, who notes that the individual 'chorale' phrases get increasingly louder, this creates 'the impression of a procession of singers "arriving" in the orchestra from afar'.⁵⁰⁷ Then, as others have observed, the Trio concludes with a *fortissimo* phrase clearly recalling the ending of Martin Luther's 'Ein feste Burg' chorale (featured in Mendelssohn's 'Reformation' Symphony ten years earlier).⁵⁰⁸

Mendelssohn's reference to sacred styles continues in the third movement, which he designates to be played *Adagio religioso* and *cantabile*. The opening phrases connote suspensions – another reference to sacred part-writing – with their sighing descent from G to F-sharp (although the effect is actually produced by the more 'modern' resolution of the dominant seventh). After two iterations (bars 560–575), the woodwind choir presents homophonic hymn-like phrases (bars 576–586) before the opening 'sigh' returns with full strings (bars 587–594).⁵⁰⁹ As the movement continues into two additional larger sections and a coda (bars 594–615, 615–656, and 656–672, respectively), the underlying accompaniment figures

⁵⁰⁵ Todd, 'Mendelssohn's Sacred Music', p. 106.

⁵⁰⁶ Mark Evan Bonds, *After Beethoven: Imperatives of Originality in the Symphony* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 83.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁸ In his 2008 essay 'On Mendelssohn's Sacred Music, Real and Imaginary' (in *Mendelssohn Essays* (New York: Routledge, 2008)), Todd points out the freely composed 'imaginary' chorales in Mendelssohn's music, giving examples such as the theme of the Fugue, Op. 35, No. 1.

⁵⁰⁹ All bar numbers refer to Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Lobgesang: Op. 52: Sinfonie-Kantate nach Worten der Heiligen Schrift für Soli, Chor und Orchester*, ed. Douglass Seaton (Stuttgart: Carus-Verlag, 1990).

progress through dotted figures to steady semiquavers and then rapid arpeggios figures. With these gestures, Mendelssohn turns a symphonic slow movement – with his distinctive blend of strings and winds – into a depiction of sung religious devotion in motion, perhaps suggesting a pilgrimage towards a sacred site.⁵¹⁰

The nine-section cantata follows, setting Mendelssohn's own collage of biblical texts and chorale verses.⁵¹¹ Mendelssohn uses the dotted rhythms from the third movement as a transition into and an introduction to the grand chorus 'Alles was Odem hat' (No. 2, 'All that has breath'). It is here where he shows his continued mastery of Handel's sacred style, emulating not just Handel's oratorios but his majestic anthems.⁵¹² Other evidence of the Handelian sublime can be found in the 'strongly fugal texture' in the first movement (bars 57–78) and polyphonic writing in the cantata's grand *Allegro* choruses, including movements two (*Allegro moderato maestoso*), seven (*Allegro maestoso e molto vivace*), and ten (*Allegro non troppo*).⁵¹³ Imitative four-part polyphony occurs practically throughout 'Alles was Odem hat' (with the exception of bars 1–31, 43–51, and 134–138), and full choral fugues are found in movement seven ('Die Nacht ist Vergangen') beginning at bar 66 and in movement ten ('Ihr Völker') beginning at bar 87.

Mendelssohn's use of diverse compositional techniques from Medieval chant, the Renaissance polychoral tradition, the Lutheran chorale, and Handel's grand anthems and oratorio choruses show the *Lobgesang* to be a diverse mixture of historic music, confirming Mercer-Taylor's statement that Mendelssohn's large choral works are the clearest locus of his 'historicizing eclecticism'.⁵¹⁴ Other scholars have also recognized the historical variety in Mendelssohn's work. Todd describes the *Lobgesang* as 'a broad historical review that relates the German past to

⁵¹⁰ See Minor, *Choral Fantasies*, p. 37 on the 'vocal topoi' of the *Lobgesang*'s Sinfonia movements.

⁵¹¹ Mendelssohn's choice of texts includes verses from Psalms 150, 33, 145, 103, 107, 56, and 40 (for No. 2's 2–5); Psalm 116:3, Ephesians 5:14 and Isaiah 21:11–12 (for the No. 6 Tenor Air and Recitative); Romans 13:12 (for the No. 7 Solo and Chorus), two stanzas of Martin Rinckart's 'Nun danket alle Gott' (for the No. 8 Chorale); and Psalm 96, 1 Chronicles 16:8–10, and (again) Psalm 150:6 (for the No. 10 Chorus). All German Bible texts are from Luther's translation.

⁵¹² Bonds has identified Mendelssohn's clear allusion to the accompaniment texture of Handel's famous *Zadok the Priest* in this movement, which was regularly sung in German lands (as 'Groß ist der Herr') and used in Mendelssohn's first 'historical concert' in Leipzig (on 15 February 1838). See *After Beethoven*, p. 89. When *Lobgesang* was premiered in 1840, another grand Handelian work was performed at the same concert: the *Dettingen Te Deum*. See Todd, *MLM*, p. 397.

⁵¹³ See Bonds, *After Beethoven*, p. 103. For a description of the 'fully developed, Handelian fugue' in Number 7, see Minor, *Choral Fantasies*, p. 59.

⁵¹⁴ Mercer-Taylor, 'Mendelssohn as Border-Dweller', p. 5.

the present and summons various musical icons – symphony, cantata, oratorio elements, responsorial psalmody, and chorale – into the service of praising God’.⁵¹⁵ Bonds states that ‘Mendelssohn’s *Lobgesang* is the composer’s musical monument to Germany’s past, a synthesis of various genres and styles associated with significant composers of previous generations’.⁵¹⁶ In the words of Thomas Carlyle, Mendelssohn had made, in a sense, ‘the whole Past ... the possession of the Present’ and created a musical museum to showcase historic treasures.⁵¹⁷

But, is there anything that unifies this eclectic historic mixture into a singular work of art? Despite its linked movements, reviewers of the work struggled to find such. Even Schumann – who praised the work – stated that ‘we would then also prefer to see the two works [symphony and cantata] published separately, to their apparent mutual advantage’.⁵¹⁸ Certainly comparisons of *Lobgesang* with Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony (and confusion over the structure of Beethoven’s work) have contributed to this concern. However, more recent readings of the work have pointed to at least one strategy for unifying these diverse elements, one that is verified in Mendelssohn’s correspondence, consistent with the *Lobgesang*’s content, and demonstrative of Mendelssohn’s ‘genius’.

3.2. Ancient Parallel Structures and Classical Forms

In a letter written to Klingemann on 21 July 1840, Mendelssohn described his basic structural plan for the *Lobgesang* as follows: ‘first the instruments praise [God] in their own fashion, followed by the chorus and soloists’.⁵¹⁹ Furthermore, as Toews summarizes, Mendelssohn informed Klingemann that ‘Both instrumental and vocal segments ... were composed on this text, as an intensifying, elevating movement of praise, progressing from instruments to voices’.⁵²⁰ Thus the text – primarily based on psalm verses – informed both the thematic content and structural idea for the work.

⁵¹⁵ Todd, *MLM*, p. 400.

⁵¹⁶ Bonds, *After Beethoven*, p. 86. Bonds relates the *Lobgesang* to another example of musical historicism from the 1830s: Sphor’s *Historische Sinfonie* of 1839.

⁵¹⁷ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (London: H. Frowde, 1904), From Lecture I: ‘The Hero as Divinity. Odin. Paganism: Scandinavian Mythology’. See also Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Rev. edn.; Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁵¹⁸ Quoted in Bonds, *After Beethoven*, p. 75. For a summary of critiques by Wagner, Schumann, Hauptmann, and Bülow, see Todd, *MLM*, p. 397.

⁵¹⁹ Letter to Klingemann, 21 July 1840; Quoted in Bonds, *After Beethoven*, p. 102.

⁵²⁰ Toews, ‘Musical Historicism’, p. 192.

Furthermore, the work demonstrates structural features that correspond to the Psalms. As Bonds has observed,

the formal layout of the Lobgesang as a whole mirrors the basic form of the psalm-text verses that constitute the text. Just as the typical Psalm verse is based on a structural parallel of its component halves, so too is Mendelssohn's 'Symphony of Psalms' based on certain large-scale formal parallels between its instrumental and vocal sections.⁵²¹

Although Mendelssohn's comments to Klingemann or other statements regarding the *Lobgesang* do not suggest that he viewed the work's structure as a massive Psalm verse, this connection with the parallelism that is indicative of ancient Hebrew poetry fits Mendelssohn well, especially considering his many Psalm settings and his appreciation for his grandfather Moses Mendelssohn's psalm translations.⁵²²

As the following formal outline will demonstrate, the form of *Lobgesang* has much in common with psalm-verse parallelism. Within each 'half' of the work, three movements are apparent. In the 'Symphony' these are clearly distinguished by tempo markings as well as changes in metre and key. In the 'Cantata', the various movements can be grouped to correspond to these 'Symphony' movements, as demonstrated in Table 5.1.

⁵²¹ Bonds, 'Flight of Icarus', p. 103. Here Bonds refers to the definitive aspect of Hebrew poetry, commonly referred to as 'parallelism'. As defined in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia on Poetry and Poetics*, parallelism occurs when 'The words of the second colon [i.e. phrase or clause] repeat in different words the meaning of the first (*synonymous parallelism*); reverse, negate, or contradict its meaning (*antithetical parallelism*); or modify it (*synthetical parallelism*)' (Ezra Spiceland, 'Hebrew Poetry,' *NPEPP*, ed. Preminger and Brogan (New Haven, CT: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 501).

⁵²² Mendelssohn composed five large-scale cantata-like 'Psalms with orchestra', including *Psalm 115* (Op. 31, discussed in Chapter Three), *Psalm 42* (Op. 42), *Psalm 95* (Op. 56), *Psalm 114* (Op. 51), and *Psalm 98* (Op. 91, to be discussed in Chapter Six).

Table 5.1 Parallel Structure in the *Lobgesang*⁵²³

‘Symphony’ Movements

A	Movement I	<i>Maestoso con Moto</i>	Common metre	B-flat major
	Movement II	<i>Allegretto un poco agitato</i>	6/8 metre	G minor
	Movement III	<i>Adagio religioso</i>	2/4 metre	D major

‘Cantata’ Movements (corresponding aspects in **bold**)

A’	(I) No.’s 2–5	<i>Allegro moderato maestoso</i>	Common metre	B-flat major (after D minor introduction)
	(II) No. 6	<i>Allegro un poco agitato</i>	3/4 metre	C minor
	(III) No.’s 7–10	<i>Allegro maestoso e molto vivace</i>	6/8 metre	D major

While allowing for variations – as psalm parallelism does – the two ‘halves’ correspond in many features, including the opening *maestoso* indications, middle *agitato* ‘movements’, and keys. In the case of the third part of the ‘Cantata’, the *Allegro maestoso e molto vivace* can be seen to intensify, not repeat, the *Adagio religioso* with its faster tempi and more complex compound metre. Thus an ‘ancient’ structural pattern can be discerned: the cantata reiterates the symphony as the second half of a psalm verse reiterates (in different ‘words’) the ideas of the first.

Another unifying strategy easily observable of the *Lobgesang* can also be related to ancient Hebrew poetry: the ‘motto’ theme’s use at beginning and end. In many psalms (or sometimes groups of psalms), the opening text phrase appears again at the end of the last psalm verse, thus forming an *inclusio* by ‘framing’ the entire

⁵²³ Tempo, metre, and key designations refer to the *initial* ones for each movement.

psalm. Examples easily seen in English translations include Psalm 8 (vv. 1a and 9), Psalm 103 (vv. 1a and 22b (used in the *Lobgesang*)), and Psalm 118 (vv. 1 and 29). Thus, the trombones' sounding of the 'motto' theme in B-flat major as an introduction to Movement I of the 'Symphony' as well as in the concluding coda of No. 10 of the 'Cantata' serves as an ancient way to 'frame' and thus unify this expansive work.⁵²⁴

Yet, Mendelssohn also made use of Classical structural principles within the *Lobgesang*. In addition to the Classical forms in each of the three movements of the 'Symphony' (two sonata forms and a scherzo with trio), the 'Cantata' is also replete with tripartite structures, identifiable by changes in tempo and key across the various movements.⁵²⁵ These sectional subdivisions are summarized in Table 5.2.

⁵²⁴ The 'motto' theme also recurs in several other portions of the *Lobgesang* ('Symphony' Movements I and II and 'Cantata' No's 2), thus making the 'Symphony No. 2' one of Mendelssohn's 'cyclic' late works.

⁵²⁵ See Toews, 'Musical Historicism', pp. 193–195 for a description of sonata form sections of Movement I of the *Sinfonia*, including identification of 'Exposition', 'Development', and (somewhat cautiously) the 'Recapitulation', which has 'Theme 2' in the relative minor key of G minor as opposed to the primary key of B-flat major.

Table 5.2 Tripartite Structures in the *Lobgesang*

Introduction	'motto' theme	B-flat major
Movement I	Sonata form: (1) Exposition (2) Development (3) Recapitulation	B-flat major
Movement II	(1) Scherzo (2) Trio (3) Scherzo (<i>abbreviated</i>)	G minor G major G minor
Movement III	Sonata form: (1) Exposition (2) Development (3) Recapitulation, plus Coda	D major
[I] No.'s 2–5	(1) No. 2 <i>Allegro moderato maestoso</i> Chorus; <i>Molto piu moderato ma con fuoco</i> Solo and Chorus (2) No.'s 3–4 Recitative and <i>Allegro moderato</i> 'Air', continuing with <i>Moderato</i> Chorus (3) No. 5	B-flat major G minor E-flat major
[II] No. 6	(1) <i>Allegro un poco agitato</i> , bars 1–39 (2) (modified repetition), bars 40–76 (3) <i>Allegro assai agitato / Moderato</i>	C minor to A-flat major C minor to C major C major to D minor
[III] No.'s 7–10	(1) No. 7 <i>Allegro maestoso e molto vivace</i> Chorus (2) No. 8 <i>Andante</i> Chorale (3) No.'s 9–10 <i>Andante sostenuto assai</i> Duet <i>Allegro non troppo</i> Chorus, with <i>Piu vivace</i> finale section <i>Maestoso come</i> Coda with 'motto' theme	D major G major B-flat major

Other scholars have also noted Mendelssohn's attempt to unify such diverse musical elements (sacred and secular, ancient and 'modern') through thematic and textual recall and sonata form. As Todd states, '...Felix aimed in the *Lobgesang* at a unified whole, in which the addition of text served to complement and explicate (but not disavow) the abstract symphonic form'.⁵²⁶ Toews acknowledges how

... the *Lobgesang* emerges from Mendelssohn's own development as an interesting attempt to merge his parallel 'reforms' of sacred music (with Bach as model and mentor) and classical sonata form (with Beethoven as model and mentor) into a single musical conception of the relations between the sacred and secular, divine and human, transcendent and immanent⁵²⁷

Acknowledging both Classical forms and 'ancient' structural principles in Mendelssohn's *Lobgesang* reveals a more cohesive work than previously recognized, and presents compelling evidence for Mendelssohn's 'genius' – a 'genius' able to unify diverse musical ideas in complex, yet coherent structures.

3.3. 'Dependent Creation' or Original Genre?

However, the fact remains that nineteenth-century reviewers had difficulty recognizing the unity in Mendelssohn's overall work, a difficulty confounded by structural parallels between the work and Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (completed only 16 years before the *Lobgesang* in 1824). These parallels are succinctly summarized by Toews, who writes, 'Three instrumental movements – an opening *sonata allegro*, a *scherzo/trio*, and an *adagio* – are completed with a choral finale'.⁵²⁸ This similarity led to the critique of Mendelssohn's work as a mere copy. By 1847, Marx was declaring that the *Lobgesang* 'lacked "inner necessity" and represents "only an imitation" of the Ninth'.⁵²⁹ In Wagner's intensified terms, 'the whole *Lobgesang* was nothing but a superficial imitation of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and a "stupid naiveté"'.⁵³⁰ As discussed above, this accusation was a direct challenge to Mendelssohn's genius.

⁵²⁶ Todd, *MLM*, p. 398.

⁵²⁷ Toews, 'Musical Historicism', p. 191.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁹ As summarized in Bonds, *After Beethoven*, p. 77 who quotes from Marx, 'Ueber die Form der Symphonie-Cantate. Auf Anlass von Beethoven's neunter Symphonie', *AmZ* 49 (1847), pp. 489–498, 505–511. Significantly, Marx actually discerned Mendelssohn's overall structural strategy, stating that 'the composer essentially tells us the same thing twice (even if he is of course using different words or notes): he sings a song of praise first in the orchestra, and then with voices'.

⁵³⁰ See Feder, 'Sacred Music', p. 262.

Modern scholarship has shown that, in fact, the *Lobgesang* differs from Beethoven's Ninth in significant ways. Toews comments on at least four areas of difference, including (1) balance (between instrumental and choral portions), (2) the character of the dramatic narrative ('less intense and troubled in Mendelssohn's work'), (3) the nature of chosen texts (Schiller's secular poem verses sacred texts), and (4) 'historic memories' ('revolutionary dawn of the late eighteenth century' verses 'the sixteenth century Reformation' and 'moral/religious "reformation"' in the 1820s').⁵³¹ Minor concludes his comparison of the works by stating that 'both biographical and historical context suggest that it was unlikely Mendelssohn would have considered the Ninth a model, or if so, a model to improve upon'.⁵³²

Therefore, despite Ernst Gottschald's 1858 prediction that the *Lobgesang* was destined to remain a 'dependent creation', Mendelssohn's work presents itself as an *original* genre of music, as the evolution of its title will show.⁵³³ When commissioned by the Gutenberg Festival Committee, the 'large-scale work' did not have a specified genre. Despite a committee report announcing that Mendelssohn's composition was to be a 'grand oratorio' (an assumption quickly dismissed by Mendelssohn), the composer's vision for the work developed along with the music itself. His conception evolved from 'an expanded Psalm setting', to 'a small oratorio', to 'a symphony', to '*Lobgesang, eine Symphonie für Chor und Orchester*'. Finally, after hearing the work performed in Birmingham, Mendelssohn's friend Klingemann suggested the genre designation of 'Symphonie-Kantate', which the composer thought 'splendidly formulated' and thus used this in the published version of the work.⁵³⁴

The process of considering (and rejecting) various genres for his 'large-scale work' demonstrates Mendelssohn's artistic ability to conceive of a new type of composition. His compositional process did not result in another chorale cantata (like his Bach-inspired works from 1827–1832), a secular cantata (like his *Die erste Walpurgisnacht*), or even an 'occasional oratorio' (such as Handel's work from

⁵³¹ Toews, 'Musical Historicism', pp. 191–192.

⁵³² Minor, *Choral Fantasies*, p. 45. See pp. 37–46 for Minor's full comparison of the works.

⁵³³ Ernst von Elterlein [i.e. Ernst Gottschald], *Beethoven's Symphonien nach ihrem idealen Gehalt, mit besonderer Rücksicht auf Haydn, Mozart und die neueren Symphoniker*, 2nd ed. (Dresden: Adolph Brauer, 1858), p. 108; Quoted in Bonds, *After Beethoven*, p. 77.

⁵³⁴ See Bonds, *After Beethoven*, pp. 96–99 for further details. For Mendelssohn's letter to Klingemann, see Mendelssohn, *Letters ... from 1833–1847*, pp. 198–200. Note that the work was only designated 'Symphony No. 2' after the composer's death.

1746).⁵³⁵ Instead, the work developed into a hybrid genre, as the designation ‘Symphonie-Kantate’ clearly suggests.⁵³⁶ It became a large-scale work in multiple movements making use of symphonic orchestration and Classical forms; it also became a composite vocal form including a variety of vocal genres (choruses, recitatives, arias, fugues, chorales, and duets), and influenced as much (or more) by Handel’s oratorios as Bach’s chorale cantatas. By transforming these two historic macro-genres (symphony and cantata) into a new hybrid one, the *Lobgesang* ‘translates’ the past for the present. Thus, the work again points to the ‘genius’ of the composer, a ‘genius’ capable of new creation.

3.4. Communicating Sublime Ideas: ‘From Night to Day’

The ‘Symphony-Cantata’ structure of Mendelssohn’s *Lobgesang* also explicated the theme of the Gutenberg Festival, which celebrated the ‘word’ (particularly the Bible) being ‘revealed’ to more people through broader dissemination made possible by Gutenberg’s printing press.⁵³⁷ This theme was metaphorically presented as a move from ‘dark’ to ‘light’ and from ‘night’ to ‘day’. As the following will show, Mendelssohn’s *Lobgesang* clearly presents this transformation – one readily understood as sublime – through its carefully-chosen texts and musical transitions.

This metaphor of coming light is presented most dramatically between the Air and Recitative (No. 6) and the Solo and Chorus (No. 7), which Douglass Seaton refers to as ‘the central moment of illumination’.⁵³⁸ As observable in the tables above, the sixth movement serves as the central section of the ‘Cantata’. Here the tenor makes a terrifying confession amid tumultuous melodic leaps in his ‘Air’: ‘The sorrows of death had closed all around me, and hell’s dark terrors had got hold upon

⁵³⁵ *Die erste Walpurgisnacht* was begun in Rome in 1831, but revised again in 1841 as a symphony-cantata, following *Lobgesang*, and then published as his Opus 60. See Seaton, Preface to *Lobgesang*, p. ix.

⁵³⁶ As Seaton states, The ‘principle of the work’s structure, presentation of an idea in abstract musical terms and subsequent revelation of the idea’s meaning in vocal text, did not merely produce a significant work ...; it demanded the creation of an original genre’ (Preface to *Lobgesang*, p. ix). See also Todd, *MLM*, p. 397 for mention of *Lobgesang*’s ‘hybrid’ genre.

⁵³⁷ In a comparison with Beethoven’s secular text, Toews asserts that ‘Mendelssohn’s theme was spiritual enlightenment through a receptiveness to divine revelation’ as well as ‘an ode to enlightenment in a general sense’ (‘Musical Historicism’, p. 192). For more on the themes and images prominent in the Leipzig Gutenberg Festival (as well as other similar events), see Bonds, *After Beethoven*, pp. 80–86 and Minor, *Choral Fantasies*, pp. 46–65.

⁵³⁸ Seaton, Preface to *Lobgesang*, p. viii. Seaton’s description of the work’s compositional history (pp. viii–ix) also shows how Mendelssohn only ‘discover[ed]’ the ‘image of revelation’ in his *Lobgesang* through progressive revisions of the work, especially his work on ‘three different tenor solo movements in turn’ between No. 5 and No. 7.

me, with deep trouble and deep heaviness'. Then, the recitative that follows, 'Watchman, will the night soon pass?' ('Hüter, ist die Nacht bald hin?'), repeatedly calls out for a sign that the terrors of night will pass. As Toews states, 'startling leaps in tonality and strikingly dissonant chords emphasize the crisis-like turning point of this yearning for redemption as a plea for light'.⁵³⁹ (See Example 5.2.)

Example 5.2. Mendelssohn, *Lobgesang*, Cantata No. 6, bars 121–129

(Based on *Hymn of Praise*, Op. 52, J. Alfred Novello (ed.) (Novello's Original Octavo Edition; n.d.))

The musical score for Example 5.2 is presented in two systems. The first system is for a Tenor Solo, with lyrics: "Watch - man will the night soon pass?" and "will the night soon pass?". The piano accompaniment features dynamic markings of *p*, *f*, and *sfz*. The second system is for a Soprano Solo, with lyrics: "will the night soon pass? The night is de - part - ing, de - part". The piano accompaniment includes dynamic markings of *ff* and *dim.*, and the tempo marking *Lento.* is indicated at the end of the system.

Mendelssohn makes use of multiple musical means to depict the dramatic transformation, including timbre, texture, harmony, and tempo. First, a high soprano replaces the tenor, announcing that 'The night is departing' ('Die Nacht ist vergangen'). The orchestra immediately joins with cadential chords leading to an introduction of the Chorus (No. 7), where brass present the melodic theme before male voices sing in octaves (bars 1–16). When the upper voices join in bar 17 (also in octaves), the full chorus and orchestra have quickly dismissed the solo tenor's anxious cries with exuberant proclamations of light: 'The night is departing, the day is approaching'.

Corresponding with the quick change of timbre and texture are changes in harmony and tempo. The solo soprano's initial melodic line ascends to a high F

⁵³⁹ Toews, 'Musical Historicism', p. 199.

sharp, turning the D minor chords so prominent in the end of the recitative into a brilliant D major. This Handelian key of brightness is confirmed with the orchestra's first chords. Then, the tempo change to an *Allegro maestoso e molto vivace* brings back the majestic confidence of the opening symphony movement and the first chorus (No. 2). (See Example 5.3.)

Example 5.3. Mendelssohn, *Lobgesang*, Cantata No. 7, bars 10–17

(Based on *Hymn of Praise*, Op. 52, J. Alfred Novello (ed.) (Novello's Original Octavo Edition; n.d.))

The musical score for Example 5.3 consists of two systems. The first system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment for the first four bars. The vocal line starts with a forte (*f*) dynamic and the lyrics "The night is departing". The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The second system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment for the next four bars. The vocal line continues with "The night ing, departing,". The piano accompaniment continues with a similar rhythmic pattern. The tempo is marked *Allegro maestoso e molto vivace*.

As Bonds writes concerning this transition, ‘The moment is imbued with the aesthetic of the sublime: darkness and terror are followed by light and rejoicing’.⁵⁴⁰ If the light is depicted by ‘bright’ tempo and key, this rejoicing is portrayed by a choral fugue with (in Minor’s description) ‘jagged melodic edges and syncopated entries’, along with ‘dance-like accompaniment rhythms’.⁵⁴¹ The text here (based on Romans 13:12) calls the participants to ‘cast off’ darkness and ‘gird on’ light (‘ablegen die Werke der Finsternis, und anlegen die Waffen des Lichts’).

⁵⁴⁰ Bonds, *After Beethoven*, p. 90.

⁵⁴¹ Minor, *Choral Fantasies*, p. 59.

Following the announcement that ‘The day is approaching ...’ (No. 7), the work’s spiritual climax is the a cappella singing of Rinkart’s famous chorale, ‘Nun danket alle Gott’ (No. 8), a communal song (and ‘ancient’ form) enabling complete participation. Stanza one serves as a congregational call to praise and mutual confession of God’s grace:

‘Nun danket alle Gott’ (Martin Rinkart) <i>Evangelisches Kirchengesangbuch</i> (1636)	English metrical version used in ‘Novello’s Original Octavo Edition’ of <i>Lobgesang</i>
Nun danket alle Gott mit Herzen, Mund und Händen, der sich in aller Not will gnädig zu uns wenden, der so viel Gutes tut, von Kindesbeinen an uns hielt in seiner Hut und allen wohlgetan.	Let all men praise the Lord, in worship lowly bending; on His most Holy Word, redeem’d from woe, depending. He gracious is and just, from childhood us doth lead; on Him we place our trust and hope, in time of need.

The second stanza selected by Mendelssohn – which Seaton describes as ‘a unison setting with elaborate orchestral illumination’ – declares praise to the Trinity:⁵⁴²

Lob Her’ und Preis sei Gott, dem Vater und dem Sohne, und seinem heil’gen Geist im höchsten Himmelsthron. Lob dem dreiein’gen Gott, der Nacht und Dunkel schied von Licht und Morgenroth, ihm danket unser Lied.	Glory and praise to God The Father, Son, be given, And to the Holy Ghost, On high enthron’d in Heaven. Praise to the Three-One God; with pow’rful arm and strong, He changeth night to day; Praise Him with grateful song.
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This stanza’s concluding phrases, however, point past the identity of God to his power to separate ‘night and darkness’ from ‘light and dawn’ (‘der Nacht und Dunkel schied von Licht und Morgenroth’). This line (evoking the Genesis 1 creation account) represented the sublime rhetorical power of one able to create daylight through sheer spoken word (‘Let there be light’).⁵⁴³

But Mendelssohn’s use of Rinkart’s chorale in the *Lobgesang* also brought to mind another representation of the ‘sublime’ for those attending the Gutenberg Festival. ‘Nun danket alle Gott’ was also used in Mendelssohn’s *Festgesang* composition for male voices and brass which was performed earlier in the festival

⁵⁴² Seaton, Preface to *Lobgesang*, p. viii.

⁵⁴³ Schumann’s celebration of the composition as ‘a work of light’ confirms the clarity of this sublime theme in *Lobgesang*. See Bonds, *After Beethoven*, p. 82.

ceremonies.⁵⁴⁴ As described by Bonds, the *Festgesang* made explicit reference to Haydn's *The Creation* when setting the text 'Und es ward Licht'.⁵⁴⁵ By repeating the 'Nun danket alle Gott' chorale in the *Lobgesang* – and emphasizing the stanza praising God's power to change 'night to day' – Mendelssohn provided a contextual reference to the musical representation of this very sublime power, thus further associating the *Lobgesang* with the creation of light.

A Lutheran chorale cantata would traditionally end with this communal vehicle of devotion: the four-part chorale. But Mendelssohn's *Lobgesang* continues on with a dramatic Lieder-style duet (No. 9), and then concludes – as would a Handelian oratorio – with a grand choral expansion: 'Ye Nations, Offer to the Lord Glory and Might' (No. 10, 'Ihr Völker, bringet her dem Herrn Ehre und Macht'). The chorus opens *Allegro non troppo* in G minor with its first choral fugue, which builds up from basses to sopranos over aggressively-articulated string chords. As each voice part adds to the texture, the call extends beyond 'Ye nations' ('Ihr Völker') to 'Ye monarchs' ('Ihr Könige'), 'Thou heavens' ('Der Himmel'), and to 'The whole earth' ('Die Erde'), invoking all to join in the 'Hymn of Praise'. After intricate polyphony ending with a stretto reiteration of the four-part call to praise (bars 39–44), a brief homophonic section leads to an intensification of the call – now more of a command – with the *Più vivace* tempo and key change to B-flat major (bar 55). The chorus continues with a veritable lexicon of sublime musical rhetoric, including its ascending and descending orchestral lines (bars 55–58, 63–66, and 71–74), its second fugue (bars 87–121), further imitation on the words 'and praise His glory' ('und preiset seine Herrlichkeit', bars 121–150), extended long notes in the basses (bars 150–159), and more ascending and descending lines before the half cadence at bar 186. The final statement of the 'motto' theme follows, with voices echoing the brass, and building to a concluding 'Hallelujah, sing to the Lord' on *sempre forte* chords (bars 187–196). Mendelssohn thus concludes his *Lobgesang* with parallel references to the musical sublime: the 'motto' theme (built on an 'ancient' mode and

⁵⁴⁴ See Todd, 'Mendelssohn's Sacred Music', in *Mendelssohn Essays*, p. 107 and Minor, *Choral Fantasies*, pp. 64–65, who provides a brief comparison of the *Festgesang* and the *Lobgesang*.

⁵⁴⁵ See Bonds, *After Beethoven*, p. 90. Bonds also acknowledges how the 'Nun danket alle Gott' chorale fantasia of the *Lobgesang* (No. 8) makes an implicit reference to the *St Matthew Passion* through its 'especially close affinity' to Bach's 'O Mensch, bewein' dein' Sünde groß' chorale setting (p. 86).

echoed antiphonally) and a Handelian ‘Hallelujah’ (complete with thundering timpani rolls).⁵⁴⁶

3.5. The ‘Most Ingenious of all Mendelssohn’s Works’

Contrary to the judgments of *Lobgesang* as ‘unsuccessful’ and even ‘dismal’ by twentieth-century musicologists (who assumed Mendelssohn sought to follow Beethoven’s Ninth), scholars of the *Lobgesang*’s contemporary reception testify to its overwhelming success.⁵⁴⁷ Bonds states that ‘It was immensely popular during Mendelssohn’s own lifetime and repeatedly hailed as one of his greatest compositions’.⁵⁴⁸ According to Brown, ‘Of all the sacred works Mendelssohn wrote between *St Paul* and *Elijah*, ... it was the Symphony-Cantata *Lobgesang* that seems most powerfully to have seized the attention and roused the imagination of contemporaries. ... [I]t was seen at the time as a work of major importance, and to judge by its publication history and the number of performances it received, it retained that position throughout the nineteenth century’.⁵⁴⁹ Jacob goes so far as to assert that ‘No religious work of Mendelssohn’s, not even the *St. Paul* or the *Elijah*, found more favour with his contemporaries’.⁵⁵⁰

Praise from Mendelssohn’s contemporaries support these claims. After a December 1840 performance of a revised version of *Lobgesang* at the Leipzig Gewandhaus, Robert Schumann declared:

All praise for the splendid composition, as it was, and as it now is! We declared it before. Everything that can make people happy and ennoble them – pious feelings, consciousness of power, its freest, most natural expression – may be found here; not to speak of the musical skill of the composition and the imagination with which Mendelssohn worked on this piece, especially in the parts where the chorus predominates.⁵⁵¹

⁵⁴⁶ English audiences seemed to recognize the Handelian sublime in the *Lobgesang*. Consider Toews’ report that ‘In Birmingham the audience rose to attention for the climactic chorale of the Cantata movement, a response previously reserved for the Hallelujah Chorus’ (‘Musical Historicism’, p. 184).

⁵⁴⁷ Bonds refers to Hugo Riemann’s assessment that the *Lobgesang* was “‘on the whole an ultimately unsuccessful attempt” to adopt Beethoven’s idea of uniting instrumental and vocal movements’ and Gerald Abraham’s ‘vicious’ judgment that it “‘stands alone as the most dismal attempt to follow the lead of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony ever conceived by human mediocracy” (*After Beethoven*, pp. 78–79).

⁵⁴⁸ Bonds, *After Beethoven*, p. 74.

⁵⁴⁹ Brown, *Portrait*, p. 414.

⁵⁵⁰ Jacob, *Mendelssohn and His Times*, p. 235.

⁵⁵¹ *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 13 (1840), p. 188; Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, p. 415.

Schumann's review recognized the 'musical skill' and 'imagination' evident in the work (even though he cleverly chose 'not to speak' of them), but centred his praise on the edifying effects of the work on its listeners: 'Everything that can make people happy and ennoble them'. Similar reports of the work's edifying impact came from England. Jacob accounts (in the words of an Anglican bishop) that the "'civilizing and optimistic quality of this music" ... won all hearts for the *Hymn of Praise*'.⁵⁵² Likewise, at the end of the decade, Macfarren (in a comparison with Beethoven's Ninth) also mentions the effect of the work on its hearers, which is 'grand and impressive because of its beauty'. However, he sees beyond the work to its creator:

... the 'praise' is that of a great mind, which feels that the pouring out of its best feelings and its noblest, is the devoutest homage: thus we find all conventionalities are eschewed completely; no form or style, because it has the name of sacred, is employed to impose a false character of devotion upon the hearers....⁵⁵³

Macfarren alludes to the unconventional use of diverse musical genres – both 'sacred' and otherwise – in *Lobgesang* as demonstrative of the 'great mind' of the composer.

In yet another defence of *Lobgesang* against comparisons with Beethoven's Ninth (after Marx's 1847 essay), Wilhelm Adolf Lampadius testified that 'To me, the *Lobgesang* is one of the greatest and most ingenious of all Mendelssohn's works, ... [one] in which his entire individuality, free of any reliance on an existing model, is manifested in its purest and most pleasing manner'.⁵⁵⁴ Lampadius' personal approbation for the work represents a view of *Lobgesang* as a work of originality and genius.

This positive view of *Lobgesang* was not limited to Mendelssohn's supporters (like Schumann), admirers (like Macfarren), and close friends (like Lampadius). Admiration for the work extended to the general public as well as members of royal families. As Toews states, 'It was a favourite of pious royalty (in England, Saxony, and Prussia) as well as of the evangelical protestant middle class in commercial and industrializing regions like the German Rheinland, the British

⁵⁵² Jacob, *Mendelssohn and His Times*, p. 235, with reference to *Fraser's Magazine* (London, 1848).

⁵⁵³ *Musical World* 24 (1849), p. 54; Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, pp. 415–416 (with no italics for *Lobgesang*).

⁵⁵⁴ Wilhelm Adolf Lampadius, *Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy: Ein Denkmal für seine Freunde* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1848), p. 102; Quoted in Bonds, *After Beethoven*, p. 79.

midlands, and New England'.⁵⁵⁵ Likewise, Jacob reports that

The symphony-cantata had a triumph through Germany. Its arias immediately travelled from concert hall to the church and to the household. King Friedrich August II of Saxony, who had been present at the première, insisted on hearing it again and again. The entire royal family of Prussia was equally enraptured and there was talk of coaxing Mendelssohn away from Leipzig and back to Berlin.⁵⁵⁶

This affirmation from the Prussian crown was significant for Mendelssohn's future. As the Prussian crown prince became King Frederick William IV in 1840, he immediately sought representatives of the cultural elite who shared his vision for the *Bildung* of the Prussian people and would assist in developing Prussia's cultural resources.⁵⁵⁷ A work such as *Lobgesang*, which was able to celebrate tradition and communicate sublime concepts of revelation and enlightenment through an ingeniously contrived musical structure, helped confirm that Mendelssohn should be considered for the task.

Eventually, the *Lobgesang* even impressed Mendelssohn's most famous critic. Years after the publication of *Das Judenthum*, Wagner himself apparently affirmed Mendelssohn's genius due to the impact of the work. After hearing a performance of *Lobgesang* at the Crystal Palace in 1877, he declared that Mendelssohn was 'the greatest purely musical genius since Mozart'.⁵⁵⁸ Again, the effect that Mendelssohn's music had on the listener (here Wagner) was such that the artistic merit of the work became irrefutable proof of the artist's 'genius'.

4. Summary

As shown in the previous section, Mendelssohn's *Lobgesang* was received as great art, and led its hearers to attribute 'genius' stature to the composer himself. Thus, the artwork confirms the artist by exhibiting nineteenth-century traits of genius. But, how does the prominence of this attribution in Mendelssohn's lifetime assist us in

⁵⁵⁵ Toews, 'Musical Historicism', p. 184.

⁵⁵⁶ Jacob, *Mendelssohn and His Times*, p. 235. Likewise, Brown mentions 'a highly successful concert that King Friedrich August II of Saxony had attended at the Gewandhaus in October 1840' where 'The standard of the concert and especially the performance of Mendelssohn's recently premiered *Lobgesang* forcibly impressed the king' (*Portrait*, pp. 162–163).

⁵⁵⁷ On the king's aim 'to create a livelier cultural atmosphere at [the Prussian] court', see David Barclay, *Frederick William IV and the Prussian Monarchy 1840–1861* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 110.

⁵⁵⁸ As reported by Hans von Bülow in *Ausgewählte Schriften: 1850–92* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1896), p. 371, from a review of a performance of Mendelssohn's *Lobgesang* at Crystal Palace under August Manns written for *Signale* 35, no. 64 (1877); Cited in Brown, *Portrait*, p. 516, note 1.

understanding both the composer and his works according to ‘sublime’ standards? Due to the significant relationship between the concept of genius and sublime aesthetics (as discussed in previous chapters) the response to this question must address two positions for sublime traits.

First, sublime traits have been identified *in the composer*. In the process of composing the *Lobgesang*, Mendelssohn continued to incarnate key aspects of the sublime through his ‘genius’ – including seemingly divine creative power, artistic originality, and a unifying imagination. These traits convinced many that Mendelssohn possessed the ‘great mind’ (Macfarren) of a ‘Great Man’ (Carlyle), one able to recognize the sublime in existing works of art, conceive new artistic ideas, and produce – through seemingly boundless musical memory and skill – new artistic works.

Second, sublime traits are represented *in the work*. When understood according to early nineteenth-century views of sublimity, Mendelssohn’s *Lobgesang* was a work that presented ‘ancient’ musical genres as well as clearly ‘sublime’ ideas – including creation, light, and revelation – in a large-scale musical work composed for a grand occasion. Even though the work was misunderstood (or selfishly derided) by reviewers, its status as a ‘sublime work of genius’ was obvious to a wide range of listeners. Thus, Mendelssohn’s *Lobgesang*, both as artistic process and product, serves to display ‘sublimity’ and confirm ‘genius’.

In Chapter Six, another facet of Mendelssohn’s ‘genius’ will be explored: his genius for emotional expression. As his mentor Goethe had written in one of his many ‘maxims’, ‘It is now obvious that when men of truly poetical genius appear, they will describe more of the particular feelings of the inner life than of the general facts of the great life of the world’.⁵⁵⁹ I will endeavour to show how Mendelssohn fulfils Goethe’s prophetic maxim, expressing particular feelings not through the poetic word, but through music. In order to understand Mendelssohn’s expressive capabilities, I will first explore the thoughts and writings of another great influence on Mendelssohn: Friedrich Schleiermacher, the ‘theologian of feeling’.

Then, in a more detailed analysis, the 1843 and 1844 psalm intonations written for the Berlin Cathedral Choir will be compared. In these liturgical works,

⁵⁵⁹ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Maxims and Reflections of Goethe* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1906), Maxim 423, pp. 155–156.

Mendelssohn managed to use a wide variety of historical styles to convey 'genuine' emotions and achieving edifying effects, despite significant stylistic constraints imposed by the Cathedral clergy.

Finally, brief observations on Mendelssohn's last complete oratorio will be made, demonstrating how *Elijah* exemplifies his unique ability to unify contrasting musical material in a dramatic work intended to convey sublime ideas. The documented reception of this work will provide ample evidence for the recognition of Mendelssohn's 'genius' beyond his death in 1847.

6.

Sublime Feelings and Genius in the Berlin Psalm Introits and *Elijah*

... Sublimity raises them near to the greatness of the mind of god.

– Longinus, *On the Sublime*⁵⁶⁰

... [E]very fine feeling comes completely to the fore only when we have found the right musical expression of it.

– Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christmas Eve* (1806)⁵⁶¹

Save, perhaps, for the advent of Handel among us, no more important event than the rise of Mendelssohn ever occurred in the history of English music.

– *The Musical Times* (1 August 1887)⁵⁶²

In this chapter, I continue to advance a view of Mendelssohn's late aesthetics informed by eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century aspects of the sublime. First, I will relate Mendelssohn's unique combination of an expressivist aesthetic with edifying intentions to the thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher. By establishing analogies between Schleiermacher's 'theology of feeling' and Mendelssohn's aesthetic views, the composer's competing aesthetic priorities will be understood as part of his desire to communicate 'genuine' feeling and promote edifying devotion.

Then, analyses of Mendelssohn's psalm introits for the Berlin Cathedral (1843–1844) will demonstrate these 'Schleiermacherite' aesthetic commitments. I will show that the composer's first works written for liturgical use combine 'ancient' devices with expressive 'romantic' means to communicate the 'immediate' feelings and sublime ideas inherent in the psalm texts.

Thirdly, I will survey the continual attribution of 'genius' to Mendelssohn, both in England and Germany, particularly in regard to the reception of his oratorio

⁵⁶⁰ Longinus, *On the Sublime*, Chapter 36.1, translated by Malcolm Heath in 'Longinus and the Ancient Sublime', p. 23.

⁵⁶¹ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christmas Eve: A Dialogue*, trans. Terrence N. Tice (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), p. 29.

⁵⁶² 'Victorian Music (Concluded)', *The Musical Times* 28/534 (1 August 1887), p. 465; Quoted in Eatock, *Victorian England*, p. 133.

Elijah. I will show that *Elijah* is more than just another work in this historic genre. Instead, the oratorio is a work of biblical and Handelian sublimity that also evidences Mendelssohn's compositional innovation and advancement. In contrast to the 'narrative of decline' (discussed in Chapter Five), Mendelssohn's last oratorio will serve as evidence of an upward trajectory in the composer's artistic output, even at the end of his life.

1. The Expressive Communication of Sublime Feelings

In a letter to Pastor Julius Schubring written on 18 November 1830, Mendelssohn declared himself 'a follower of Schleiermacher'.⁵⁶³ This statement, along with other biographical details, has led various scholars to connect Mendelssohn's aesthetics views with the famous Berlin theologian. Recent examples include Appold, who connects Mendelssohn's descriptions of landscapes in letters from 1822 and 1831 to Schleiermacher's concept of 'intuition of the universe'.⁵⁶⁴ Also, Botstein, in his study of 'The Origins of Mendelssohn's Aesthetic Outlook', briefly points out 'the affinity' between Schleiermacher and Mendelssohn 'concerning the relationship between music and religion'. He then identifies common views on aesthetic perception and contemplation in the two which are anticipated in the writing of Felix's grandfather Moses Mendelssohn.⁵⁶⁵ In a later essay, Botstein explicitly identifies one view of Mendelssohn's as 'following Schleiermacher': namely, how 'the temporal experience of music, even in a completely secular context' enabled a transcendent experience with divine grace beyond the limits of reason.⁵⁶⁶

This section seeks to explicate the connection between theologian and composer in order to explain the expressivist aspect of Mendelssohn's late aesthetic thought, thus providing a balance to his Goethe-inspired historicism. By exploring

⁵⁶³ Felix Mendelssohn, Letter to Julius Schubring from Rome on 18 November 1830, in *Briefwechsel zwischen Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy und Julius Schubring*, Hg. Von Julius Schubring (Leipzig: Duncker and Humbolt, 1892), pp. 13–16; Quoted in Appold, 'Mendelssohn's Theological Friendship', p. 33, Note 34. Although Mendelssohn did not attend Schleiermacher's lectures while a student in Berlin, Schleiermacher did attend Mendelssohn's 1829 performance of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* with the Berlin Singakademie. See Todd, *MLM*, pp. 197–198 and Applegate, *Bach in Berlin*, pp. 38 and 228.

⁵⁶⁴ Appold, 'Mendelssohn's Theological Friendship', p. 31; Quoting Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans. Crouter (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 104.

⁵⁶⁵ Botstein, 'Neoclassicism, Romanticism, and Emancipation', p. 5.

⁵⁶⁶ Botstein, 'Wagner as Mendelssohn', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*, ed. Mercer-Taylor, p. 259.

Schleiermacher's views on religious feeling, rhetorical acts, and edification, and then presenting three key analogies between Schleiermacher's theology and Mendelssohn's aesthetic views, the composer's particular understanding of musical expression will be made clearer. Also, the composer's commitment to the musical expression of ineffable ideas and feelings will reveal a continued connection to sublime aesthetics.

1.1. Schleiermacher on Religious Feeling, Music, and Edification

In 1799, Schleiermacher first published *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, a work that grew out of his years of debates and discussions with the Romantic circle and was addressed to enlightened thinkers now sceptical of traditional religion.⁵⁶⁷ It is here that Schleiermacher defines religion's essence as 'neither thinking nor acting, but intuition and feeling'.⁵⁶⁸ He later revised this definition to emphasize the 'immediate perception' (1806) or 'consciousness' (1821) of 'the universal existence of all finite things, in and through the Infinite'.⁵⁶⁹ This 'perception' or 'consciousness' could not be separated from 'feeling' (*Gefühl*).

What does Schleiermacher mean by *Gefühl*? Jeremy Begbie states that 'By *Gefühl*, Schleiermacher does not mean merely an emotion. Feeling includes emotion, but it is wider and deeper, for it is a profound sense of the *whole* of us being in relation to the infinite'.⁵⁷⁰ Bowie defines Schleiermacher's *Gefühl* as 'immediate ... unreflected, self-consciousness'.⁵⁷¹ According to Philip Stoltzfus, *Gefühl* 'functions in [Schleiermacher's] texts as a way to qualify visually oriented *Anschauungen* [intuitions] by highlighting [expressivist] Orpheus qualities of nonlinguistic and nonimagerial temporal immediacy'.⁵⁷² He also sees particular advantages for Schleiermacher favouring *Gefühl* over other terms in his discussion of the essence of

⁵⁶⁷ See Richard Crouter, 'Introduction' to Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 13–18 for a detailed account of the book's genesis.

⁵⁶⁸ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, trans. Crouter, p. 102.

⁵⁶⁹ Crouter, 'Introduction', p. 62. See pp. 59–73 for a summary of changes in the 1806, 1821, and following editions of *On Religion*.

⁵⁷⁰ Jeremy S. Begbie, *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), p. 146.

⁵⁷¹ Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*, p. 155.

⁵⁷² Stoltzfus, *Theology as Performance*, pp. 68–69. Later, in *Der christliche Glaube (The Christian Faith, 1821–1822/1830–1831)*, Schleiermacher would make much of the 'feeling of absolute dependence' that is the basis for religion, clarifying that *Gefühl* was not a specific emotion, but a general state of religious consciousness. See Stoltzfus, p. 94.

religion; specifically, he lists ‘(1) an immediate “arousing” from within, (2) a potential for “expression” in a nonparticular and communicatory manner, and (3) a fruitful location for the construction activity of theological expression’.⁵⁷³ This first aspect of *Gefühl* – ‘an immediate “arousing” from within’ – is particularly significant for his view of religious feeling.

In the *Speeches*, Schleiermacher makes it clear that ‘immediate’ personal feelings are essential for true religion. In his second speech (‘On the Essence of Religion’), he critiques those who have only ‘mimetically reproduced’ *Gefühle*: ‘You have memory and imitation, but no religion. You have not produced the intuitions for which you know the formulas, but have learned them by heart and preserved them, and your feelings are mimetically reproduced like alien physiognomies, and for just that reason are caricatures’.⁵⁷⁴ As Stoltzfus states, for Schleiermacher ‘Intuition of the universe is not a matter of *mimēsis* or *anamnesis*. ... His aesthetic model for religious intuition will not be one involving the retrieval of some preexisting form’.⁵⁷⁵ Thus it is not sufficient to simply reiterate creedal formulas or replicate seemingly expressive actions in one’s religious observances.

Schleiermacher’s emphasis on such an ‘immediate’ experience of *Gefühl* can also be seen in a sermon given on 18 October 1818 based on Psalm 68 (vv. 3–4), in which he preached against *falsehood* in religious feeling and the need for *living* (not slothful) emotion in worship. He proclaimed that ‘we cannot rejoice on account of anything being past’.⁵⁷⁶ Furthermore, he emphasizes ‘joy from the heart’ as a life-filled joy, not a slothful experience that fears and shuns life.⁵⁷⁷ Religious feeling must be based on present and personal experiences of emotion.

However, true religious feelings could be stimulated by external means. First, speeches and sermons, as rhetorical acts, could stimulate religious feeling. As Barth observes in Schleiermacher’s *Speeches (On Religion)*, ‘The speaker himself assures us that religion must be communicated in a lofty style. It is appropriate to reach the very summit of what is possible in speech, to use all the fullness and majesty of

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁴ Schleiermacher, *On Religion* (Crouter trans.), p. 114.

⁵⁷⁵ Stoltzfus, *Theology as Performance*, p. 68.

⁵⁷⁶ Friedrich Schleiermacher, ‘Rejoicing Before God’, In *Selected Sermons of Schleiermacher*, trans. Mary F. Wilson (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1890), pp. 187–188.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 189–190. Specifically, he asserts that our joy must be free from falsehood and the need to feel convictions strongly to really rejoice before God.

human oratory'.⁵⁷⁸ These 'speeches' to religion's 'cultured despisers' were intended to communicate in such a fashion as to convince religion's critics to reassess their stance and recognize their own religious nature.

Likewise, Schleiermacher's sermons were intended to be effective rhetoric acts. In *Christian Faith*, Schleiermacher classifies preaching as 'rhetorical language' that could accomplish a 'directly arousing affect'.⁵⁷⁹ In his *Practical Theology*, he taught that 'The rhetorical organization relies on the fact that in each moment something happens for the effect [on the hearers] ...'.⁵⁸⁰ For Schleiermacher, the purpose of the sermon was, as Buran Phillips states, 'to awaken the religious sensibilities'.⁵⁸¹ In Schleiermacher's words from a sermon on Colossians 1:3–8, this awakening 'create[s] room in ourselves and all others for the spiritual life ... [by creating] the conditions by which those gathered might have their own predisposition to religion cultivated and stimulated'.⁵⁸² Thus, a sermon was designed to *affect* the listener with religious feeling.⁵⁸³

Yet, in Schleiermacher's thought, a well-crafted sermon was not enough. Music, as a rhetorical act and communicative activity, was crucial to the representation and stimulation of religious feeling. The close affinity between music and religious feeling is evident in Schleiermacher's early writings, including his *Speeches*. In Speech II, in an attempt to relate how religion is both universal and yet has 'endless variety', he states, 'Were I to compare religion in this respect with anything it would be with music, which indeed is otherwise closely connected with it'.⁵⁸⁴ In Speeches III and IV, he referred to 'the music of my religion' and 'the music

⁵⁷⁸ Barth, *Theology of Schleiermacher*, p. 246.

⁵⁷⁹ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Harper Torchbook edition, New York: Harper & Row, 1963), Section 18.3; Quoted in Buran F. Phillips, *Friedrich Schleiermacher's Interpretation of the Epistle to the Colossians: A Series of Sermons (1830–1831)* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), p. 23. This is based on his three types of religious language: (1) poetic, (2) rhetorical, and (3) didactic (p. 22).

⁵⁸⁰ Schleiermacher, *Practical Theology*, in *Friedrich Schleiermachers sämtliche Werke* (Berlin: George Reimer, 1834–1864), I, 13:257; Quoted in Dawn DeVries, *Jesus Christ in the Preaching of Calvin and Schleiermacher* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), p. 56.

⁵⁸¹ Phillips, *Interpretation of ... Colossians*, p. 24.

⁵⁸² *Ibid.*

⁵⁸³ Mendelssohn himself seems to have been affected by Schleiermacher's sermons. According to Dinglinger, 'due to aesthetic categories Mendelssohn appreciated Schleiermacher's sermons as excellent speeches' (*Studien*, pp. 159–160).

⁵⁸⁴ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, trans. John Oman (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., Ltd., 1893), p. 51.

of sublime feelings', desiring that such music would resonate in a 'holy person'.⁵⁸⁵ Here, the 'orator' of the *Speeches* sought to use the metaphor of music to convince his sceptical 'hearers' that religion was not to be divorced from artistic experiences of sublimity.

In *Christmas Eve* – Schleiermacher's early dialogue contrasting the theological monologues of men with the religious feelings of women – he uses music repeatedly to signify religious feeling and devotion. In Chapter Two, a discussion of music leads the 'serenely religious' Eduard to declare that '...it is precisely to religious feeling that music is most closely related'.⁵⁸⁶ Eduard adds that 'particular events are only the passing notes for music. Its true content is the great chords of our mind and heart, which marvelously and with the most varied voices ever resolve themselves in the same harmony, in which only the major and minor keys are to be distinguished ...'.⁵⁸⁷ Likewise, in Chapter Three, after the young mother Agnes narrates her experience of a baby's baptism on Christmas Eve, she states to the skeptical Leonhardt, '...I do not know how to describe with words how deeply and ardently I then felt that all radiant, serene joy is religion; that love, pleasure, and devotion are tones making up a perfect harmony, tones that fit in with each other in any phrasing and in full chord'.⁵⁸⁸ Here music – particularly harmony – is used as a symbol for true inner experiences that relate to the universal.

Furthermore, in Schleiermacher's writings music not only signifies religious feeling, it conveys it.⁵⁸⁹ In *Christmas Eve*, music's dual role is most evident when presented by Sophie, the young girl with precocious musical gifts. In Chapter One, Sophie is said to sing 'with devoutness', and her singing is compared to 'a holy kiss'.⁵⁹⁰ In Chapter Two, reflecting on the experience, the hostess Ernestine

⁵⁸⁵ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, trans. Crouter, pp. 142, 185. For a summary of the musical metaphors used by Schleiermacher in his *Speeches*, see Kramer, *The Idea of Kunstreligion*, pp. 54–55.

⁵⁸⁶ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christmas Eve: A Dialogue*, trans. Terrence N. Tice (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), p. 29.

⁵⁸⁷ Schleiermacher, *Christmas Eve*, pp. 31–32. In 1826, Schleiermacher added to Eduard's speech the declaration that 'music such as Handel's *Messiah* is, for me, like a sweeping proclamation of Christianity as a whole' (p. 31). Schleiermacher had first performed *Messiah* with the Berlin Singakademie on Good Friday, April 5, 1822, and had sung the oratorio often thereafter (p. 35, note 95).

⁵⁸⁸ Schleiermacher, *Christmas Eve*, p. 52.

⁵⁸⁹ As James Jirtle explains, 'music in *Christmas Eve* functions as a vehicle for the feeling of self-consciousness or absolute dependence that forms the basis of religion' ('Understanding Music's Theological Significance: A Kantian Approach' (Ph.D. Thesis, Durham University, 2010), p. 124.

⁵⁹⁰ Schleiermacher, *Christmas Eve*, p. 6.

comments that ‘...it was the whole perspective of the child that moved me so’.⁵⁹¹ Likewise, Eduard then claims to owe the consciousness of his mood – ‘the joy of pure serenity’ – to ‘the fact that our little one has invited us to express it in music, for every fine feeling comes completely to the fore only when we have found the right musical expression of it’.⁵⁹² Clearly, in Schleiermacher’s writing, music has a significant relationship to religion, metaphorically representing ‘sublime feelings’ (as in the *Speeches* and *Christmas Eve*), and, through actual musical experiences, conveying and stimulating the ‘feeling of self-consciousness’ (*Gefühl*) that is the essence of religion.

The result of this stimulation of religious feeling was a positive one: it was edifying, and it cultivated religious devotion (*Andacht*). This was true whether the religious feeling was produced by preaching or music. As Phillips states, ‘...the ultimate purpose of Christian preaching, edification, is not that of a purely aesthetic operation. Edification, for Schleiermacher, is also a moral activity, for the decisive aim of rhetorical language is not merely to arouse sentiment but to stimulate and have an effect upon the will’.⁵⁹³ The means of preaching were rhetorical; its singular goal was edification.

In Schleiermacher’s *Christian Ethics* (published posthumously in 1843), he describes music as ‘productive’ activity. He states that ‘It is only in the case of music, as it is manifest as religious presentation, whereby the whole congregation can be productive, and also by means of the general social form of this art, that general activity can be produced’.⁵⁹⁴ This is contrasted with other activities (such as card playing) which are deemed unproductive. Thus, music was valued due to its ability to produce *Andacht*, which, according to Schleiermacher, ‘happens when you lose yourself in the infinite’.⁵⁹⁵ And, according to Schleiermacher, this devotion – in

⁵⁹¹ Ibid., p. 13.

⁵⁹² Ibid.

⁵⁹³ Phillips, *Interpretation of ... Colossians*, p. 24.

⁵⁹⁴ Schleiermacher, *Christian Ethics*, trans. Brandt, p. 183.

⁵⁹⁵ In his unpublished notes, Schleiermacher described *Andacht* as

... a state in which we find ourselves subordinate to something or someone different It happens when you lose yourself in the infinite In the early development of this feeling we also find that a certain attachment to the sublime develops which explains why sites were chosen for the worship of the Supreme Being at which the environment of nature must produce the feeling of the sublime.

its simplest form – is best expressed not in words, but ‘without language in sound and gesture’.⁵⁹⁶ Thus, this theologian of feeling saw music as a potential stimulant for, as well as an expression of, religious devotion.

1.2. Mendelssohn on ‘Genuine’ Feelings and Edification

Mendelssohn, a self-declared ‘follower’ of Schleiermacher, also valued expressions of edifying sublime feelings. But how did the composer follow the theologian in his views on feeling, music, and edification? Three key analogies will help clarify this connection, and provide keener insight into Mendelssohn’s aesthetic thought.

First, just as Schleiermacher insisted on the ‘immediate’ experience of *Gefühl* as part of true religious experience, Mendelssohn insisted on the ‘genuine’ expression of personal feeling in musical composition. Despite Heinrich Heine’s criticisms denying ‘truthfulness’ and ‘earnestness’ in Mendelssohn’s music (in 1842 and 1844), the composer consistently demanded honest personal expression in his music.⁵⁹⁷ As Mendelssohn wrote to Zelter in his letter from Rome on 18 December 1830 (discussed in Chapter Five in relation to historicism), ‘Nothing is valid except that which has flowed in deepest sincerity [*Ernst*] from the innermost soul...’.⁵⁹⁸ Likewise, he wrote to his friend Eduard Devriest in 1831, stating:

I look upon it as my duty to compose just how and what my heart indites ... – to write only as I feel, to have less regard than ever to outward results, and when I have produced a piece that has flowed from my heart – whether it is afterwards to bring me fame, honours, orders, or snuff-boxes, does not concern me.⁵⁹⁹

Berlioz had accused Mendelssohn of being ‘too fond of the dead’ in his music, presumably implying that his works followed models of deceased composers more than his own living inspiration; but according to Feder, ‘Even when imitating or reviving older forms, ... Mendelssohn went decisively beyond traditionalism, historicism, and eclecticism ... by the animation that corresponded to his work ethic.

See *Entwurf eines Systems der Sittenlehre. Aus Schleiermachers handschriftlichem Nachlasse*, ed. Alex Schweizer (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1835), part one (‘Lehre vom höchsten Gut’), section 3 (‘Das subjective Bewußtsein auf seinen höheren Stufen’), p. 211 (here translated by Sabine Koch).

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 196.

⁵⁹⁷ Heinrich Heine, *Lutezia* 9 (Supplement: Musical Season of 1844), p. 400 and *Lutezia* 43 (Paris, middle of April 1842), p. 227 and 224. See Feder, ‘Sacred Music’, p. 261.

⁵⁹⁸ Mendelssohn, letter to Zelter of 18 December 1830, *Reisebriefe*, pp. 96–97; Translated in Garratt, ‘Musical Historicism’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*, ed. Mercer-Taylor, p. 66.

⁵⁹⁹ Eduard Devriest, *Meine Erinnerungen an Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy und seine Briefe an mich*, trans. Natalia Macfarren (London: 1869), p. 113; Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, pp. 314–315.

... Personal emotion was always the decisive point for Mendelssohn ...'.⁶⁰⁰ Whereas other composers may have exhibited impressive displays and powerful effects, for Mendelssohn (as Brown asserts), 'it was not the strength of the feeling that was important, but its genuineness'.⁶⁰¹ Therefore, following Schleiermacher's emphasis on 'immediate' feelings, Mendelssohn sought to express through music the genuine feelings he experienced while composing.

In a second analogy, just as Schleiermacher saw music as a rhetorical act particularly capable of stimulating particularly religious feeling, Mendelssohn believed strongly in music's ability to communicate ideas and feelings to listeners. This conviction is most evident in his much-discussed 1842 letter to Marc-André Souchay regarding proposed titles for some of his *Lieder ohne Worte* for piano, where he asserts that the titles are not necessary because his music can 'arouse the same feelings' without the need for words.⁶⁰² As he stated to Souchay, words 'remain ambiguous' but 'the music of the song alone can awaken the same ideas and the same feelings in one mind as in another, – a feeling which is not, however, expressed by the same words'.⁶⁰³

Mendelssohn's brief reply to Souchay's suggestions is rich with expressivist claims and implications. First, he claims that his *Lieder ohne Worte* could each express *definite* thoughts. As he stated to Souchay, 'What the music I love expresses to me are thoughts not too *indefinite* for words, but rather too *definite*'.⁶⁰⁴ Even Souchay's most precise musical or programmatic descriptions of his *Lieder* (such as 'a *par-force* hunt') are seen as lacking in specificity. It is not that Mendelssohn denied any ability to identify the associations of his various songs, but that Souchay's suggestions were not precise enough. As Todd keenly observes when

⁶⁰⁰ Feder, 'Sacred Music', p. 263.

⁶⁰¹ Brown, *Portrait*, p. 318. Brown's statement is made in the context of a summary of Mendelssohn's views of Berlioz's music.

⁶⁰² Felix Mendelssohn, Letter to Marc-André Souchay from Berlin on 15 October 1842, trans. John Michael Cooper, in Strunk, *Source Readings*, p. 1201. Compare Brown's translation of Mendelssohn's letter in *Portrait*, p. 316.

⁶⁰³ *Ibid.* Note that Mendelssohn concluded his letter with another statement emphasizing the ambiguity of words: 'Will you accept this as my answer to your question? It is at any rate the only one I know how to give – though these, too, are nothing but ambiguous words...'

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

comparing the *Lieder ohne Worte* with similar Lieder with words, the songs were ‘a fertile testing ground for the definitude of musical expression’.⁶⁰⁵

Secondly, Mendelssohn claimed that his *Lieder ohne Worte* could each express unambiguous feelings. These feelings were too complex and too diverse to fit Souchay’s suggested ‘meanings’.⁶⁰⁶ They could only be communicated by the music that he wrote: ‘just the song as it stands there’ (‘gerade das Lied wie es dasteht’).⁶⁰⁷ In Mendelssohn’s view, ‘good music’ – or ‘genuine music’ – could arouse these feelings without the need for titles or descriptions.⁶⁰⁸ Since words were often ambiguous, Mendelssohn implies that music was a more effective means of communicating.

Based on mention of Souchay’s specific title suggestions, Mendelssohn seems to have confidence in music’s ability to convey not only *Gefühl* in a religious sense (‘praise of God’), but *Gefühle* – a wide variety of feelings including those associated with particular experiences (e.g. a *par-force* hunt) or moods (e.g. ‘melancholy’). As Schleiermacher’s Eduard had declared in *Christmas Eve*, ‘every fine feeling comes completely to the fore only when we have found the right musical expression of it’.⁶⁰⁹ Mendelssohn’s comments imply that he, like Schleiermacher, saw music as ‘a highly developed language’ capable of presenting ‘a direct expression of feeling and mood’.⁶¹⁰ While Mendelssohn’s view of the expressive power of music was more general (not limited to ‘religious feeling’), what is clearly analogous between the two is an appreciation of music’s communicative *precision* in its immediate presentation of feelings.

⁶⁰⁵ Todd, *MLM*, p. 443.

⁶⁰⁶ Souchay’s suggested meanings for each song in the first four volumes of the *Lieder ohne Worte* included emotional descriptions such as ‘melancholy’ and ‘anxious expectation’, programmatic descriptions such as ‘a *par-force* hunt’, devotional descriptions such as ‘praise of the goodness of God’, and specific references to types of songs such as ‘Venetian gondolier-song’, ‘lullaby’, and ‘love song’. See Souchay’s original letter in Strunk, *Source Readings*, p. 1200.

⁶⁰⁷ Mendelssohn, Letter to Souchay, in Strunk, *Source Readings*, p. 1201.

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁹ Schleiermacher, *Christmas Eve*, p. 29. Stoltzfus clarifies Eduard’s ‘every fine feeling’ ‘not as an *Affektenlehre* and thus some type of imitation theory of piety. Rather, his appeal is to consider musical expression as a constructive way to think about religious consciousness in general’ (*Theology as Performance*, p. 83).

⁶¹⁰ Stoltzfus, *Theology as Performance*, p. 251, and p. 88. This second phrase is taken from Stoltzfus’ summary of Schleiermacher’s lectures on aesthetics (*Ästhetik*) given in 1819, 1825, and 1832–33 and published posthumously. See ‘*Ästhetik*: Musical *Gefühl* as expression of the “Infinite”’, pp. 88–92.

Lastly, Mendelssohn clearly asserts that his *Lieder ohne Worte* were capable of expressing things unable to be expressed through words. In his letter to Souchay, ‘good music’ could ‘fill one’s soul with a thousand things better than words’ and enable both he and the listener to ‘understand the music properly’.⁶¹¹ The composer further explained to Souchay that

if I happen to have had a specific word or specific words in mind for one or another of these songs, I can never divulge them to anyone, because the same word means one thing to one person and something else to another, because only the song can say the same thing, can arouse the same feelings in one person as in another – a feeling which is not, however, expressed by the same words.⁶¹²

This assertion (sometimes read as a predecessor to modern linguistic deconstructionism) implies that Mendelssohn’s view of music’s expressive power aligned with Schleiermacher’s understanding of music’s capability to evoke ‘sublime’ feelings: ones that were beyond expression in words alone. As J.P. Lyser wrote in 1842, ‘...Mendelssohn’s *Lieder ohne Worte* could be more correctly labeled *Empfindungen wofür keine Worte gibt* [Feelings for which there are no words]...’ because, for Mendelssohn, music was capable of expressing *precisely the ineffable*.⁶¹³

In a third analogy, just as Schleiermacher encouraged rhetorical acts that would stimulate devotion, Mendelssohn was committed to writing music that could edify listeners through the communication of sublime ideas and feelings. For Mendelssohn, the purpose of music was not simply personal musical expression. It was not ‘art for art’s sake’. Neither was it ‘communication for communication’s sake’. Mendelssohn’s desire was that these authentic feelings communicated through music would edify. As Christian Riedel affirms, ‘Mendelssohn agreed with Schleiermacher’s theology of emotions, which aimed at edification’.⁶¹⁴ Brown recognizes this intent in Mendelssohn’s works, stating that

...in his composition, Mendelssohn aimed to convey all those qualities or feelings that he felt to be healthy and life-enhancing, from noble profundity,

⁶¹¹ Mendelssohn, Letter to Souchay, in Strunk, *Source Readings*, p. 1201.

⁶¹² Ibid.

⁶¹³ J.P. Lyser, *Allgemeine Wiener Musikzeitung* II (1842) No. 154, pp. 617–618; Quoted in Todd “‘GERADE DAS LIED WIE ES DASTEHT’”, p. 361.

⁶¹⁴ Christian Rudolf Riedel, Preface to *Der 115. Psalm* (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1989), p. 4.

heartfelt grief and tender yearning, through passionate enthusiasm to simple merriment and *joie de vivre*.⁶¹⁵

Likewise, Toews asserts that Mendelssohn judged ‘the effectiveness of musical composition and performance ... by their ability to moralize or edify the audience, to elevate individual listeners into the unity and spirituality of the “idea”’.⁶¹⁶ Thus, for Mendelssohn, it was important that his music communicated edifying ideas and feelings.

Furthermore, if these feelings were of a religious nature, they could lead to *Andacht* and moral improvement in his listeners. Felix and his sister Fanny remembered how such feelings had been stirred at the 1829 performance of Bach’s *St Matthew Passion*, which Felix conducted. Fanny described the atmosphere as being ‘like a church’ when ‘the deepest stillness, the most solemn devotion (*Andacht*) overcame the gathering, interrupted only by the occasional involuntary cries of deeply moved feeling’.⁶¹⁷ In these representative comments regarding the performance, it is not the libretto by Picander (Christian Friedrich Henrici (1700–1764)) that is singled out as inspiring devotion. Bach’s music had served to arouse devout religious feelings.

Whether in rehearsal, at church, or at a concert, music could inspire *Andacht* in listeners. This conviction remained strong in Mendelssohn after his experiences with Bach’s *St Matthew Passion*. In a letter to Franz Hauser (dated 16 April 1830), Mendelssohn describes how ‘... already after only a few rehearsals ... [the choir] sang with an *Andacht* as if they were in church’. He further states, ‘... I have never seen audiences so silent and overwhelmingly touched. The public felt that it was not music and concert but rather religion and church’.⁶¹⁸ Music, for Mendelssohn, was art intended not for entertainment, but edification.

This concern for edification is increasingly evident in Mendelssohn’s choral works from the 1840s. In compositions such as the *Lobgesang* (discussed in Chapter Five) and the oratorio *Elijah*, the composer clearly seeks to edify his listeners

⁶¹⁵ Brown, *Portrait*, p. 314.

⁶¹⁶ Toews, ‘Musical Historicism’, p. 185.

⁶¹⁷ Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, Letter to Klingemann from 22 March 1829, in Sebastian Hensel, *Die Familie Mendelssohn 1729–1847* (1879; Reprint, Frankfurt am Main, 1995), p. 239; Quoted in Applegate, *Bach in Berlin*, p. 230.

⁶¹⁸ Mendelssohn, *Sämtliche Briefe*, i, p. 522; Translation adapted by Sabina Koch from Kramer, *The Idea of Kunstreligion*, p. 171.

through music that utilizes a variety of venerated historical styles and forms. In the next section of this chapter, I will analyse four liturgical Psalm settings Mendelssohn wrote for the Berlin Cathedral in 1843 and 1844. Due to their origins as a royal commission and the demands of their liturgical context, these works provide unique views into Mendelssohn's ability to appropriate historical styles and forms while maintaining his 'Schleiermacherite' commitment to 'genuine' expressions of edifying emotion and sublime concepts.

2. 'Schleiermacherite' Values in Mendelssohn's Psalm Intros

In the 1843 and 1844 psalm intros written for the Berlin Cathedral Choir, Mendelssohn used a wide variety of historical styles to convey 'genuine' emotions and achieve edifying effects, despite significant stylistic constraints imposed by the Cathedral clergy. Mendelssohn's psalm intros for the Berlin Liturgy demonstrate his aesthetic priorities and 'Schleiermacherite' commitments by (1) unifying 'ancient' a cappella music, Handelian techniques, and Classical form; (2) communicating the 'immediate' feelings of the psalm texts through musical contrasts; and (3) emphasizing sublime ideas inherent in the psalm texts. Over the course of composing the four intros, despite his progressive attention to the aesthetic preferences of the clergy and king and the liturgical demands of the Cathedral setting, Mendelssohn shows his commitment to edify his listeners and remain true to his expressivist convictions.

2.1. 'Genuine' Feelings and Sublimity in the 1843 Psalm Intros

Mendelssohn's opportunity to write liturgical music for the revised *Agenda* of 1843 was part of a religious and cultural project begun by Prussian king Friedrich Wilhelm III (1770–1840) in the early nineteenth century. He had sought to unify the Lutheran and Reformed churches in his domain through a common liturgy based on historical research into early church liturgies. As David Barclay relates, 'At the King's behest, Lutheran and Reformed (Calvinist) denominations joined together in 1817 into a single union; and in 1822 ... he introduced a controversial liturgy (*Agende*) for use in the new Evangelical Church'.⁶¹⁹ His Union Church and revised liturgy was intended to be a fitting remembrance on the three-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, but in fact it was not until 1895 that the liturgy was passed by the General Synod and

⁶¹⁹ Barclay, *Frederick William IV*, p. 78.

incorporated into the *Service Book for the Protestant Church of Prussia*.⁶²⁰ However, according to Wolfgang Dinglinger, Friedrich Wilhelm III's liturgy received 'its liturgical place' ('ihren liturgischen Ort') when implemented by his son Friedrich Wilhelm IV in the Berlin Cathedral beginning in December of 1843.⁶²¹

Like his father, Friedrich Wilhelm IV shared an interest in historical liturgies and a desire to revive true Christian worship in his kingdom. But the son's antiquarian interests went back farther than the father's, including a fascination with the 'Apostolic Constitutions' (believed to date from the first century) and a dedication to incorporate the Psalms more prominently into the liturgy.⁶²² Dinglinger asserts that 'Friedrich Wilhelm's idea of a great Unity Church was directly related to his interest in the Psalms, which were therefore an important part of worship'.⁶²³ But beyond intellectual curiosity, Barclay reports that it was the king's 'fervent religious feelings' that inspired a desire 'to renew the spirit of early Christianity and transform Prussia into a Christian state'.⁶²⁴

This religious goal for his monarchy paralleled Friedrich Wilhelm IV's goals for enriching Prussian cultural life. He prepared to revive liturgical music by commissioning new sacred music by Mendelssohn and forming a new choir for him to direct at the Berlin Cathedral, while also giving him the title of *Generalmusikdirektor* over Prussian church music.⁶²⁵ By the end of 1843 and the beginning of Advent, the composer had written new settings of prescribed liturgical texts for the Berlin Cathedral Choir, including two psalm intros.

Mendelssohn's first psalm intros for the Berlin liturgy were settings of Psalm 2 and Psalm 98, designated for Christmas Day and New Year's Day,

⁶²⁰ See Hans-Christoph Schmidt-Lauber, 'The Lutheran Tradition in the German Lands' in *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, ed. Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 411.

⁶²¹ Dinglinger, *Studien*, pp. 156–157.

⁶²² According to Barclay, there is indirect evidence that the diplomat (and friend of the Mendelssohn family) C. K. J. Bunsen (1791–1860) acquainted Friedrich Wilhelm IV with the 'Apostolic Constitutions' and the related 'Apostolic Canons', a series of documents on church administration and structure dating from the early Christian era (*Friedrich Wilhelm IV*, p. 84).

⁶²³ Dinglinger, *Studien*, p. 156.

⁶²⁴ Barclay, *Frederick William IV*, p. 35.

⁶²⁵ For a summary of details related to Mendelssohn's appointment, see David Brodbeck, 'Forward' to *Drei Psalmen*, Op. 78 (Stuttgart: Carus-Verlag, 1998), p. vii. For a comparison of the revised Prussian *Agende* with the 1829 edition (showing the addition of the psalm introit) and lists of the specific music Mendelssohn selected for 1843 and 1844 services, see Brodbeck's article 'A Winter of Discontent: Mendelssohn and the *Berliner Domchor*', in *Mendelssohn Studies*, ed. Todd (Cambridge UP, 1991), pp. 8–9 and 17–19.

respectively. In distinct ways appropriate to their contrasting texts, Mendelssohn's settings display his ability to (1) unify 'ancient' choral textures with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century musical idioms and structures; (2) communicate the 'immediate' feelings of the psalm texts; and (3) emphasize sublime ideas inherent in the psalm texts, especially ideas related to divine sovereignty.

Mendelssohn's setting of Psalm 2 was written for double-choir and organ, although the accompaniment part is primarily supportive and never prominent. Also, there are numerous phrases that are a cappella, as the revised version for publication (Op. 78) would be in its entirety. This emphasis on a cappella textures immediately points to Mendelssohn's appropriation of 'ancient' choral sounds for his initiatory liturgical music for the Berlin Cathedral. His setting of Psalm 2 makes use of both Renaissance antiphonal textures as well as chant-like solo and unison passages. Furthermore, as the following will explain and Todd summarizes, *Psalm 2* 'fully tests the expressive range of the eight-part double choir'.⁶²⁶ The choral writing communicates 'genuine' feelings through dramatic contrasts in accord with the emotions of the psalm text, including sectional distinctions in tempo and tonality as well as more closely differentiated textures and dynamics within sections.

The first bars of the G minor *Moderato* communicate the fierce rage of the heathen through antiphonal four-part choirs calling to one another in close succession (bars 1–12) before the male voices of each choir express their rebellious plot to 'break [their] bonds asunder' ('Laßet unz zerreißen ihre Bande') in distinct chant-like phrases (bars 13–16). Their 'chants' evoke the Phrygian mode with its rising and falling semitones and (like the tenor recitative in *Lobgesang*) make dramatic use of a rising augmented fourth. (See Example 6.1.)

Example 6.1. Mendelssohn, *Psalm 2*, Chant Theme, bars 13–16

(Based on *Drei Psalmen*, Op.78, David Brodbeck (ed.) (Carus-Verlag, 1998))

CHOIR I

Las-set uns zer-rei-ßen ih-re Ban - de!

CHOIR II

und von uns wer-fen ih-re Sei - le!

⁶²⁶ Todd, *MLM*, p. 465.

Their plan is then scoffed at by the full eight-part choir singing in a triumphant *forte* of how the one that dwells in heaven will deride them with laughter ('Aber der im Himmel wohnt, lachet ihrer, und der Herr spottet ihrer'), a text that is repeated to demonstrate mocking scorn (bars 17–30). After other interjections of men's unison chant (bars 31–32 and 35–36, again emphasizing the Phrygian semitone), the Lord's sobering displeasure is related in sombre *piano* dynamics by the full choir (bars 37–41).⁶²⁷

In the E-flat major *Andante* section that follows (bars 42–65), Mendelssohn employs solo voices to relate God's pronouncement that 'he has set [his] King on his holy mount Zion' ('ich habe meinen König eingesetzt auf meinem heiligen Berge Zion'). After which a *tutti* homophonic passage delivers the Lord's declaration: 'You are my Son, today have I begotten you' ('Du bist mein Sohn, heute hab' ich dich gezeuget') (bars 52–65). These combined forces then promise the Anointed Son the heathen themselves and the ends of the world as his possession (bars 58–65). In the C minor *Con moto* section (bars 66–104), the two choirs return to the opening antiphonal texture on frightening words of the Lord's judgment (v. 9), repeated at a *forte* dynamic and closer imitative intervals.

This is followed by the concluding G minor section (bars 105–142) with its subdued warning commanding the kings of the earth to 'be wise' ('lasset euch nun weisen'), to 'serve the Lord with fear' ('Dienet dem Herrn mit Fürcht'), and (repeatedly) 'kiss the Son, lest He be angry' ('Küsst den Sohn, daß er nicht zürne'). These warnings are delivered first by monophonic 'chants' in the upper voices (bars 105–108) and lower voices (bars 109–112, again emphasizing the Phrygian semitone), then carefully-controlled homophony (bars 113–122). Finally, the Psalm setting concludes with the contrasting idea that 'All are blessed, who trust in him' ('Aber wohl allen, die auf ihn trauen'), which Mendelssohn sets three times in the first choir (bars 129–142). However, he continues a remnant of the word of warning in the basses of the second choir: 'for his scorn will soon rekindle' ('den sein Zorn wird bald anbrennen'). Clearly, Mendelssohn's setting seeks to evoke the range of feeling in the Psalm text through dramatic musical contrasts.

Furthermore, Mendelssohn's careful attention to the psalm text allows him not only to express emotions inherent in the text, but also to emphasize sublime ideas; in particular he highlights the theme of divine sovereignty over (1) human

⁶²⁷ See Table 6.1 for a formal outline of *Psalm 2*.

rebellion (bars 1–41), (2) heathen peoples and lands (bars 58–65), and (3) curses and blessing (bars 105–142). Also, in case there was any doubt concerning the identity of the ‘Son’ who is to reign as ‘King on Zion’s hill’ (vv. 6–7), Mendelssohn followed this psalm introit not with ‘the traditional Lesser Doxology’, but with the singing of Handel’s ‘For Unto Us a Child is Born’ chorus from *Messiah*.⁶²⁸ Thus, Mendelssohn evoked the much-appreciated Handelian sublime as a means to confirm the divine sovereignty of the anointed ‘Son’ whose birth was being celebrated that day.

The effect of Mendelssohn’s setting, including its allusions to ‘ancient’ styles, was not lost on those attending the service. According to Fanny, Felix’s *Psalm* 2 setting was ‘very beautiful, very Gregorian and Sistine’. However, she added that ‘Felix would rather compose for orchestra’.⁶²⁹ In his next original introit on Psalm 98 for New Year’s Day, Mendelssohn would indulge this preference for full orchestral colour as an expanded accompaniment for the Cathedral Choir.

In his second psalm introit for the Berlin Cathedral liturgy, Mendelssohn unifies even more diverse musical styles, extending beyond choral idioms to include instrumental ones. In somewhat of a reversal of the overall plan from his (more epic-scale) Symphony-Cantata *Lobgesang*, he begins his *Psalm 98* only with ‘ancient’ a cappella choral forces, but later includes an entire orchestra. Furthermore, as Dinglinger points out, Mendelssohn applies a form from instrumental music to this choral introit: Classical sonata form.⁶³⁰ His ‘Exposition’ consists of double-choirs presenting the first *Allegro* theme in D major (bars 1–61), followed by a contrasting *Andante lento* section in B minor (bars 62–88). The ‘Development’ primarily emphasizes G major (bars 89–145) and ‘develops’ primarily in musical forces as the orchestral instruments are added. Finally, bars 146–237 provide an *Allegro* ‘Recapitulation’ of the opening theme in the initial key of D major. This application of sonata form to a liturgical genre demonstrates Mendelssohn’s view of Classical form as a transcendent musical structure able to incorporate diverse historic idioms, both ‘ancient’ and ‘modern’. (See Table 6.1 for a formal outline of *Psalm 98*.)

⁶²⁸ See David Brobeck, ‘Eine Kleine Kirchenmusik: A New Canon, a Revised Cadence, and an Obscure “Coda” by Mendelssohn’, *The Journal of Musicology* 12, No. 2 (1994), pp. 181–183.

⁶²⁹ Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, Letter to Rebecka on 26 December 1843, in Sebastian Hensel, *Die Familie Mendelssohn*, Vol. 2, p. 263; Quoted in Feder, ‘Sacred Music’, pp. 268–269.

⁶³⁰ Dinglinger notes that sonata form plays a role in all of Mendelssohn’s psalm settings with orchestra. However, the structural aspects in his Psalm 98 setting are particularly clear. See Dinglinger, *Studien*, p. 168.

Yet, *Psalm 98* represents a unification of more than ‘ancient’ Renaissance choral textures and Classical form and instrumentation. The work also displays Mendelssohn’s continued emulation of Handel, beginning with his choice of key (D major) as well as timbres (especially the trumpets). Beyond these compositional choices (influenced in part by what was to follow the introit in the service), Mendelssohn follows his sublime predecessor in constructing dramatic conclusions to various sections of the work, creating distinctions from his other more reserved sections. As the following will show, Mendelssohn employs all of these contrasting musical elements to express the exuberant feelings and sublime ideas in Psalm 98.

In the ‘Exposition’, Mendelssohn unifies various choral textures and dynamic contrasts. The opening bass solo simulates a cantor calling the choir to sing ‘a new song’ (‘ein neues Lied’). When the choir enters in bar 5, it is a double choir in eight-parts, which sings a cappella for the entirety of the opening *Allegro* (bars 1–61) and *Andante lento* sections (bars 62–88). These two portions of the ‘Exposition’ are distinguished by their endings: the conclusion of the *Allegro* alternates choirs in four-part statements of ‘Singet dem Herrn...’ (bars 45–52) before joining in a grand *tutti* conclusion emulating Handel (bars 54–61); the end of the *Andante lento* contrasts dynamically through a reverent, hushed passage emphasizing how ‘all the world’s ends have seen the salvation of our God’ (‘Aller Welt Enden sehn das Heil unsers Gottes’) (bars 74–84), before a concluding section with a *tutti* swell on the repeated text (bars 85–88).

When the work continues in the *Andante con moto* (bars 89–145), Mendelssohn’s setting depicts the exhortation in the psalm text, suggesting that all the worshippers are now responding to the call to ‘Shout with joy to the Lord’ (v. 4). But in this section of timbral ‘development’, the worshippers are not only singing, but playing instruments according to the Psalm’s commands: ‘Praise the Lord with harps and with Psalms! With trumpets and trombones make a joyful noise before the Lord, to the King’ (vv. 5–6). As Fanny noted, ‘...the instruments gradually come in as they are called...’ (‘dann kommen nach und nach die Instrumente dazu, wie sie genannt werden’), first with harp accompaniment beginning in bar 89 (with organ and brass chords) and then by an increasing prominence of trumpets and trombones beginning at bar 101.⁶³¹

⁶³¹ Fanny Hensel, Letter to Rebecka on 26 December 1843, in Sebastian Hensel, *Die Familie Mendelssohn*, Vol. 2, p. 262; Quoted in Dinglinger, *Studien*, p. 161.

When Mendelssohn sets the next verses of Psalm 98 (vv. 7–9a), the full orchestra now joins, including timpani (bar 117ff). The variety of instruments helps depict seas, world, rivers, and mountains, along with all living creatures, roaring and frolicking joyfully before the Lord. Another Handelian conclusion ends this section. The musical drama builds to *fortissimo* in bar 134, arriving at the harmonic goal of the section: the A major chord; but this is contrasted with a sudden change to *piano* in the final bars, as the *tutti* singers contemplate that ‘the Lord comes to pass judgment on the world’ (‘den er kommt, das Erdreich zu richten’).

Mendelssohn concludes the entire work, as Todd has observed, in a ‘triumphant Handelian finale’ (bar 146ff).⁶³² After the ‘Intonation’ theme returns from the beginning bars, now sung not by a solo bass but by the combined ‘Männerchor’, the theme is ‘answered’ by combined choir and orchestra. A new texture – imitative polyphony – now ensues between the four sections of the combined choirs.⁶³³ This texture is then dismissed for homophonic choral writing in bold *forte* dynamics (bar 202ff) and concluding bars with exchanges between the choir and orchestra.

The mixture of historic styles in *Psalm 98*, including vocal and instrumental idioms, was designed to produce sublime and edifying effects. First, Mendelssohn’s use of a capella and antiphonal choral styles sought to impress those who admired ‘ancient’ music. This was noted by Moritz Hauptmann, who stated that the work made ‘much effect’ (‘viel Effect’) and compared the ‘declamatory choral style’ in *Psalm 98* to other musical works that were part of Friedrich Wilhelm IV’s historicist cultural project: Mendelssohn’s dramatic choruses in settings of ancient Greek plays – *Antigone*, *Oedipus*, and *Athalia*.⁶³⁴

Secondly, Mendelssohn added the ‘modern’ effects of orchestral instruments. This ‘timbral development’ was intended not as a secular intrusion into liturgical music based on a composer’s whims, but as a means of edifying listeners. Early in his negotiations concerning his new role in Berlin, Mendelssohn had complimented the King on his intention to ‘ennoble church music, and insure its greater development’ through an expanded instrumental ensemble which would support the

⁶³² Todd, *MLM*, p. 466.

⁶³³ Mendelssohn did refrain from a full fugal exposition, as he had used in all his previous settings of Psalms with orchestra. See Dinglinger, *Studien*, p. 153.

⁶³⁴ See Dinglinger, *Studien*, p. 152.

congregational singing and be available for oratorio performances, noting that these instruments ‘produce the most solemn and noble effects’.⁶³⁵ In his use of full orchestra with the New Year’s Day introtit, Mendelssohn sought to produce such sublime effects in the worshippers.

Thirdly, as described above, Mendelssohn sought to affect his listeners by following Handel’s sublime models. In each of the dramatic endings described above, Mendelssohn was emulating Handel’s penchant for rousing finales. In a letter to Moscheles from 1834, he had expressed his admiration of Handel’s striking rhetorical affect in such passages (while critiquing music by Neukomm and Cherubini):

That’s where I admire Handel’s glorious style; when he brings up his kettledrums and trumpets towards the end, and thumps and batters about to his heart’s content, as if he really meant to knock you down – no mortal man can remain unmoved. I really believe it is far better to imitate such work, than to overstrain the nerves of your audience, who, after all, will at last get accustomed to Cayenne pepper.⁶³⁶

In three conclusive sections in *Psalm 98*, Mendelssohn showed his ability to imitate ‘Handel’s glorious style’ in the context of a work combining ‘ancient’ a cappella textures and symphonic timbres in the transcendent form of the Classical sonata.

Fourthly, as in *Psalm 2*, Mendelssohn emphasizes the sublime concept of sovereignty in the text of Psalm 98. This is demonstrated in his fourfold emphasis of ‘dem Könige’ in bars 110–117, first in alternating choirs then a full *tutti*.⁶³⁷ Mendelssohn’s ‘recapitulation’ (bar 146ff) also emphasizes sovereignty, making it clear that the extent of this king’s reign is the entire globe (‘Erdkreis’), which he will judge with justice (‘richten mit Gerechtigkeit’) when he comes, concluding adamantly that ‘he comes to judge the earth’ (‘Denn er kommt zu richten das Erdreich’, bars 221–237). At the New Year’s Day service, this ‘Handelian’ conclusion emphasizing the Lord’s sovereignty was then followed (just as *Psalm 2* on Christmas Day) with an appropriate selection from Handel’s *Messiah*, in this case

⁶³⁵ Mendelssohn, Letter to Friedrich Wilhelm IV on 28 October 1842; in *Letters ... from 1833 to 1847*, trans. Wallace, p. 273.

⁶³⁶ Mendelssohn, Letter to Moscheles from 1834; Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, p. 319.

⁶³⁷ According to Dinglinger, Mendelssohn may have intended a ‘double meaning’ in his emphasis of ‘König’ in a work commissioned by King Friedrich Wilhelm IV who was present at the New Year’s Day service. See *Studien*, pp. 162–163.

the 'Hallelujah' chorus. This famous conclusion made it clear that it was 'the Lord God omnipotent' that reigns over 'the kingdom of this world ... for ever and ever'.⁶³⁸

⁶³⁸ See Brodbeck, 'A Winter of Discontent', Table 1.2, 'Music for Christmas and New Year's Day' on p. 17.

Table 6.1. Formal Outlines of Mendelssohn’s 1843–1844 Psalm Intros (in order of liturgical use)

Psalm 2 (Op. 78)⁶³⁹	Psalm 98 (Op. 91)	Psalm 43 (Op. 78)	Psalm 22 (Op. 78)
I. Moderato in G minor (bars 1–39 [1–41])	I. [Exposition] (bars 1–88) Allegro in D major: ‘Intonation’ Theme (bars 1–61)	I. Con moto in D minor (bars 1–36)	I. Recitative Solo/Andante Choir in E minor (bars 1–46)
II. Andante in E-flat (bars 40–62 [42–65])	Andante lento in B minor (bars 62–88)	II. Andante in D minor (bars 37–79)	II. Allegro in B minor (bars 47–57)
III. Con moto in C minor (bars 63–102 [66–104])	II. [Development] (bars 89–145) Andante con moto in G major (bars 89–145)	III. Allegro maestoso in D major (bars 80–110)	III. Andante con moto in E minor (bars 58–84)
IV. Andante (bars 103–142[105–142])	III. [Recapitulation] (bars 146–237) Allegro in D major: ‘Intonation’ Theme (bars 146–201, building towards A major beginning bar 168) Coda in D major (with G major emphasis) (bars 202–237)		IV. Andante con moto (cont.) in E major (bars 84–102)
			V. Assai animato in E major (bars 103–126)
			VI. Recitative Solos/Andante Choir in E major (bars 127–150)

⁶³⁹ This formal outline of *Psalm 2* is from Brodbeck, ‘A Winter of Discontent’, Table 1.4 (p. 22), with added bar numbers from the ‘Erstfassung’ score in [brackets]. See Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Drei Psalmen*, Op. 78, ed. Brodbeck (Stuttgart: Carus, 1998), pp. 36–58. Brodbeck’s bar numbers correspond to the revised version prepared for publication. My analysis considers the first edition prepared for use at the Berlin Cathedral on Christmas Day of 1843 in order to analyze changes in Mendelssohn’s compositional techniques between the two sets of psalm intros (Psalms 2 and 98; Psalms 43 and 22).

2.2. Compromises and Continuities in the 1844 Psalm Introits

Despite Mendelssohn's best intentions and skilful composition, the Berlin Cathedral clergy were not enamoured with the sublimity of Handel's chorus, nor Mendelssohn's dramatic psalm introit. Todd states that the work 'ran counter to [the preacher F.A.] Strauss' ascetic tastes'.⁶⁴⁰ Dinglinger refers to a 'Contre-Ordre' given to Mendelssohn by the clergy after the service, probably due to his use of orchestra.⁶⁴¹ According to Georg Feder and Eric Werner, the use of harp was most controversial, as the clergy considered it 'the most profane musical instrument'.⁶⁴² Instead of a rich accompaniment of plucked strings, majestic brass, and resounding pipes, the cathedral clergy preferred the unaccompanied singing of the choir, and they interjected their musical tastes in between the lines of the liturgy. As Brodbeck explains, 'the very rubrics of the Prussian liturgy' were 'under the influence of the "quietistic" Palestrina movement of the time [that] permitted only a cappella, virtually neo-syllabic settings of the required texts'.⁶⁴³ But according to Brodbeck, '... the greatest concern to the clergy may well have been Mendelssohn's approach to text setting'.⁶⁴⁴ As the above has shown, due to his detailed attention to inherent emotions in the Psalm texts, the composer's settings expressed 'immediate' feelings through dramatic contrasts.⁶⁴⁵ Also, Brodbeck details how Mendelssohn repeats specific phrases of the psalm texts, a rhetorical gesture that extends the settings through emphasis dictated by aesthetic (or emotional) choices made by the composer.

⁶⁴⁰ Todd, *MLM*, pp. 465–466.

⁶⁴¹ Dinglinger, *Studien*, p. 163.

⁶⁴² See Feder, 'Sacred Music', p. 269 and Eric Werner, *Mendelssohn: A New Image of the Composer and His Age*, trans. Dika Newlin (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), pp. 416–417 (referencing Sebastian Hensel, *Familie Mendelssohn* (Berlin: 17th edition, 1921), v. III, pp. 114, 116). According to Feder, this was 'presumably because, as a beggar's harp, it had fallen into low social status'. Furthermore, Frank Reinisch explains that 'led by the court preacher Gerhard Friedrich Abraham Strauss, the orthodox-reformed clergy of Berlin criticized Mendelssohn sharply for using the harp in the orchestra, since it was viewed as a secular instrument' (Preface to *Der 98. Psalm* (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1989).

⁶⁴³ Brobeck, Forward to *Drei Psalmen*, Op. 78, p. vii.

⁶⁴⁴ Brodbeck, 'A Winter of Discontent: Mendelssohn and the *Berliner Domchor*', in *Mendelssohn Studies*, ed. Todd (Cambridge UP, 1991), p. 22.

⁶⁴⁵ Brodbeck confirms that this is 'a distinctly non-liturgical approach, where textual clarity is sacrificed for the sake of musical or dramatic expression' ('Winter of Discontent', p. 22).

The king also seems to have subscribed to these ‘a cappella aesthetics’.⁶⁴⁶ Although Friedrich Wilhelm IV had apparently requested the use of Mendelssohn’s ‘Wachet Auf’ arrangement from the *St Paul* oratorio to be used in the New Year’s Day service, thus giving justification to involve a fuller instrumentation, there was still a distinction between what was permitted and what was preferred.⁶⁴⁷ Mendelssohn’s Psalm 98 setting had attempted a compromise between the ideal of a cappella singing and his artistic preferences, but sadly such a compromise (especially the offensive harp) was perceived as soiling sacred ground. As Dinglinger summarizes, ‘for Mendelssohn’s music [there] was no liturgy, and consequently for Friedrich Wilhelm’s liturgy no Mendelssohnian music’.⁶⁴⁸

After this New Year’s service, Mendelssohn made further compromises, seeking to follow more closely the aesthetic preferences of the king and clergy. In response to the king’s preferences and the clergy’s demands, he sacrificed his compositional preferences for instrumental accompaniment and expressive text declamation.⁶⁴⁹ However, Mendelssohn’s 1844 settings continue to display his ability to (1) unify ‘ancient’ choral textures along with more modern ones; (2) communicate the ‘immediate’ feelings of the psalm texts through musical contrasts; and (3) emphasize sublime ideas inherent in the psalm texts, including revelation and concepts of infinity.

In his setting of Psalm 43, ‘Richte mich, Gott’, Mendelssohn submits to his ecclesiastical and political superiors by limiting himself to the textural possibilities of an eight-part a cappella choir. However, within these constraints he still makes use of diverse vocal timbres alluding to multiple historic styles. As Calum MacDonald describes the Op. 78 Psalms, they deploy ‘opposing blocks of vocal colour and shifting tonal masses from vibrant eight-part writing to single voices’.⁶⁵⁰ The

⁶⁴⁶ See Dinglinger, *Studien*, p. 161 on Friedrich Wilhelm IV’s ideal (*Idealvorstellen*) of a cappella music.

⁶⁴⁷ Brodbeck, Forward to *Drei Psalmen*, p. vii. Brodbeck references an unpublished letter from Mendelssohn to Conrad Schleinitz from 19 December 1843 and quoted in Dinglinger’s ‘Ein neues Lied: Der preußische Generalmusikdirektor und eine königliche Auftragskomposition’ in *Mendelssohn-Studien V* (Berlin, 1982), p. 104.

⁶⁴⁸ Dinglinger, *Studien*, p. 158.

⁶⁴⁹ See Brodbeck, ‘Forward’, pp. vii–viii and ‘Winter of Discontent’, p. 23 and 32 for a summary of Mendelssohn’s concessions to the king and clergy.

⁶⁵⁰ Calum MacDonald, Notes from Chandos CD ‘Mendelssohn: Sacred Choral Works’ by Choir of Trinity College, Cambridge; Richard Marlow, conductor (Chandos Recording CHAN10363, 2006), p. 10.

opening unison phrase sung by the *Männerchor* simulates a solo cantor leading a liturgical petition (as the soloist opening *Psalms 98* led a call to ‘sing a new song’). Mendelssohn’s introit then makes use of Venetian-style antiphonal textures that continue to bar 27. In the *Andante* second section, Mendelssohn again has the SSAA choir respond to initial statements from the TTBB voices (bars 34–61). (See Table 6.1 for a formal outline of *Psalms 43*.)

Overall, Mendelssohn’s *Psalms 43* includes fewer overlapping phrases and more homophonic statements than his introits written in 1843, demonstrating closer attention to clear declamation of the text. For example, Mendelssohn brings the voices together for verse 3’s ending (bars 27–33): ‘zu deinem heiligen Berge und zu deiner Wohnung’ (‘to your holy hill and to your dwelling place’). By limiting himself to a cappella forces and making stylistic allusions to Renaissance polyphonic writing, Mendelssohn hoped not to offend with his first psalm introit of 1844.

However, Mendelssohn’s concessions to the clergy’s taste did not mean that the composer abandoned his deeper aesthetic convictions. Mendelssohn’s setting of *Psalm 43* communicates the psalmist’s double mood swing from despair to joy, and from mourning to hope. Initial pleas from the unison ‘cantor’ call for God to ‘plead my cause against an ungodly nation, and deliver me from deceitful and unjust men’ (‘Richte mich, Gott, und führe meine Sache wider das unheilige Volk und errette mich von den falschen und bösen Leuten’) (v. 1) are set to monophonic D minor chant that repeatedly emphasizes a moaning descending semitone from B flat to A. (See Example 6.2.)

Example 6.2. Mendelssohn, *Psalms 43*, Chant Theme, bars 1–6

(Based on *Drei Psalmen*, Op.78, David Brodbeck (ed.) (Carus-Verlag, 1998))

Rich - te mich, Gott, und füh - re mei - ne Sa - che wi - der das un - hei - li - ge Volk.

After another plaintive chant asking ‘why do you cast me off?’ (‘warum verstößest du mich’) (v. 2), along with the four-part SSAA response asking ‘Why do I go about mourning ...?’ (‘Warum lässest du mich so traurig gehen’), a cry for revelation is declared in *forte* dynamics and bright F major chords: ‘Send forth your light and your truth ...’ (‘Sende dein Licht und deine Wahrheit’) (v. 3) (bars 21–33).

In bars 34–53, the emotional pendulum then swings by way of a hopeful adaptation of the opening chant in a lilting 3/8 meter and *Andante* tempo on words expressing the Psalmist's 'joy and delight' in going to the altar of God ('daß ich hineingehe zum Altar Gottes, zu dem Gott, der meine Freude und Wonne ist, und dir, Gott' (v. 4)). As Brodbeck states, this 'lilting transformation ... aptly conveys the textual image of a joyful procession to the altar of God'.⁶⁵¹ But the pendulum swings back to mourning on the change to D major and *Allegro moderato* at bar 73. Over sustained calls to God in the men's voices, the treble voices ask of their own souls 'why do you grieve' and 'why are you disquieted within me?' ('Was betrübtest du dich, meine Seele, und bist so unruhig in mir?') (v. 5a). However, the eight-part choir then unites to repeatedly call their souls to 'Hope in the Lord' ('Harre auf Gott') (v. 5b), set homophonically by Mendelssohn in bright major harmonies. The psalm setting concludes with a communal commitment to praise God as 'the health of my countenance, and my God' ('meines Angesichts Hilfe und mein Gott') (bars 92–103). Due to his 'Schleiermacherite' aesthetic commitment to 'immediate' feelings, Mendelssohn could not keep from expressing the psalmist's quickly changing emotions in this prescribed introit text for the Passion Sunday liturgy.

Mendelssohn also could not resist expressing particularly sublime ideas in the Psalm text. Although Mendelssohn generally refrains from text repetition for dramatic emphasis on a Handelian scale in this introit, he does emphasize three key phrases of the Psalm 43 text for sublime effect. First, the 'call for revelation' in verse 3 ('Sende deine Licht...' ('Send your light')) is repeated in a quick antiphonal exchange from the TTBB Choir to the SSAA Choir. Even more strikingly, the two-bar setting is a miniature version of Haydn's famous 'Let there be light' phrase from *The Creation*, moving from a unison choral tone on 'Sende dein' to the bright F major chord on 'Licht', keeping essentially the same four-part voice leadings (with alterations due to key and range). (See Examples 6.3 and 6.4.)

⁶⁵¹ Brodbeck, 'Forward', p. viii.

Example 6.3. Haydn, *Creation*, ‘And there was light’

(Based on *Haydn's Sacred Oratorio, the Creation*, Vincent Novello (ed.) (O. Ditson & Co.; C. H. Ditson & Co., n.d.).

Example 6.4. Mendelssohn, *Psalm 43*, ‘Sende dein Licht’, bars 21–23

(Based on *Drei Psalmen*, Op.78, David Brodbeck (ed.) (Carus-Verlag, 1998))

As he did in the the *Festgesang* for the Gutenberg Festival (see Chapter Five), Mendelssohn’s here makes a subtle allusion to one of the most recognized ‘sublime’ moments of musical rhetoric in late eighteenth-century music.

Secondly, Mendelssohn emphasizes the joy of the psalmist’s contemplation of going to worship in verse 4, with full phrase repeats from the TTBB Choir to the SSAA Choir. This section concludes with five complete statements – three antiphonal and two together – of the phrase ‘auf der Harfe danke, mein Gott’ (‘thanks on the harp, my God’, bars 53–72). Although the biblical text calls for another harp with which to praise God (as Psalm 98 did), Mendelssohn thinks it best to remain with the unaccompanied choir in this setting for Berlin.

Thirdly, the four bright statements of ‘Harre auf Gott!’ (‘Hope in God!’) in bars 80–83 and 88–91 are an edifying exhortation as well as a subtle reference to Mendelssohn’s ‘Handelian’ mode. As Brodbeck points out, in this *Allegro maestoso* section in D major, Mendelssohn ‘quotes from his earlier “Handelian” setting of Psalm 42 (Op. 42, 1837), which ends with the same exuberant text’.⁶⁵²

⁶⁵² Brodbeck, ‘Forward’, p. viii.

Thus, in *Psalms 43* Mendelssohn chooses to repeat phrases with sublime and joyful associations, emphasizing ideas that edify. Also, he unifies a wider range of styles than may be immediately apparent, incorporating soloistic liturgical singing, sixteenth-century polyphony, and (however discretely) Haydn's 'light' motif and a quotation from a Handel-inspired chorus.

In his setting of Psalm 22 for the Good Friday service ('Mein Gott, Warum Hast Du Mich Verlassen?'), Mendelssohn again refrains from writing any accompaniment for the eight-part choir. Also, he evokes historic styles fitting for this psalm. As Brodbeck states, he 'borrows effectively from the tradition of responsorial psalmody, with stylized intonation in the solo tenor answered by a series of chorale-like settings for full choir'.⁶⁵³ Brodbeck provides us with further evidence that Mendelssohn took great care to craft his Psalm 22 setting more in line with clerical tastes. The 1843 works had involved many phrase repetitions. But Brodbeck's study of the composer's manuscripts of *Psalms 22* shows a retreat from such a rhetorically emphatic approach to text declamation. Repetitions in the final version are kept to a minimum, curtailed to verses 8, 15, and 18.⁶⁵⁴ But, do Mendelssohn's choices of historical styles and his limited use of text repetition equate to a 'selling out' to the clergy's conservatism and a pandering to the king's preferences? Under these restraints, can Mendelssohn still express 'genuine' feelings in line with this poignant Passion text and his own artistic inclinations?

A closer examination of Mendelssohn's *Psalms 22* reveals a continued use of expressive musical contrasts in line with the emotional contours of the Psalm text, including extensive contrast in textures as well as contrasting dynamics and harmonies.⁶⁵⁵ First, the opening bars begin with a monophonic chant (this time sung as a solo *recitative*) answered by a four-part choir (bars 1–21). Then, the tenor soloist is joined by a second tenor (bars 22–23) and answered by the choir in six parts (bars 24–27). A soli quartet then appears (bars 27–30) before the *tutti* choir sings *fortissimo* in spacious seven-part homophony (bars 31–35). Through these textural

⁶⁵³ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁴ See Brodbeck, 'Winter of Discontent', p. 25 plus Table 1.5 on pp. 26–27 indicating text repetitions. Note also Mendelssohn's elimination of the expressive 'gloss' originally conceived as an *Animato* on v.23b–25 and including more text repetition (pp. 25–27).

⁶⁵⁵ As Krummacher points out, 'The Psalms for double chorus, Op. 78, ... practically depend on expressive contrasts in the alternation of choral sound, and the quick chordal declamation rejects not only contrapuntal work but often melodic lines with thematic significance, as well' ('Art – History – Religion', p. 333).

contrasts, Mendelssohn shows the lamenting psalmist as well as the company of his covenant community.

In the next section, Mendelssohn uses even more dramatic contrasts to express the ‘genuine’ humility of the psalmist. After the soloist’s *recitative* cry, ‘But I am a worm and no man’ (‘Ich aber bin ein Wurm und kein Mensch’) (v. 6a), the four-part choir gives the parallel phrase as quietly as possible (‘ein Spott der Leute und Verachtung des Volks’ (‘a reproach of men, and [one] despised of the people’ (v. 6b)). Then, after the soloist’s most melodically poignant phrases – involving sighing semitones and an ascending diminished fifth – the basses lead the full choir in a *fortissimo* burst of mocking words: ‘He trusted in the Lord, that He would send help, ... and deliver him, and delight in him’ (‘Er klage es dem Herrn, der helfe ihm aus, ... und errette ihn, hat er Lust zu ihm’) (v. 8) (bars 47–56).⁶⁵⁶ (See Example 6.5.)

⁶⁵⁶ Brodbeck also notes these contrasting dynamics, referring to the *fortissimo* and *sforzando* ‘outbursts’ and a ‘brief *Allegro* outburst’ which leads ‘through an expressive series of descending chromatic half steps, to a half cadence on F-sharp’ (‘Forward’, p. viii).

Example 6.5. Mendelssohn, *Psalm 22*, bars 43–56(Based on *Drei Psalmen*, Op.78, David Brodbeck (ed.) (Carus-Verlag, 1998))

Recit.
Solo

Al-le, die mich se-hen, spot-ten mein-ner sper-ren das Maul auf und schüt-teln den Kopf: *ff*

Allegro ff Er kla-ge es dem Herrn, der hel-fe ihm aus, der hel-fe ihm aus und er-ret-te ihn, hat er

Tutti Er kla-ge es dem Herrn, der hel-fe ihm aus, der hel-fe ihm aus und er-ret-te ihn, hat er

Er kla-ge es dem Herrn, der hel-fe ihm aus, der hel-fe ihm aus und er-ret-te ihn, hat er

Lust zu ihm, hat er Lust zu ihm, hat er Lust zu ihm. *sfz*

Lust zu ihm, hat er Lust zu ihm, hat er Lust zu ihm. *sfz*

Lust zu ihm, hat er Lust zu ihm, hat er Lust zu ihm. *sfz*

Lust zu ihm, hat er Lust zu ihm, hat er Lust zu ihm. *sfz*

In the following *Andante con moto* section (bars 58–84), Mendelssohn again uses textural contrast – this time a *sol*i quartet against the *tutti* choir – to depict the psalmist’s words of utter despair. But dynamic contrasts are also employed, with changes from *piano* to *forte* to *fortissimo* and then suddenly to *piano* on the combined choir’s descending G major harmony which depicts God’s delivery of the despised one down ‘in the dust of death’ (‘in des Todes Staub’) (v. 15b) (bars 67–69). Further textural changes follow, included *sol*i duet and quartet (bars 69–72) and interchanges of diverse unison lines between the full choir and the *sol*i quartet (bars 72–80) before a homophonic cadential phrase leads into the next section. Such quick

changes in texture and dynamics seem to respond to the rapidly changing emotional narrative.

Next, after a preponderance of minor harmonies, the ‘prayer’ segment of verses 19–23 introduces a relieving respite in E major (bars 84–102). As Brodbeck states, Mendelssohn produces a ‘tone of hopeful supplication ... [by] the unexpected turn to the tonic major’.⁶⁵⁷ The composer’s effective harmonic shift assures his listeners that the Psalm author has not been forsaken and prepares for the imitative call to worship in bars 101–102: ‘Praise the Lord, all you that fear him!’ (‘Rühmet den Herrn, die ihr ihn fürchtet’) (v. 23a).

Finally, others forms of textural contrast are used in the concluding *Assai animato* section. First, antiphonal exchanges between the two full choirs help depict both the ‘seed of Jacob’ (‘aller Same Jakobs’) and ‘the seed of Israel’ (‘aller Same Israels’) (v. 23b) (bar 103ff). Then, a united choir in bar 117 expresses the praise ‘in the great congregation’ (‘in der großen Gemeinde’) (v. 25a). But in bar 127, Mendelssohn again returns to the *recitative* solo and responsorial texture of the beginning, now distinguished by E major.

Mendelssohn’s use of rapid contrasts in texture, dynamics, and harmony to respond to the ‘immediate’ feelings of the psalm text display his continued commitment to ‘genuine’ emotional expression in his 1844 psalm introts. But, how did he seek to edify his listeners? An examination of the closing bars of his *Psalm 22* will demonstrate the composer’s attention to sublime ideas – ideas meant to help his listeners contemplate ‘infinity’ and thus stimulate *Andacht*.

By comparing the original psalm text and Mendelssohn’s *Psalm 22* conclusion, it is apparent that the composer neglected to set the last three verses of the psalm (vv. 29–31). Also, as Brodbeck clearly shows, in the process of composition Mendelssohn omitted other verses (vv. 10, 12–13, 17) and, in the process of revision, deleted verses originally set to music (vv. 9, 11) (as well as repetitions of verses).⁶⁵⁸ What does this approach to an otherwise rather sequential psalm-setting say about the intended aesthetic effect Mendelssohn wanted to achieve, particularly with respect to the truncated ending?

First, Mendelssohn’s sensitive treatment of text acknowledging the *unending* life of the Lord’s heart (‘euer Herz soll ewiglich lebe’ (v. 26b)) draws attention to the

⁶⁵⁷ Brodbeck, ‘Forward’, p. ix.

⁶⁵⁸ See Brodbeck, ‘Winter of Discontent’, Table 1.5, pp. 26–27.

temporal sublime. His eight-part choir sings this in perfect homophonic rhythms at a *pianissimo* dynamic, seeming to meditate devoutly on this thought (bars 133–136) – as Schleiermacher would say – ‘in quiet submissiveness’.⁶⁵⁹ It is as if through a finite musical expression, Mendelssohn is leading his listeners to contemplate the sublime idea of God’s infinite existence.

Secondly, the last verses set by Mendelssohn (vv. 27–28) relate the extent of the Lord’s reign: ‘*All the ends of the world shall remember and shall turn to the Lord their Maker. All the kindred of the people shall worship before Him. For the earth is the Lord’s [literally, ‘the Lord has a kingdom’], and he rules over the nations*’.⁶⁶⁰ In bars 137–138, these are begun by tenor and soprano soloists (*recitative*) before the eight-part homophonic choir resumes their meditation on sublimity. By ending with these words, Mendelssohn leaves the listener contemplating the Lord’s *extensive* reign. In doing so, he not only continues an emphasis on the immeasurable – in distance now instead of time – but he recalls Schleiermacher’s view of the relationship between ethics and faith in the presentation of doctrine. In his *Christian Ethics*, Schleiermacher asks, ‘And is not Christian faith doctrine also ethical doctrine? Certainly, for how could the Christian faith be presented without the idea of the reign of God on earth being presented!’⁶⁶¹ In the closing bars of his Psalm 22 setting, Mendelssohn clearly presents the eternal, sovereign reign of the Lord, thus presenting and promoting orthodox and ethical doctrine.

Mendelssohn’s *Psalm 22* thus demonstrates that he maintained his ‘Schleiermacherite’ aesthetic priorities in his 1844 psalm intros, expressing and communicating ‘genuine’ emotions in the psalm texts in ways that were intended to promote edifying devotion, and lead listeners to ‘lose [themselves] in the infinite’. Also, he issued a subtle reminder that God’s sovereignty is infinite, extending over all earthly rulers and religious leaders, even over Prussian kings like Friedrich Wilhelm IV and clergy like those in Berlin.

As demonstrated in the responses from clergy and critics mentioned above, Mendelssohn’s psalm intros for the Berlin Cathedral were received with mixed reviews. But, as Botstein asserts, Mendelssohn’s ‘achievement in religious music

⁶⁵⁹ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, trans. Crouter, p. 102.

⁶⁶⁰ Emphasis added. Except where indicated, my translation here follows the English text in Brodbeck’s edition of *Drei Psalmen*, Op. 78, p. 34.

⁶⁶¹ Schleiermacher, *Christian Ethics*, trans. Brandt, p. 25.

was something more than “kitsch”⁶⁶². Mendelssohn’s psalm introits, like his *Lobgesang*, do not evince compositional ‘decline’, but an ascending progression of compositional skill involving the innovative appropriation of historical styles and perfection of form. Furthermore, through his unification of diverse historical stylistic elements, musical contrasts, and particular emphasis on sublime ideas, Mendelssohn created musical works for the Berlin liturgy that were both ‘genuine’ in feeling and sublime in content.⁶⁶³

In the next section, the ascent of Mendelssohn’s compositional skill will be found in a more popular work: the oratorio *Elijah*. Like the psalm introits, the oratorio *Elijah* is based on biblical texts, makes extensive use of musical contrasts, and emphasizes sublime concepts. However, as the following will demonstrate, the work evokes an almost universal response in published reviews and other documents as the work of ‘genius’.

3. *Elijah*: The Confirmation of ‘Genius’

Elijah – Mendelssohn’s last complete oratorio – continues to demonstrate his understanding of the sublime while also showing his compositional advancement. In this final section, I will briefly summarize ‘sublime’ aspects of the primary models for *Elijah*: Handel’s grand biblical oratorios from the eighteenth century. Then, I will present *Elijah* as a work of biblical and Handelian sublimity in which Mendelssohn makes use of musical contrasts for dramatic effect as well as a means of highlighting sublime ideas and evoking sublime rhetoric. Then, I will consider *Elijah*’s reception, connecting the work with Mendelssohn’s continued recognition as a ‘genius’, both in England and Germany.

⁶⁶² Botstein, ‘Neoclassicism, Romanticism, and Emancipation’, p. 4, with reference to Charles Rosen’s critical view of Mendelssohn’s sacred music as expressed in *The Romantic Generation*, p. 590.

⁶⁶³ As Feder writes, ‘Mendelssohn did not have an aversion to purely liturgical music, but rather to purely ceremonial music, in the sense of a liturgical piece that does not allow for any individual expression or emotional animation on the part of the composer’ (‘Sacred Music’, p. 271).

3.1. Handel's English Oratorios and the Sublime

After his 1713 works for the Peace of Utrecht, Handel continued to have opportunities to set biblical texts to music in expansive ways, including the Cannons Anthems (1717–1718) and the Coronation Anthems (1727).⁶⁶⁴ But Handel's most popular settings of biblical texts, his English oratorios, proved to be his most notable 'sublime' music. As the following will show, the scriptural content of these biblical oratorios helped secure Handel's 'sublime' reputation with the English public. Also, Handel's musical settings of these texts demonstrate musical characteristics building on – and sometimes copying from – his sublime musical rhetoric established with the earlier liturgical works. The combination of 'sublime' text and an increasingly-recognized 'sublime' musical style popularized and secured Handel's position as the author of the musical sublime.

As discussed in Chapter One, a particularly significant aspect of the sublime in eighteenth-century thought is the 'biblical sublime'. As John Dennis had asserted, 'the greatest Sublimity is to be deriv'd from Religious Ideas', and (as Ruth Smith summarizes) 'the most affecting poetry is that which treats subjects in which we have the greatest concern, chief of which is religion'.⁶⁶⁵ In the devout, yet divided age of religious enthusiasm that was eighteenth-century England, the connection of sublime rhetoric with religious convictions was readily made, thus giving credence to the superiority of art that dealt with religious topics.⁶⁶⁶ As the reception of Handel's

⁶⁶⁴ The Cannons Anthems (composed for James Brydges, soon-to-be Duke of Chandos) were based on combinations of Psalm texts, and one was an adaptation of the *Utrecht Jubilate*. See Ian Spink, *Restoration Cathedral Music, 1660–1714*, Oxford Studies in British Church Music (Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 28. The Coronation Anthems (for the grand coronation of George II at Westminster Abbey) include *Zadok the Priest*, which has received particular notoriety as a 'sublime' anthem – partially due to its regular use in British coronations – and been called 'a work of elevated, sublime rhetoric' and 'an example of religious sublimity of the most elevated style' (Wyatt, 'Aspects of Sublime Rhetoric', pp. 44 and 45).

⁶⁶⁵ Smith, *Handel's Oratorios*, p. 109, quoting *The Critical Works of John Dennis*, ed. E.N. Hooker (Balitmore, 1939), I, pp. 508–509. See Chapter Two on John Dennis' influential treatises *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry* (1701) and *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (1704).

⁶⁶⁶ Regarding Handel's biblical oratorios, Smith convincingly argues that '...the plots [of the oratorios] are not the focus of admiration in the comments of Handel's contemporaries: their praise is chiefly for his mastery of the religious sublime' (*Handel's Oratorios*, p. 167). See also Alexander H. Shapiro, "'Drama of an Infinitely Superior Nature": Handel's Early English Oratorios and the Religious Sublime', *Music and Letters* 74 (1993), pp. 215–245 and Todd Gilman, 'Arne, Handel, the Beautiful, and the Sublime' (*Eighteenth-Century Studies* 42, no. 4 (2009), pp. 529–555).

oratorios demonstrates, British audiences were most receptive to musical sublimity when the music accompanied a biblical text.⁶⁶⁷

In 1732, Handel produced his first public oratorio: *Esther*.⁶⁶⁸ The 1732 production made use of actual biblical quotes from the Authorized Version of the English Bible (1611) (forbidden in later dramatic oratorios under the Licensing Act) as well as psalm translations from the Book of Common Prayer.⁶⁶⁹ The latter were introduced by his insertion of selected Coronation Anthems directly into the oratorio.⁶⁷⁰ With this, it seems that Handel discovered the secret of appealing to the English public, one that his commitment to Italian operas may have initially concealed. As H.C. Robbins Landon succinctly states, the secret was to ‘write in English and use the Bible’.⁶⁷¹ Of all his oratorios, Handel seems to have followed this secret most in two that used biblical texts (or their Prayer Book translations) exclusively: *Israel in Egypt* (HWV 54) and *Messiah* (HWV 56).

Israel in Egypt premiered in London in 1739. The librettist for the work is unknown, but the work consists of selected passages from chapters 1–15 in Exodus; verses from Samuel, Job, Lamentations, and Daniel; Prayer Book versions of Psalms 103, 105, 106, and 112; and several texts from the Apocrypha.⁶⁷² The work (especially Part II on the the plagues on Egypt) emphasizes the supernatural power of God over nature and earthly rulers. Likewise, the libretto of *Messiah*, compiled by Charles Jennens (1699/1700–1773), consists of biblical texts carefully chosen to depict divine power. Although the work identifies Jesus of Nazareth as the biblical messiah through use of gospel and epistle texts from the New Testament (the Christmas nativity in *Messiah* using Luke 2 (No’s. 12–15) remains one of the most

⁶⁶⁷ *Esther*’s libretto drew freely from the biblical account of Esther as well as apocryphal narratives and recent retellings of the story (specifically Jean Racine’s version, as translated by Thomas Brereton). This method would serve as the model for the librettos for Handel’s dramatic oratorios such as *Deborah*, *Athalia*, *Saul*, *Samson*, *Joseph and his Brethren*, *Belshazzar*, *Joshua*, *Solomon*, and *Jephtha*. See Smith’s Appendix I for a summary of Handel’s libretto authors and their sources, biblical and otherwise (*Handel’s Oratorios*, pp. 351–353).

⁶⁶⁸ Handel adapted *Esther* from an earlier version of the work performed privately at Cannons in 1718. See Smith, *Handel’s Oratorios*, p. 14.

⁶⁶⁹ See Smith, *Handel’s Oratorios*, p. 291.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 14–16.

⁶⁷¹ H.C. Robbins Landon, *Handel and His World* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984), p. 122. Landon asserts that Handel should have recognized this earlier, due to the great success of the Coronation Anthems (1727).

⁶⁷² Smith presents evidence supporting Charles Jennens as the compiler of the *Israel in Egypt* libretto. See *Handel’s Oratorios*, p. 291.

popular segments), the majority of the work emphasizes Old Testament texts, including selections from Job, Psalms, Lamentations, the prophet Isaiah, and the ‘minor prophets’ Haggai, Malachi, and Zechariah. Furthermore, Jennens’ particular emphasis is on prophetic texts from the Old Testament that are understood to be fulfilled in the New Testament. For example, directly before Part II’s conclusion with the ‘Hallelujah’ chorus, four movements (No.’s 36–39) set verses from Psalm 2 (beginning ‘Why do the nations so furiously rage?’), an acknowledged messianic psalm on the power of the Lord’s anointed over his enemies. In *Messiah*, the prophetic ability of the God of the Old Testament to forth-tell the future is on display.⁶⁷³

These exclusively biblical and non-dramatic oratorios are some of the purest and most popular representations of the ‘biblical sublime’ in all of Handel’s oratorios. With particular emphasis on divine supernatural power, miraculous events, and the fulfilment of prophecies, they align with what Smith identifies as ‘the most striking elements of religion’ for Handel’s audience: ‘Revelation, prophecies and miracles’.⁶⁷⁴ In the biblical librettos for *Israel in Egypt* and *Messiah*, Handel was given treasure troves of biblical sublimity ready to open to an appreciative and biblically-literate English public.

Handel ‘opens’ the treasure troves of biblical sublimity for the British public through his musical settings of the prepared oratorio texts. In doing so, he incorporates the very musical genre through which he ‘authored’ his sublime musical rhetoric: the English choral anthem. As Smith observes, ‘His first oratorios for London were marked by heavy injunctions of anthems, which these choirs [the choirs of the Chapel Royal, St Paul’s and Westminster Abbey] specialised in performing, and Handel’s were exceptionally varied, elaborate, dense and weighty by comparison with earlier English music for choirs’.⁶⁷⁵ These ‘anthems’, or oratorio choruses, made use of the same compositional strategy and stylistic traits as his earlier English sacred works, *expanding* the musical forces and producing choruses more ‘grand’ and ‘extended’ than previously encountered.

⁶⁷³ Ibid., pp. 148–149.

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 110.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 21. For more information on the relationship between Handel’s English anthems and his oratorios, see Smith’s Chapter 3 sections ‘Cathedral music as temple music’ (pp. 88–92) and ‘The Anthem and the Oratorio Libretto’ (pp. 92–107) as well as Chapter 7, ‘Towards Oratorio’ (pp. 157–170).

For example, in *Israel in Egypt* – Handel’s first oratorio that featured the chorus almost exclusively – both ‘expansive’ musical forces and ‘sublime’ stylistic traits are on display. Here Handel’s choral forces expand to an eight-part double chorus, while displaying varied and complex choral polyphony in four parts. Likewise, his orchestra is emboldened with timpani, trumpet, and three trombones. He also makes strategic use of ‘slow’ tempos and ‘surprising’ harmonic effects.⁶⁷⁶ The diverse textures and effects of the Handelian sublime would later be admired in another oratorio: Mendelssohn’s *Elijah*.

3.2. Sublimity in *Elijah*

After the success of his first oratorio *St Paul* (1836), Mendelssohn consulted with his friends Karl Klingemann and Pastor Julius Schubring for over a decade (1837–1846) to select scriptural passages telling the story of the prophet Elijah.⁶⁷⁷ When he finally embarked upon composing the music for *Elijah*, his work was interrupted by performances (in 1846) of Haydn’s *Creation* and Handel’s *Alexander’s Feast* in Frankfurt.⁶⁷⁸ As the following will show, each of these oratorio masters would influence Mendelssohn’s new work. *Elijah* was premiered in English on 26 August 1846 in Birmingham, England, but then revised and published only weeks before Mendelssohn’s death in November of 1847.⁶⁷⁹

The libretto for *Elijah* establishes the work as a distinctly Old Testament oratorio, using New Testament texts sparsely and eschewing free poetry. As Peter Burkholder observes, ‘Like most of Handel’s oratorios, *Elijah* tells a story from the Old Testament – in this case, an account of the life of the prophet Elijah ...’.⁶⁸⁰ This account is taken from the books of 1 Kings and 2 Kings. But, in addition to these narrative passages, Mendelssohn selected numerous other biblical texts for the

⁶⁷⁶ Choruses from Part II of the work present a plenitude of examples of these traits, especially No.’s 15, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, and 24. However, it is important to note that some choruses in Handel’s *Israel* oratorio were similar to ‘sublime’ predecessors, because, in essence, they *were* other works: Handel had simply ‘borrowed’ them for reuse. Examples of Handel’s borrowing from his own previous works include adaptations of keyboard fugues to texted works such as ‘They loathed to drink’ (No. 15, derived from HWV 609) and ‘He smote all the firstborn’ (No. 20, based on HWV 605).

⁶⁷⁷ See Krummacher, ‘Art – History – Religion’, p. 324. According to Krummacher, Mendelssohn’s choices were also informed by the popular collection of sermons by Friedrich Wilhelm Krummacher on ‘Elias der Thisbiter’.

⁶⁷⁸ See Todd, *MLM*, pp. 515–516.

⁶⁷⁹ Other works performed at the Birmingham Festival included Haydn’s *Creation* and Handel’s *Messiah*. See Todd, *MLM*, p. 515.

⁶⁸⁰ J. Peter Burkholder, et al., *Norton Anthology of Western Music* (6th edn.; New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), Vol. 2, p. 573.

libretto, most of which were also from the Old Testament. These included verses from the Pentateuch, historical books, wisdom literature, prophetic books, and poetry. In particular, Mendelssohn selected many verses from Isaiah and an impressive range of Psalm verses.⁶⁸¹ The entire oratorio includes only two verses from the New Testament: Matthew 24:13 (used in Chorus No. 32) and Matthew 13:43 (used at the beginning of No. 39).⁶⁸²

Mendelssohn's reliance on Old Testament texts (despite Schubring's suggestions to include more New Testament ones) supports views of the composer such as those expressed by Gustav Kühne. In his 1847 obituary, Kühne describes the 'Old Testament power, chastity, simplicity and sublimity ... [that] stamped his oratorios with the strictest seal, [and] which was only softened by the amiable innocence of his playful grace illuminating them with all the charm, all the magic of fresh beauty'.⁶⁸³ Kühne's statement captures the aesthetic dichotomy of the sublime and the beautiful, and attributes both to Mendelssohn's oratorio (undoubtedly referring to *Elijah*). Furthermore, Kühne observes that 'a distinctive impetus towards the religious regions of music ... lead [Mendelssohn] to true greatness of feeling'.⁶⁸⁴ These comments (dated the day after the composer's death) imply that it was religious texts (particularly from the Old Testament) that led Mendelssohn to the heights of sublimity and romantic expression, and present him as a nineteenth-century master of the religious sublime.

Furthermore, *Elijah* also proves to be a more Handelian work than its Bach-influenced predecessor *St Paul*.⁶⁸⁵ This is evident in the Old Testament subject and

⁶⁸¹ The libretto is compiled from the following sections of the Bible: (1) the Pentateuch (Exodus 12, 20; Deuteronomy 4, 5, 6, 28, 31), (2) historical books (1 Samuel 17; 1 Kings 14, 16–19, and 21; 2 Kings 1–2; 2 Chronicles 6), (3) wisdom literature (Job 7, 10, and 23; Proverbs 3; Lamentations 1), (4) prophetic books (Isaiah 6, 11, 19, 41, 42, 48, 49, 51, 53, 54, 55, 58, 63, 64; Jeremiah 8, 14, 23, 26, 29; Hosea 7; Joel 2; Malachi 4), (5) Psalms (6, 7, 8, 10, 16, 22, 25, 28, 34, 37, 38, 55, 56, 71, 86, 88, 91, 93, 104, 106, 108, 112, 116, 121, 128, 138, 143), (6) the apocryphal Ecclesiasticus 48, and (7) the Gospel of Matthew (13 and 24). (See liner notes to 'Mendelssohn: Elijah' by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and Chorus; Robert Shaw, conductor (Telarc CD 80389, 1995)).

⁶⁸² See Sposato, *The Price of Assimilation* for a discussion of the proposed 'Jewishness' of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* (as proposed by Jack Werner and Eric Werner in the 1950s and 1960s), in contrast to the 'Christian' *St Paul*.

⁶⁸³ K. [Gustav Kühne], 'Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy', *Europa* (13 Nov 1847), pp. 757–759; Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, p. 428. Significantly, Kühne attributes the sublime traits to 'a personal inheritance of his origin and descent'.

⁶⁸⁴ *Ibid.*; Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, pp. 428–429.

⁶⁸⁵ For further confirmation of this point, see Jeffrey Sposato, 'Saint Elsewhere: German and English Reactions to Mendelssohn's Paulus', *19th-Century Music*, 32/1 (2008), pp. 26–51.

the relative number of chorales and fugues in the work, as well as its dramatic organization. Whereas *St Paul* included ten chorale movements which comment on the biblical narrative as in a Bach cantata or passion, *Elijah* only contains one complete Bach-style chorale: ‘Cast thy burden upon the Lord’ (No. 15).⁶⁸⁶ Although Mendelssohn uses less complete fugues in *Elijah* than in *St Paul*, he does include a sufficient number of contrapuntal movements to emulate Handel’s complex textures, following fugal procedure in multiple movements throughout the oratorio. These include the overture, the chorus ‘Help, Lord!’ (No. 1), and the chorus ‘Yet doth the Lord’ (No. 5).⁶⁸⁷ In addition, the chorus ‘Behold, God the Lord’ (No. 34) makes use of (in Krummacher’s words) ‘canonic compression’ and the final chorus ‘And then shall your light break forth’ (No. 43, to be discussed below) includes a complete choral fugue.⁶⁸⁸ By refraining from extensive use of the chorale yet maintaining fugal choruses, Mendelssohn follows Handel more than Bach in *Elijah*.

Furthermore, Mendelssohn freely organises the biblical text and composes musical settings that emphasize the drama of the narrative. Krummacher points out how Mendelssohn uses ‘sharp divisions’ between individual movements to create such dramatic effects, such as the ‘choral outburst’ of the Israelites (No. 5) which follows the ‘lyric tenor aria’ of Obadiah (No. 4), the interruption of the calm chorus declaring ‘Blessed are the men who fear Him’ (No. 9) with Elijah’s recitative ‘As God the Lord of Sabaoth’ (No. 10), and the ‘contemplative invocation’ of Elijah’s ‘Draw near, all ye people’ (No. 14) that follows ‘the chain of Baal choruses’ (Nos. 11–13).⁶⁸⁹ All of these sudden transitions recall the drama of Handel’s Old Testament oratorios such as *Saul*, *Joshua*, and *Israel in Egypt* but make use of an even wider use of musical contrasts.

⁶⁸⁶ References to movement numbers in *Elijah* follow the numbering in the G. Schirmer choral score of *Elijah*. My continued aesthetic analysis of *Elijah* also draws heavily from Krummacher’s magisterial 84-page study in ‘Art – History – Religion’. On the influence of Bach’s Passions on *St Paul*, see Krummacher, pp. 312–323, especially his section entitled ‘*St Paul* and the Model of Bach’.

⁶⁸⁷ For commentary on these movements, see Krummacher, ‘Art – History – Religion’, pp. 333–334 (with Ex. 6.6), 366–367 (with Examples 6.30, 6.31, and 6.32, pp. 368–370), and 368–371, respectively. Krummacher acknowledges that *Elijah* does not ‘lack fugal movements, as they are intrinsic to the oratorio, but among these, sections and whole movements stand out in which contrapuntal work takes a back seat to declamatory sound surfaces, which can even make do without melodic lines’ (p. 338).

⁶⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 371 and 355, respectively. Note that Krummacher numbers the final chorus No. 42, not 43 and states that this is the only fugue ‘in the strict sense’.

⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 337.

Mendelssohn's musical contrasts in *Elijah* also serve to highlight contrasting ideas, distinguishing between judgement and mercy, curses and blessings, and creation and Creator. For example, when the chorus 'Yet doth the Lord' (No. 5) moves from text on God's 'jealous' judgment to a declaration of God's mercies ('His mercies on thousands fall, fall on all them that love Him and keep His commandments'), Mendelssohn emphasizes the magnitude of the change by first changing tempo from *Allegro vivace* to *Grave* (bar 67), then from *forte* to *piano* dynamics (bar 74), and, most strikingly, from C minor to C major tonality (bar 89). Also, in movements 19 through 20, Elijah's prayer for rain after the curse of drought is answered (at the third request) by the boy soprano's announcement that 'Behold, a little cloud ariseth now from the waters' to end of the drought. In the context of a recitative that turns flexibly from C major to A-flat major, the youth's solo outlines an ascending C major chord. Then, when spotting the cloud, the ascending line shifts to D major by way of a diminished chord (bar 67 of No. 19A) before chromatically modulating to the harmonic destination of the following chorus: E-flat major. (See Example 6.6.)

Example 6.6. Mendelssohn, *Elijah*, Chorus No. 19A, bars 64–73(Based on *Elijah* (G. Schirmer Editions of Oratorios and Cantatas, n.d.))

YOUTH SOLO

Be - hold, a lit - tle cloud a - ri - seth now from the wa - ters:

It is like a man's hand! The heavens are black with clouds and with wind: The

storm rush - eth lou - der and loud - er

Thanks be to

pp

Allegro Moderato

CHORUS

Likewise, and most famously, Mendelssohn makes use of harmonic contrasts as well as extreme dynamic changes in his *Allegro con fuoco* chorus ‘Behold, God the Lord’ (No. 34). Here Mendelssohn first depicts the terror of the natural sublime – including tempest, earthquake, and fire – by use of minor chords, ascending lines, and timpani rolls. He then contrasts these with the Lord’s revelation of himself through ‘a still small voice’ depicted through major key choral homophony with string arpeggios, brass chords, and ascending flute. In each of these musical examples, contrasts of tempo, dynamic, harmony, and timbre accentuate conceptual opposites laden with natural and religious sublimity.

Furthermore, *Elijah* demonstrates Mendelssohn’s knowledge of established sublime rhetoric through the additional use of harmonic contrasts. In the recitative

and chorus following the movement just described, an alto soloist pronounces that ‘Above Him stood the Seraphim: and one cried to another’, outlining an E minor chord. Yet, as the soprano soloist then enters, the minor third becomes part of a C major chord in the building double-choir texture, depicting the Lord’s holiness in this ‘Sanctus’ text: ‘Holy, holy, holy is God the Lord, the Lord Sabaoth’. Such a harmonic move evokes again Haydn’s depiction of light in the *Creation* with its change from minor darkness to C major brightness.⁶⁹⁰ As Taylor states regarding Mendelssohn’s use of ‘the C major key of light and revelation’ on the word ‘light’ in Goethe’s text in *Die erste Walpurgisnacht*, this gesture was ‘indelible in music since its use in Haydn’s *Die Schöpfung* for the words ‘und es ward Licht’”.⁶⁹¹ In his choice of harmonies here in *Elijah*, Mendelssohn brought Haydn’s famous depiction of sublimity into a new oratorio that would continue the association of bright major chords with divine revelation and holiness. (See Example 6.7.)

Example 6.7. Mendelssohn, *Elijah*, Chorus No. 35, bars 1–7

(Based on *Elijah* (G. Schirmer Editions of Oratorios and Cantatas, n.d.))

Adagio ♩ = 72

Alto Solo

A - bove Him stood the Se - ra - phim: and one cri - ed to an - oth - er:

p

Soprano Solo

Soli

Ho - ly, ho - ly ho - ly is God the Lord.

ho - ly is God the Lord.

⁶⁹⁰ Mendelssohn anticipates this move towards ‘the light’ as far back as the recitative ‘Night fallest round me’ (No. 33), where the angel pronounces to Elijah (while he is sojourning in the desert) that the Lord’s ‘glory will appear and shine’ on him. The theme of light as a sign of God’s revelation and blessing is continued in the tenor aria ‘Then shall the righteous shine forth’ (No. 39).

⁶⁹¹ Taylor, *MTM*, p. 278. Taylor’s comment draws on the work of Dahlhaus, who found similarities between the *Walpurgisnacht* cantata’s ‘final transformation’ and the ‘motto’ theme of the *Lobgesang*. See Taylor, *MTM*, p. 276, note 138, with reference to Dahlhaus’ *Nineteenth-Century Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

3.3. *Elijah* as Compositional Advancement

In *Elijah*, Mendelssohn continues the sublime emphases and musical techniques of previous masters while displaying his own musical innovations. Mendelssohn models parts of *Elijah* on the works of Bach, Handel, and Haydn. But, as discussed in previous chapters as well as in the analysis of the Berlin psalm intonations, this appropriation of historic models was his way of advancing further as a composer. As Krummacker explains,

... Mendelssohn was led from the thought of ‘progress’ to the ‘further’ and obligated thereto, but to the same extent he felt himself answerable to tradition as had hardly any musician before him. For the discovery of the past ... was a new thing for its time and in that way a bit of progress. To this corresponded the conviction that one must ‘go further on the path ... or back to the old or correct one (which actually ought to be called forward)’.⁶⁹²

Indeed, Mendelssohn sought to go ‘further on the path’ through compositional innovations that went ‘beyond’ those in previous oratorios, including Handel’s and his own *St Paul*. The last chorus of *Elijah* will serve to demonstrate such innovations.

The concluding chorus of *Elijah* (No. 43) continues the sublime themes and musical techniques from previous masterworks. Here Mendelssohn emphasizes sublime ‘light’ with a biblical text equating ‘the light of morning’ with ‘health’ and God’s ‘reward’: ‘And then shall your light break forth as the light of morning breaketh, and your health shall speedily spring forth then’ (Isaiah 58:8). Musically, Mendelssohn makes use of a majestic initial tempo (*Andante maestoso*) and *fortissimo* ascending string lines (bars 1, 3, and 5). These lead to homophonic choral statements in dotted rhythms, with a ‘surprising’ harmonic progression from E-flat major to A major to B-flat major (bars 4–6). Next, a brief imitative section sung *piano* on the text ‘And the glory of the Lord ever shall reward you’ provides textural and dynamic contrast (bars 9–17). Through this short introduction, Mendelssohn exhibits a range of dramatic sounds and ideas before embarking on the anticipated fugal section.

The choral fugue commences in the ‘*Allegro. Doppio movimento*’ section (beginning at bar 18), evoking Handel in choice of texture and tonality. According to Todd, here begins ‘a majestic fugue in D major on a subject derived from the final

⁶⁹² Krummacker, ‘Art – History – Religion’, p. 376, quoting Mendelssohn’s letter from 4 March 1833 in Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, *Briefe 1833–1847*, p. 2.

“Amen” fugue of Handel’s *Messiah*.⁶⁹³ As the text describes ‘how excellent Thy name is in all the nations’ (a celebration of the Lord’s *extensive* glory), the four-part chorus exchanges the theme over an initial pedal D in the orchestra, continues its imitations during a tonal progression away to F-sharp major (bar 43), and sings even more thematic exchanges as the basses find the dominant pedal (beginning in bar 77). As Burkholder observes, ‘The fugal texture is maintained much longer than in a typical Handel fugue’.⁶⁹⁴ Although the entire movement is relatively short at 127 bars, Mendelssohn’s four-part counterpoint ensues for over seventy of these.

The conclusion of the fugue also follows Handel while ‘going further’. Here Mendelssohn repeats his fugue theme in a homophonic setting at bold *fortissimo* dynamics (bars 90–113), which segues into the closing Handelian ‘Amens’ (beginning bar 113). Mendelssohn then reintroduces a series of descending tritones in the bass voices and instruments which are recognizable as the ‘curse’ motive first heard in Elijah’s solo introduction in D minor and repeated through the entire oratorio. Through this ‘characteristic’ and ‘cyclic’ use of this opening thematic material, Mendelssohn rehearses the contrasts inherent in his musical material. As Todd describes the conclusion, ‘...the [descending augmented] fourths preserve the downward spiral of the original curse motive, but in the culminating fugue, to reinforce the image of the “fiery chariot” that takes Elijah “away to heaven”, the fourths ascend’.⁶⁹⁵ These ascending intervals in the upper parts throughout the choral and orchestral texture soon establish triumphant D major harmonies and resolve the entire oratorio from darkness to light and from descent to ascending heights. Through ‘the light of the morning’, the curse has been lifted. (See Example 6.8.)

⁶⁹³ Todd, *MLM*, p. 550. Note Examples 16.11a and 16.11b, which show the similarity in contour of the two themes.

⁶⁹⁴ Burkholder, *Norton Anthology of Western Music*, p. 573.

⁶⁹⁵ Todd, *MLM*, p. 551. Note that in his last work published in his lifetime, Mendelssohn is using melodic and formal strategies similar to those employed in his Octet for Strings and the *Midsummer Night’s Dream* overture from his prodigy years.

Along with the harmonic innovations and sustained contrapuntal texture in the movement, these diverse structures help Mendelssohn accomplish his dramatic goals for the oratorio, emphasizing sublime contrasts to great effect.

3.4. Elijah as Evidence of ‘Genius’

If his earlier compositions were not sufficient, *Elijah* assured Mendelssohn’s lasting reputation as a ‘genius’. In fact, representative evidence from the reception of *Elijah* can be seen to align with primary aspects of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century theories of genius (as presented in Chapter One).

First, one was recognized as a ‘genius’ when one’s artistic works were acknowledged as ‘great art’. As Felix’s grandfather Moses Mendelssohn had claimed: sublimity in works of art put on display the ‘great wit’, ‘genius’, and ‘imagination’ of the artist.⁶⁹⁷ In the grandson’s work of art, just such attributes were evident. When *Elijah* was premiered in Birmingham in 1846, *The Times* hailed the work as ‘one of the most extraordinary achievements of human intelligence’.⁶⁹⁸ The work of art was regarded as ‘extraordinary’ not just as a musical work, but as an intellectual ‘achievement’ – an achievement of the mind of Felix Mendelssohn. In Germany, Heinrich Brockhaus (in his diary entry of 3 February 1848) described a Leipzig performance of *Elijah* as ‘a rich, beautiful work, worthy of Mendelssohn’s genius’.⁶⁹⁹ Again, the work of art confirmed the inherent ‘genius’ of the artist.

This intellectual power of ‘genius’ was one that could generate *original* ideas. As Sulzer described this ability in his *General Theory of the Fine Arts*, for an artistic genius ‘Ideas suddenly develop themselves with seemingly no effort ...’.⁷⁰⁰ The genius’ creative mind was a fertile source of new ideas, and Mendelssohn’s mind was acknowledged as such a source. This acknowledgement was prominent in obituaries of Mendelssohn, and evident in his last oratorio. Kühne’s obituary (quoted above) mourned that Leipzig has ‘lost a genuine artistic nature, an original creative

⁶⁹⁷ Moses Mendelssohn, ‘On the Sublime’, in *Philosophical Writings*, p. 197.

⁶⁹⁸ *The Times*, 27 August 1846; Quoted in Todd, *MLM*, p. 528. For more on the reception of *Elijah* during the ‘Apotheosis’ of Mendelssohn’s reputation in England, see Eatock, *Victorian England*, pp. 126–129.

⁶⁹⁹ Heinrich Brockhaus, *Aus den Tagebüchern von Heinrich Brockhaus* (Leipzig, 1884), v. 2, p. 156; Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, p. 421.

⁷⁰⁰ Sulzer, *General Theory of the Fine Arts*, in Baker and Christensen, *Aesthetics and the Arts of Musical Composition*, pp. 32, 34, and 47.

genius'.⁷⁰¹ In England, Macfarren maintained that the composer was separated by 'genius' and 'originality', fulfilling the role of an innovator like Henry Purcell.⁷⁰² As summarized in the previous section, Mendelssohn's *Elijah* demonstrated a profuse mind capable of originality. Its harmonic and motivic innovations (such as the use of repeated descending tritones as a 'characteristic' motive) and the diversity of its musical structures and textures (such as those represented in 'And then shall your light break forth') proved that the composer's mind was rich in musical conceptions. The work was evidence of Mendelssohn's 'original genius'.

The creative mind of 'genius' could generate many 'original' ideas. But the 'genius' can also unify these ideas through the power of a 'unifying imagination'. For Coleridge, this was the very essence of 'genius'.⁷⁰³ Prince Albert expressed his admiration for exactly this trait of Mendelssohn's abilities. After hearing *Elijah* performed in London in 1847, he wrote the following words (originally in German) on his oratorio wordbook:

To the Noble Artist who, surrounded by the Baal-worship of debased art, has been able, by his genius and science, to preserve faithfully, like another Elijah, the worship of true art, and once more to accustom our ear, amid the whirl of empty, frivolous sounds, to the pure tones of sympathetic feeling and legitimate harmony: to the Great Master, who makes us conscious of the unity of his conception, through the whole maze of his creation, from the soft whispering to the mighty raging of the elements.⁷⁰⁴

In this magniloquent tribute, the prince consort alluded to several key aspects of 'genius' theory in relation to artistic output. According to his statement, it was Mendelssohn's 'genius and science' that allowed the composer to accomplish 'true art' and 'pure tones'. Furthermore, in his acknowledgement of how 'the Great Master' makes 'the unity of his conception' known, Albert praises Mendelssohn's ability to unify a 'maze' of contrasting musical depictions. Thus Mendelssohn's 'unifying imagination' was on display in *Elijah*.⁷⁰⁵

⁷⁰¹ Kühne, 'Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy'; Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, p. 429.

⁷⁰² Macfarren, 'Mendelssohn', *Musical World* 24 (1849); Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, pp. 437, 438.

⁷⁰³ See discussion in Chapter One, with reference to Vallins, *On the Sublime: Coleridge's Writings*, p. 83.

⁷⁰⁴ F.G. Edwards, *The History of Mendelssohn's Oratorio 'Elijah'* (London; New York: Novello, Ewer and Co., 1896), p. 127; Quoted in Eatock, *Victorian England*, p. 108.

⁷⁰⁵ The impact of Prince Albert's statement is represented in Schima Kaufman's biography title: *Mendelssohn, 'a Second Elijah'* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1934; reprint Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1971).

Lastly, according to theories of genius popular in the 1830s and 1840s, the ‘genius’ possessed seemingly divine creative power. As Watson states (regarding views from the German Enlightenment), ‘More and more, the genius was considered to have the qualities of a prophet’.⁷⁰⁶ Likewise, Carlyle celebrated ‘The Hero’ as an ‘original man’ with words of divine source and power: ‘We may call him Poet, Prophet, God; – in one way or other, we all feel that the words he utters are as no *man*’s words’.⁷⁰⁷ In the tribute quoted above, Prince Albert celebrated Mendelssohn as a prophet ‘like another Elijah’. Kühne’s obituary also pointed to a divine source for Mendelssohn’s art, proposing that ‘genius is to be recognized precisely by its retreating, so as to remain ... all the more faithfully a genuine bearer of divinely inspired art’.⁷⁰⁸ Instead of attributing the work solely to Mendelssohn’s human abilities, Kühne and others were convinced that *Elijah* was inspired by God, and Mendelssohn was God’s prophet.

As the above has demonstrated, Mendelssohn’s *Elijah* continues the connection with sublime aesthetics evident throughout the composer’s oeuvre. First, the oratorio’s libretto is identified with the biblical sublime and its musical setting with that of Handel, continuing to use the techniques of the Handelian musical sublime such as fugal textures and dramatic contrasts. Mendelssohn’s musical contrasts also depict contrasting ideas whose distinctions are of sublime proportions. In particular, his emphasis on the harmonic shift from minor to major evokes Haydn’s sublime musical rhetoric.

While Mendelssohn continues to make use of his predecessors’ musical conventions in *Elijah*, he also demonstrates his compositional advancement (‘further on the path’) in the work, even as his life’s journey was almost at an end. The original innovations in the oratorio confirm Mendelssohn’s ‘genius’ for his English and German audiences, as the reception of *Elijah* clearly indicates.

⁷⁰⁶ Watson, *German Genius*, p. 75.

⁷⁰⁷ Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, p. 55. Emphasis added.

⁷⁰⁸ Kühne, ‘Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy’; Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, p. 430.

4. Summary

In this chapter, I have sought to further connect Mendelssohn's aesthetic thought and late musical works with sublime aesthetics. First, a study of conceptual analogies between the theologian Schleiermacher and the composer explicated Mendelssohn's particular understanding of musical expression, one that emphasized ineffable ideas and feelings for the sake of edification. The composer's aesthetic commitments were then demonstrated through analyses of liturgical works (in Section Two) and oratorio movements (Section Three). These compositions revealed not only the appropriation of historical musical styles and particular techniques regarded as 'sublime', but also creative and imaginative musical innovations. Furthermore, a survey of the reception of *Elijah* attributed Mendelssohn's innovations to the mind of 'genius', the locus of nineteenth-century sublimity.

In the mid- to late-nineteenth-century reception of the composer and his works, the attribution of 'genius' overlapped with the rhetoric of the sublime, just as it had done throughout the composer's life. As detailed in Chapter Five, the application of 'genius' to Mendelssohn began in the late 1820s, and continued throughout his life, both in his homeland Germany as well as his 'adopted' England. This recognition comes from elite circles and the general public, and from the pens of his advocates as well as his harshest critics. In a letter to Mendelssohn dated 28 April 1844, the diplomat C.K.J. Bunsen (1791–1860) affirms that Tieck 'share[s] the universal opinion about [Mendelssohn]', recognizing his 'character' and 'genius'.⁷⁰⁹ Wagner himself was so impressed by an 1843 performance of *St Paul* in Dresden (conducted by Mendelssohn) that he wrote a favourable review referring to the work as a 'masterpiece' and 'a work that is evidence of the highest flowering of art and, since it was composed in our day, filled us with rightful pride in the time in which we live'.⁷¹⁰ More specifically, Wagner comments that 'the effect in the concert hall was moving and uplifting'.⁷¹¹

The attribution of 'genius' to Mendelssohn was intricately connected to the positive reception of his musical works in his lifetime. And, significantly, Mendelssohn's 'genius' status continues through the period of (supposed) 'decline'

⁷⁰⁹ *Letters ... from 1833 to 1847*, trans. Wallace, p. 320.

⁷¹⁰ Richard Wagner, 'ST. PAUL IN DRESDEN, 1843', trans. Seaton, in *The Mendelssohn Companion*, ed. Seaton, pp. 386–387.

⁷¹¹ Wagner, *ST. PAUL*, p. 387.

as well as in his extensively documented posthumous reception. Despite degradations and doubts to the contrary, various evidence shows that Mendelssohn's music was still greatly valued through the late-nineteenth century in both England and Germany. In 1871, a nearly full-column report in the *Daily News* on a Mendelssohn concert held at the Crystal Palace admired 'the mere quantity of the composer's works' and 'the fact that they are nearly all distinguished by a splendour of imagination, and a perfection of art-finish, that will ensure their permanence among the greatest productions of creative musical genius'.⁷¹² Brown remarks on the 'paradox' in Mendelssohn reception in Germany during the same period, where '... Mendelssohn's music still elicited widespread admiration at the end of the 1860s and his continuing high status in the 1870s was emphasized by the publication, between 1874 and 1877, of the Breitkopf and Härtel edition of his collected works'.⁷¹³ Back in England, a vote among attendees at Crystal Palace concerts in 1880 and 1887 showed that a 'strong interest' in Mendelssohn's music remained, with his first Piano Concerto receiving more votes than Beethoven's first, fourth, and fifth piano concertos combined and his 'Scottish' Symphony being voted more popular than Beethoven's Fifth Symphony.⁷¹⁴

The continued interest in the works of Mendelssohn paralleled continued attribution of 'genius' to the composer himself, at least in English publications. The 1871 *Daily News* review placed Mendelssohn in a line of geniuses including Purcell, Handel, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Spohr, and Weber.⁷¹⁵ Garrulously demonstrating his continued admiration, George Grove wrote the longest article on any composer in the first edition of his *Dictionary of Music and Musicians* on Mendelssohn.⁷¹⁶ The English recognition continued in the *Morning Post* in 1881, which confidently predicted that

⁷¹² 'MUSIC. CRYSTAL PALACE.—MENDELSSOHN CONCERT', *Daily News* [London, England], 7 Nov. 1871: n.p. *19th Century British Library Newspapers*. Available online at the Gale Newsvault (accessed 29 March 2013).

⁷¹³ Brown, *Portrait*, p. 487.

⁷¹⁴ See Eatock, *Victorian England*, pp. 138–139.

⁷¹⁵ *Daily News*, 7 Nov. 1871. The reviewer begins his survey of musical geniuses by commenting that 'If, since the death of Purcell, England has contributed but little to such results, she has at least the merit of having largely recognised the composers of other countries, especially of the most gifted—those of Germany'.

⁷¹⁶ The entry is 58 pages in length and was published in the 1880 instalment. See Eatock, *Victorian England*, p. 122.

Genius, either in politics or in art, will always command in this country a recognition commensurate with its conditions and extent. When allied with moral worth and personal virtue it is certain to meet with esteem, and not infrequently with a sense of profound affection. As a musician Mendelssohn has no greater admirers than are to be found in England.⁷¹⁷

In perhaps the most hyperbolic statement regarding Mendelssohn's stature, *The Musical Times* declared (in 1887) that 'Save, perhaps, for the advent of Handel among us, no more important event than the rise of Mendelssohn ever occurred in the history of English music'.⁷¹⁸ As Eatock states, 'Mendelssohn was a "Great Man" in an era that embraced Great Man themes'.⁷¹⁹ In nineteenth-century English- and German-speaking lands, Mendelssohn was undoubtedly considered a 'genius'.

⁷¹⁷ 'THE MENDELSSOHN FAMILY', *Morning Post* [London, England], 28 Dec. 1881: 6. *19th Century British Library Newspapers*. Available online at the Gale Newsvault (accessed 29 March 2013).

⁷¹⁸ 'Victorian Music (Concluded)', *The Musical Times* 28/534 (1 August 1887), p. 465; Quoted in Eatock, *Victorian England*, p. 133. See also Eatock's comparison of Mendelssohn's reception in the late 1840s to Handel ('Like Handel, he was *de rigueur*' (p. 114)) and his later discussion of the process of 'canonization' for both Handel and Mendelssohn (p. 130).

⁷¹⁹ Eatock, *Victorian England*, p. 148, with reference to Thomas Carlyle's statement in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (London: H. Frowde, 1904): 'The history of the world is but the biography of Great Men' (p. 29).

Conclusion

How does the aesthetic category of the sublime, in its various formulations from the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, assist in explaining the significance of Felix Mendelssohn and his compositions to English and German audiences in his lifetime and beyond? Furthermore, with regard to the ‘narrative of decline’ prominent in Mendelssohn reception and scholarship (especially in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries), does the concept of the sublime remain multifaceted enough to help integrate Mendelssohn’s mature aesthetic identity? Could it help to recover and explain the effect that Mendelssohn’s music continued to have on audiences in Germany and England, even after his death?

As I have demonstrated in the preceding chapters, sublime aesthetics can be used to provide a more contextualized appreciation of Mendelssohn’s life and work, enabling a better understanding of the reception of the composer as ‘genius’ and his compositions as ‘works of genius’. This includes specific musical traits considered sublime (especially those ‘authored’ by Handel), as well as figures, literature, and concepts associated with the sublime (from Shakespeare to Schleiermacher, from the Bible to Goethe’s poetry, and from the Burkean sublime to Kantian genius). In the following pages, I will summarize major findings, highlighting how sublime aesthetics have proven to be illuminating for Mendelssohn research. I will also suggest that a study of Mendelssohn – including his life, works, and reception – has proven to be a way to study the sublime in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century thought. Finally, I will present opportunities for further research.

1. The Sublime as Method for Mendelssohnian Research

Much of the literature on ‘the sublime’ considers the aesthetic concept primarily as an eighteenth-century topic and phenomenon, due in large part to the influential writings of Burke and Kant. The importance of the concept for eighteenth-century studies is emphasized by Ruth Smith, who states that ‘In England the eighteenth century is far more the age of the sublime than the age of reason. Sublimity was constantly sought and admired in art, and the religious sublime was considered the highest form of it’.⁷²⁰ Likewise, Lynn Poland accounts that ‘The sublime – as one mode of the new science of aesthetics – was particularly important to the eighteenth century, ... because it provided an intense, experiential confirmation of the powers of transcendence – powers capable of meeting and mastering the excess of signifiers, the claims of the bodily, the sense-bound character of experience’.⁷²¹ Due to its prevalence, the sublime remains a frequent topic of research and commentary for eighteenth-century studies.

However, as the chapters above have shown, ‘the sublime’ is also significant for the nineteenth century, continuing as an aesthetic category in prominent thinkers both in England and Germany. In London, Professor William Crotch established ‘the sublime’ as a musical category in his lectures on music which continued into the 1830s, distinguishing the ‘sublime’ in music from the ‘beautiful’ and the ‘ornamental’.⁷²² In Germany, Hegel associated ‘the sublime’ with ‘symbolic’ art in ancient art, where ‘the Idea [of Spirit or *Geist*] is presented to consciousness ... *abstractly*’.⁷²³ As summarized in Chapter One, this allocation of ‘the sublime’ to ancient art threatened the continued recognition of ‘the sublime’ in nineteenth-century art, at least in German lands.

Yet, in Chapter Two, after finding descriptions of the sublime in musical writings from eighteenth-century England, the continued importance of the sublime in music was found in German writings of the early-nineteenth century. Koch included ‘Erhaben’ in his *Musikalisches Lexikon* (1802), and Michaelis contributed significant descriptions of the musical sublime in popular music journals such as the

⁷²⁰ Smith, *Handel’s Oratorios*, p. 109.

⁷²¹ Poland, ‘The Idea of the Holy’, p.183.

⁷²² See Crotch, *Substance of Several Courses of Lectures* and Howard Irving, *Ancients and Moderns: William Crotch and the Development of Classical Music* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1999).

⁷²³ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, Vol. I, p. 77.

Berlinische musikalische Zeitung. These descriptions incorporated aspects of Longinian rhetoric, Kantian concepts, and late-eighteenth-century expressivism, demonstrating that the musical sublime was one that transcended conceptual territories and musical eras, remaining relevant into the time of Mendelssohn.

In Chapter Three, Handel's sublime musical rhetoric was shown to not only impact English audiences in the eighteenth century, but also German ones in the nineteenth century. As Applegate confirms, appreciation of Handel far exceeded that of J.S. Bach during the time of Mendelssohn's coming of age.⁷²⁴ Handel's music had a profound influence on the young Mendelssohn, and he emulated the 'master' of the musical sublime in early works such as the Octet, the 1826 *Te Deum*, and *Psalm 115*. For Mendelssohn research, which more often emphasizes the influence of Bach, the recognition of the Handelian sublime in Mendelssohn's works is an important corrective.⁷²⁵

Furthermore, the recognition of Handel as a 'musical genius' provides a precedent for understanding the relationship between musical sublimity and theories of genius.⁷²⁶ Just as the 'sublimity' of Handel's works led to attributions of 'genius' by admirers, biographers, and historians, so the positive reception of Mendelssohn's works gained him the status of 'genius' in his lifetime and beyond. As first presented in Chapter Three, and reviewed in the following chapters, Mendelssohn's genius followed a Kantian pattern discerned in the 'Analytic of the Sublime' of the Third Critique: the study of previous models resulted in an 'understanding' of their methods and then led to original and exemplary new works.

⁷²⁴ See Applegate, *Bach in Berlin*, p. 215.

⁷²⁵ Representative modern literature on the importance of J.S. Bach for Mendelssohn include writings by Larry Todd such as *Mendelssohn's Musical Education: A Study and Edition of His Exercises in Composition* (see 'Bach and the Berlin Tradition', pp. 5–10), 'On Mendelssohn's Sacred Music, Real and Imaginary' (in *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*, ed. Mercer-Taylor (2004) and reprinted in *Mendelssohn Essays* (New York: Routledge, 2008)), and 'Echoes of the *St. Matthew Passion* in the Music of Mendelssohn' (also in *Mendelssohn Essays*). Other articles addressing Bach's influence include Feder's 'On Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy's Sacred Music' and Krummacher's 'Art-history-religion' (both in *The Mendelssohn Companion*, ed. Seaton (2001)) and Jeffrey Sposato's 'Saint Elsewhere: German and English Reactions to Mendelssohn's Paulus' (in *19th-Century Music*, 32/1 (2008), pp. 26–51). Applegate's 2005 full-length monograph on the context and details of Mendelssohn's revival of the *St Matthew Passion* (*Bach in Berlin*, cited throughout this thesis) is a particularly important study. Most recently, Anselm Hartinger's 'Between Tradition and Innovation: Mendelssohn as Music Director and his Performances of Bach in Leipzig' is included in *Mendelssohn Perspectives*, Nicole Grimes and Angela Mace, eds. (Farnham, Surrey ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012).

⁷²⁶ For examples, see Kivy, *The Possessor and the Possessed* and Johnson, "'Giant HANDEL'".

Other artistic models for the young Mendelssohn were recognized in Chapter Four, including Shakespeare, Goethe, and Beethoven. Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream* Overture showed that the young composer recognized sublime aspects of Shakespeare's drama, and, through strictly musical means, represented these sublime ideas. As the rest of Chapter Four demonstrated, the *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage* and *The Hebrides* overtures showed an even wider understanding of and connection with the sublime, while affirming that Mendelssohn was following the Kantian pattern from inspiration to emulation to exemplary originality. Clearly, in Mendelssohn's early works, signs of 'sublimity' and 'genius' abound.

In Chapters Five and Six, aspects of the sublime provide insight to Mendelssohn and his works appropriate to the 1840s and beyond. Despite the degradations most viciously pronounced by Wagner, Mendelssohn's late works do not indicate a 'decline' in artistic value, but a continued 'ascent', based on contemporary reception. Wagner had accused Mendelssohn of having an intrinsic inability for great artistic achievements (based on his racial heritage), and denied the composer both artistic profundity and the ability to express profound feeling in his music.⁷²⁷ However, works such as the *Lobgesang* and the 1843–1844 psalm intonations give evidence of an ascending progression of (1) increasing compositional skill and perfection of form, (2) the innovative appropriation of historical styles, and (3) expressive communication of feeling. These works counter Wagner's accusations by showing that this German composer of Jewish descent could produce musical works received as great art, achieve moments of musical profundity (especially when evoking 'sublime' rhetoric such as the harmonic move from 'dark' to 'light' in Haydn's *Creation*), and communicate 'genuine' feelings through diverse textures and styles.

Mendelssohn's musical 'genius' was then confirmed in the superlative recognition of his last oratorio *Elijah*, as summarized in Chapter Six. In Germany, Brockhaus recorded that *Elijah* was 'a rich, beautiful work, worthy of Mendelssohn's genius'.⁷²⁸ In England, Mendelssohn's 'unifying imagination' (another trait of genius) was recognized in *Elijah*, as evident in Prince Albert's 1847 tribute to the

⁷²⁷ See Wagner, *Das Judentum in der Musik* in Brown, *Portrait*, pp. 473–483.

⁷²⁸ Brockhaus, *Aus den Tagebüchern*, v. 2, p. 156; Quoted in Brown, *Portrait*, p. 421.

composer. Mendelssohn was seen not just as a talented composer, but ‘like another Elijah’ – a prophet of music exhibiting creative power seemingly divine in origin.

2. Mendelssohnian Research as a Method for Sublime Aesthetics

The summary above emphasizes the main methodology of this study: using the resources of sublime aesthetics to understand the life and works of Mendelssohn. However, the study of sublimity in Mendelssohn’s life and works has also proved to be a means of studying the sublime itself. The following provides a brief survey of the variety of formulations of the sublime that are conceptually proximate to Mendelssohn and have been discussed in the preceding chapters.

In Chapter One, the influence of Longinus’ *On the Sublime* was summarized. Then, in Chapter Four, the ‘Grand Concept’ of ‘vastness’ so admired in commentary on Longinus was observed in Mendelssohn’s representation of Goethe’s poetry, the *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage* Overture. Furthermore, Longinus’ emphasis on ‘Noble Passions’ became increasingly important in the form of expressivist musical aesthetics.⁷²⁹ In Chapter Six, the influence of Schleiermacher’s ‘sublime feelings’ on Mendelssohn’s particular form of expressivism was recognized, providing insight into a regularly mentioned, but little understood influence on the composer’s aesthetic views. As Schleiermacher valued the representation and stimulation of edifying religious feeling, so Mendelssohn valued the ‘genuine’ expression of all edifying feelings through music, as evident in the Berlin psalm intonations.

The recognition of sublime literature is also apparent through Mendelssohn’s music, even in ‘settings’ without text. Dramatic literature is represented in the *Midsummer Night’s Dream* overture, while poetic works inspired *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*. Furthermore, biblical literature was set to music by Mendelssohn throughout his life. From early works such as *Psalm 115* to psalm settings for the Berlin liturgy to compilations of (primarily Old Testament) biblical texts in the *Lobgesang* and *Elijah*, the continued importance of the ‘biblical sublime’ is evident.

Particular theories of the sublime are also relevant to Mendelssohn’s life and works. Throughout this study, the grandfather Mendelssohn’s theory ‘On the sublime and naïve in the fine sciences’ can be seen in the grandson, as Felix’s works

⁷²⁹ According to Kivy, Longinus’ *On the Sublime* can be understood to be the prototype of all expressivist theory. See *The Possessor and the Possessed*, p. 16.

demonstrate his ‘great wit, his genius, his imagination, and his soul’s capacities’.⁷³⁰ In Chapter Four, Edmund Burke’s description of the sublime was apparent in Mendelssohn’s *Hebrides* Overture, a more ‘obscure’ work exhibiting multiple aspects of sublimity. Kant’s significant category of the ‘mathematical’ sublime was discerned in Mendelssohn’s (abbreviated) setting of Psalm 22, which emphasized the ‘infinite’ reign of a divine King. Lastly, while Mendelssohn rejected Hegel’s view of the ‘symbolic’ sublime in ancient history, he followed Goethe by valuing past objects as the inspiration for new creations. In works such as the *Lobgesang* and the Berlin psalm intonations (especially settings of Psalms 43 and 22), the ‘ancient’ sublime is present in Mendelssohn’s music. For nineteenth-century audiences, Mendelssohn’s ability to incorporate both classical forms and romantic elements reconciled the values of ‘timelessness’ and ‘progress’.⁷³¹

3. Projections for Further Research

The findings summarized thus far demonstrate that the sublime serves to integrate Mendelssohn studies, taking into account biography, using musical analysis, and considering reception history. Also, an aesthetic study of Mendelssohn’s life, works, and reception relates to many important facets of the sublime. But what additional opportunities do sublime aesthetics present for Mendelssohn research and musicology in general? In the following I will suggest three possibilities.

Theological Aesthetics as Hermeneutical Guide

As presented in Chapter One, and discussed later in relation to the reception of Handel’s oratorios, the ‘biblical sublime’ is a significant category for eighteenth-century studies. Lynn Poland has sought to explain this aspect of the sublime by explicating the connection between Longinus’ writing and biblical texts. She also draws upon related writings from Augustine and the twentieth-century theologian Rudolf Otto. She sees a primary question in the quest for the biblical sublime being ‘Where is the religious power – the *mysterium tremendum* – of the Bible located?’ and considers whether this is in the sacred text itself or in the community reading the text.⁷³²

⁷³⁰ See Mendelssohn, ‘On the Sublime’, in *Philosophical Writings*, p. 197.

⁷³¹ See Eatock, *Victorian England*, p. 131.

⁷³² Poland, ‘The Bible and the Rhetorical Sublime’, in Martin Warner, *The Bible as Rhetoric: Studies in Biblical Persuasion and Credibility*, Warwick Studies in Philosophy and Literature (London:

A similar question may be asked regarding Mendelssohn's many settings of biblical texts and their modern reception: How can Mendelssohn's music convey the power of the biblical sublime for audiences today?

A guide for discerning the biblical sublime in music (as well as a reference to Mendelssohn's music itself) may be found in the twentieth-century German theologian that Poland explores in her study: Rudolf Otto. In his famous work on experiential religion, *The Idea of the Holy*, Otto presents an elaboration on Augustine's 'mysterium tremendum' phrase that he discerns from a close reading of Isaiah chapter 6: 'mysterium tremendum fascinans et augustum'.⁷³³ This phrase describes the stages one may go through in an encounter with 'the holy'.

Otto defines the initial stage of the encounter as the 'mysterium', or 'the wholly other', in sublime terms: 'that which is quite beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible, and the familiar, which therefore falls quite outside the limits of the "canny", and is contrasted with it, filling the mind with blank wonder and astonishment'.⁷³⁴ Then, Otto progresses to the 'tremendum', which has been described as having not one, but three moments. The first is that of 'religious dread' or 'awe'.⁷³⁵ 'The moment of overwhelming majesty' follows, which Otto describes as 'the annihilation of self' in which the transcendent becomes the sole and entire reality.⁷³⁶ Third, the 'tremendum' concludes with an 'energetic' moment in which the numinous seems to will and move in a way that demands a response from the mortal.

Otto's definition of the 'mysterium tremendum' continues with another aspect of religious feeling that, as he asserts, appears at the same time as the 'mysterium' and the moments of the 'tremendum'. This is 'the fascinating and intoxicating attraction of the noumen' which Otto terms the 'fascinans'.⁷³⁷ Otto describes this aspect '...as something that bestows upon man a beatitude beyond

Routledge, 1990), p. 32. In pursuing this question, Poland refers to Augustine's location of the *mysterium tremendum* in the labour of interpretation, particularly of difficult passages.

⁷³³ See Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (London; New York: H. Milford, Oxford University Press, 1923). Otto's use of Latin terminology to describe 'the experience of the holy' begins simply with the words 'mysterium tremendum', but later adds qualifiers to further clarify the expression.

⁷³⁴ Ibid., p. 26.

⁷³⁵ Ibid., pp. 14–15.

⁷³⁶ Ibid., p. 21.

⁷³⁷ See John Wilson, *Introduction to Modern Theology: Trajectories in the German Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), p. 147.

compare'.⁷³⁸ Finally, Otto adds one additional qualification to the encounter. In a chapter entitled 'The Holy as a Category of Value', 'The holy' is qualified as 'augustus', referring to '[the] supreme worth or *value* [of the numen]'.⁷³⁹ Otto states that '[the holy] is "august" ...in so far as it is recognized as possessing in itself *objective* value that claims our homage'.⁷⁴⁰

These stages can also be applied to the recognition of the biblical sublime in Mendelssohn's music. Through his detailed attention to 'immediate' feelings and dramatic contrasts in the texts, Mendelssohn's music can be seen to lead the listener through such an 'encounter'. For example, the opening segment of Mendelssohn's *Psalm 22* introit (from 1844) can be read as follows:

- (1) bars 1–15: *mysterium* – recognizing the sublime distance between man and God,
- (2) bars 16–21: *tremendum* – an encounter with the numinous,
- (3) bars 22–35: *fascinans* – regarding the numinous as good,
- (4) bars 36–57: *augustum* – a self-deprecating feeling-response

Other settings of biblical texts by Mendelssohn may also follow this pattern, and thus take the listener through other experiences akin to Otto's 'encounter with the holy'.⁷⁴¹ As Otto himself identified Mendelssohn's *Psalm 2* as an example of experiencing the sublime in music (specifically the pianissimo setting of 'Dienet dem Herrn mit Fürcht' ('Serve the Lord with fear')), his pattern may help expose how Mendelssohn's music may still evoke the 'biblical sublime' for modern audiences.⁷⁴²

Mendelssohn and the Postmodern Sublime

This study of Mendelssohn's musical sublimity has applied concepts of the sublime from the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries to the composer's life and works, thereby connecting views of the sublime that seem most appropriate for a contextual understanding of his reception. However, formulations of the sublime continued to

⁷³⁸ Ibid., p. 33.

⁷³⁹ Ibid., p. 54.

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 54. Otto relates this aspect of 'the holy' to the prophet Isaiah's spontaneous feeling of original guilt and ensuing confession 'I am a man of *unclean* lips and dwell among a peoples of unclean lips' (Isaiah 6:5).

⁷⁴¹ The method is also applicable to other composers. I utilize Otto's pattern for a 'sublime' analysis of C.P.E. Bach's double-choir *Heilig* in a study entitled 'C.P.E. Bach's *Heilig* and "the Holy" of Rudolf Otto: An Eighteenth-Century Experience of the *Mysterium Tremendum*', forthcoming in an edited volume from Ashgate Press entitled *Music and Transcendence*. Some content from above derives from this essay.

⁷⁴² See Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 73. This passage is found in bars 108–109 in the published edition of *Psalm 2*.

develop in the twentieth century, as modern thinkers interacted with descriptions of the sublime from the past, especially that of Kant in his Third Critique. Such formulations have been described as the ‘postmodern sublime’, and the most famous presentation of such is found in Jean-François Lyotard’s *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*.⁷⁴³

According to David Johnson, Lyotard understands Kant’s sublime primarily as ‘a crisis for the faculty of presentation’.⁷⁴⁴ In contrast to the views of Schelling and Coleridge, which celebrate the genius’s power of a ‘unifying imagination’ (see Chapter One), Lyotard emphasizes ‘the failure of the imagination’ which is ‘[u]nable to discover anything sensible that would enable it to fulfill its sublime task’.⁷⁴⁵ Instead of asserting Kant’s triumph of reason over the sensible, Lyotard asserts ‘the presentation of the unrepresentable’ where ‘we are brought to feel the presence and the power of the content of that idea in the experience of the sublime’.⁷⁴⁶

Can this understanding of the sublime experience also be applied to Mendelssohn research? Is there any relevancy to Lyotard’s ‘presentation of the unrepresentable’ in the composer’s aesthetic outlook?

One possible connection relates to the composer’s famous interchange of letters with Souchay with regard to the *Lieder ohne Worte* (discussed in Chapter Six), where Mendelssohn expressed a view that words were not sufficiently clear to express one’s intended meaning because ‘the same word means one thing to one person and something else to another’. However, he asserts that ‘the song can say the same thing, can arouse the same feelings in one person as in another’.⁷⁴⁷ In one sense, Mendelssohn could be understood to say that instrumental music is the ‘presentation of the unrepresentable’ idea, anticipating Lyotard’s formula. By reading Mendelssohn’s works through the lens of Lyotard’s sublime, there is the potential for a ‘postmodern’ view of the composer, one that recognizes the sublime primarily in

⁷⁴³ Jean-François Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime: Kant's Critique of Judgment, [Sections] 23–29* (Meridian; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994). For a recent study relating the postmodern sublime to music, see Kiene Brillenburg Wurth, *The Musically Sublime: Indeterminacy, Infinity, Irresolvability* (Ashland, Ohio: Fordham University Press, 2009).

⁷⁴⁴ David B. Johnson, ‘The Postmodern Sublime: Presentation and Its Limits’ in *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present*, p. 118.

⁷⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 121, with reference to Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 5:274.

⁷⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 120 and 121.

⁷⁴⁷ Mendelssohn, Letter to Souchay, in Strunk, *Source Readings*, p. 1201. As Leo Treitler observes, Mendelssohn’s comment is a ‘surprisingly modernist insistence that words themselves are too ambiguous for accurate communication to be taken for granted’ (pp. 1198–1199).

the ineffable experience of the music, not any discernible ‘meaning’. Also, Mendelssohn’s works can thus serve as aesthetic objects to explore the postmodern sublime, finding potential continuities in aesthetic thought from the nineteenth to the late-twentieth centuries.⁷⁴⁸

Sublime Aesthetics and Musical Biography

Finally, sublime aesthetics may prove helpful in musicological work and writing beyond Mendelssohn studies. As this thesis has demonstrated, a multi-faceted concept such as the sublime can become a heuristic tool by which particular composers are examined, taking into account a wide range of research related to his or her biography, works, and cultural context. Such an examination may result in a new type of musical biography. Instead of a genre of writing seeking to narrate the life events of a composer and celebrate his or her compositions, this new approach could expand the genre of biography into a ‘philosophical enquiry’. Such a study would explore a composer’s conceptual context, and then use these concepts as ways to discern the composer’s influences, ‘read’ his or her works, and understand the works’ reception.

In particular, the concept of the sublime might serve to produce full-length biographies on various composers from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As the sublime has been acknowledged in shorter studies on composers from Handel to Beethoven (see representative articles listed in footnote number five), the sublime could be applied as an over-arching concept for new musical biographies. This approach may prove to be profitable for composers as seemingly diverse as Johannes Brahms (1833–1897) and Franz Liszt (1811–1886).

Brahms, a composer both derided as ‘traditional’ and hailed as ‘progressive’ (most famously by Schoenberg), wrote music infused with the religious sublime such as the *German Requiem* (Op. 45) and the *Song of Destiny* (Op. 54). Yet, he also became a recognized master of ‘Classical’ genres such as the symphony and concerto. Examining Brahms’ works with respect to sublime aesthetics could

⁷⁴⁸ One caution with this suggested approach is the potential distortion of two of Mendelssohn’s mature aesthetic values: (1) the appreciation of historical forms and (2) a confidence in music’s ability to actually communicate, as discussed in Chapters Five and Six. A solution to this may be the consideration of Mendelssohn’s works according to Lyotard’s category of ‘aesthetic modernism’ which ‘indulg[es] in pleasurable, nostalgic forms’, versus the category of postmodernism which is ‘suspicious of what has come before’ (as summarized by Johnson from Lyotard’s essay entitled ‘Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?’ (1982) in ‘The Postmodern Sublime’, pp. 122–123).

transverse these genre boundaries and help to understand his overall compositional output in a way never before realized in musical scholarship.

Likewise, the arch-Romantic Liszt composed works ranging from symphonic poems inspired by famous literature to his infamous *Totentanz* for piano to his much-neglected sacred works including psalm settings, masses, and oratorios. These compositions (as well as their inception and reception history) could be examined through the lens of sublime aesthetics, serving to expose a fuller view of Liszt than traditional accounts of the virtuosic pianist and radically 'progressive' composer allow.

In conclusion, sublime aesthetics may serve to better integrate and further extend the study of Mendelssohn and his music as well as other composers and their works. Beyond discrete considerations of biography, musical analysis, and reception history, the sublime provides integrating conceptual tools for better understanding the significance of a composer and his or her musical accomplishments. As concepts related to sublime aesthetics from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have served as resources for this study on Mendelssohn and the musical sublime, so may additional views of the sublime provide further resources for musicological research that surpass current conceptions.

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