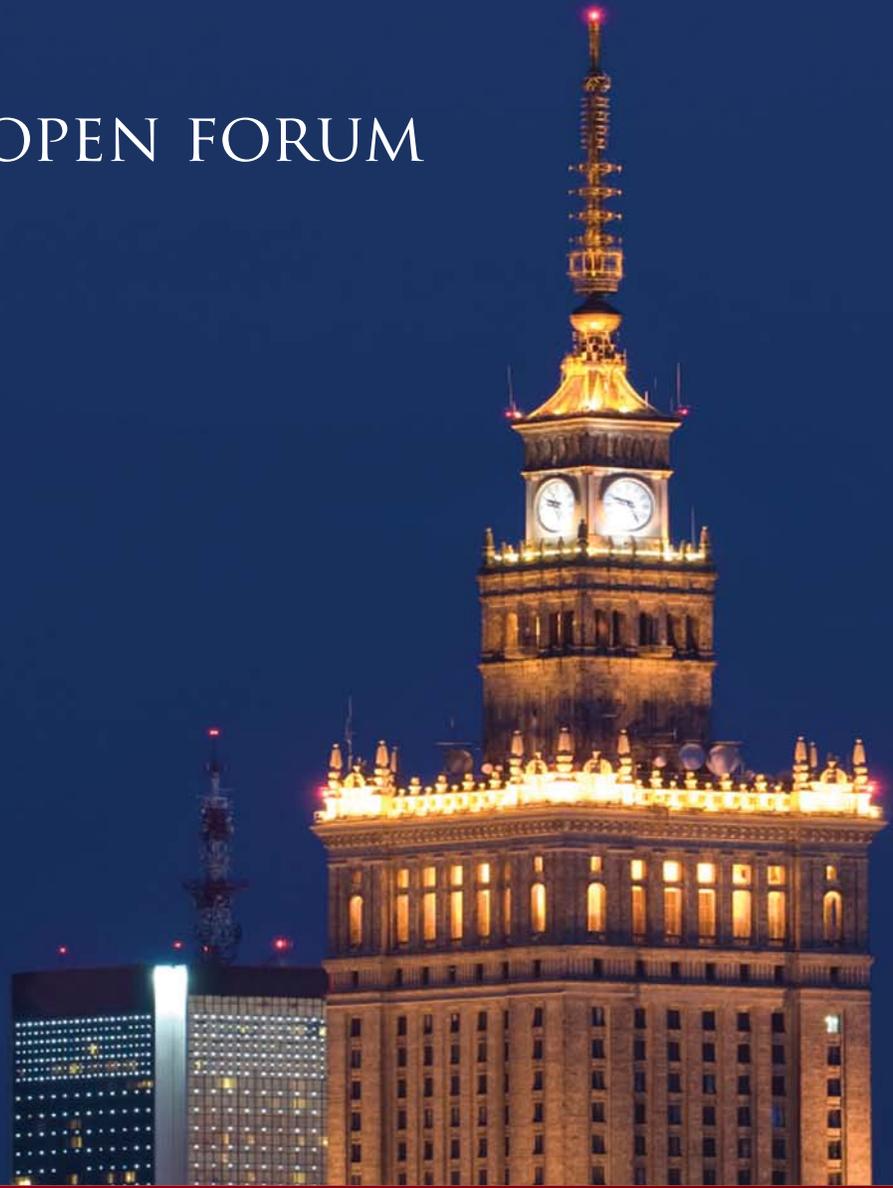


CES PAPERS - OPEN FORUM



MENDELSSOHN'S *REFORMATION* SYMPHONY  
AND THE CULTURE OF ASSIMILATION\*

PAUL-ANDRÉ BEMPÉCHAT

THE MINDA DE GUNZBURG

CENTER FOR EUROPEAN STUDIES

AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY



## OPEN FORUM CES PAPER SERIES

---

The Series is designed to present work in progress by current and former Center affiliates and papers presented at Center's seminars and conferences. Any opinions expressed in the papers are those of the authors, and not of CES.

### EDITORS:

Grzegorz Ekiert and Andrew Martin

### EDITORIAL BOARD:

Philippe Aghion  
David Blackburn  
Trisha Craig  
Peter Hall  
Roberto Foa  
Alison Frank  
Torben Iversen  
Maya Jasanoff  
Jytte Klausen  
Michele Lamont  
Mary Lewis  
Michael Rosen  
Vivien Schmidt  
Kathleen Thelen  
Daniel Ziblatt  
Kathrin Zippel

PAUL-ANDRÉ BEMPÉCHAT has been an Affiliate at Harvard's Center for European Studies since 2002. Trained at The Juilliard School and at the Sorbonne and Boston University in musicology and comparative literature, he is the first biographer of the Breton impressionist Jean Cras (Ashgate, 2009), and an internationally renowned concert pianist.

## ABSTRACT

---

Felix Mendelssohn's "Reformation" Symphony, opus 107 (1829-30) – "the beast," according to his sister Fanny – remains, along with his oratorios Saint Paul (1836) and Elijah (1846), one of his most controversial works. The symphony, composed in competition with works by other composers, was intended not only to honor the tercentenary of the Augsburg Confession, the principle doctrine of the Lutheran faith, but to convince Germans that one of their nation's most prominent Jewish families, recent converts to Protestantism, had assimilated. Mendelssohn's supreme efforts, spiritual, psychological, and technical, proved fruitless, most likely due to his Jewish origins, and to the thematic ecumenism of his symphony, which, projecting its author's own reconciliation of these traditions, unites motives from the Christian and Jewish traditions. Mendelssohn's religious convictions have, since the end of the Second World War, become an unnecessarily divisive source of controversy between musicologists and social historians. Aided by an analysis of Mendelssohn's spiritual hybridity as expressed in the symphony, this essay will strive to resolve the controversy by elucidating the psychological intricacies of German Jewish conversion during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and the futile drive by German Jews to assimilate into a society that would ultimately affirm and reject them as outsiders.

# MENDELSSOHN'S *REFORMATION* SYMPHONY AND THE CULTURE OF ASSIMILATION\*

*To my parents, in loving memory*

---

## Introduction

Felix Mendelssohn's (1809-47) "Reformation" Symphony, opus 107 (1829-30) – "the beast,"<sup>1</sup> according to his sister Fanny (1805-47) – remains, along with his celebrated oratorios *Saint Paul* and *Elijah*, one of his most controversial works. The Symphony was composed in honor of the tercentenary of the Augsburg Confession, the principle doctrine of the Lutheran faith. In light of the current and tacit tug-of-war between musicologists and social historians to situate his spiritual identity, Mendelssohn's motivation, due to his Jewish roots, merits scrutiny. Paradoxically, non-Jewish musicologists and social historians—outsiders to the innate angst Jews have always felt as outsiders trying to assimilate into Christian society—have naively assumed that his enforced childhood conversion, and his prolific output of sacred Christian compositions, amount to a willful effacement of his Jewish roots. Closer, more perspicacious analysis of the correspondence and original family documents now disproves the contention that Felix and his sister Fanny, albeit his entire family, felt themselves to be entirely loyal to doctrinal Christianity. Many Mendelssohns became, like other

---

\* Thanks are extended to David Conway (University College, London), Robert Fallon (Carnegie Mellon University), Peter Laki (Bard College), Angela Mace (Duke University), Andrew Martin (Harvard University), Douglass Seaton (The Florida State University), Barry Seldes, (Rider University), Jürgen Thym (Eastman School of Music), R. Larry Todd (Duke University), and Barry Wiener (City University of New York) for their wisdom and guidance in the refining of this essay, first presented on April 30, 2010 at the Lyrica Dialogues at Harvard, hosted by the Divinity School.

1 Letter of Felix to Carl Klingemann, August 6, 1830; *Briefwechsel*, Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2008, 83; see also Eric Werner, *Mendelssohn, A New Image of the Composer and His Age*, London: Macmillan, 1963, 215.

*Neuchristen*, converts-in-name only. Felix's letters, and the hybridity of the scriptural texts he chose for *St. Paul* and *Elijah*, reveal, however, an abiding faith anchored between Judaism and Christianity. As we shall learn, his "Reformation" Symphony is both the fruit and the emblem of his hybrid spiritual identity.

## Mendelssohn's Milieu

With Felix Mendelssohn, we deal with a young German Jew, the grandson of Moses Mendelssohn (1729-86), a central figure of the *Haskalah* (the Jewish Enlightenment), the revival of Hebrew learning in eighteenth-century Europe. Mendelssohn's mission had been to bridge the cultural and metaphysical divide between Christians and Jews. Four of his six children converted to either Protestantism or Catholicism. Among them was Felix's father Abraham, a co-founder of the family's prosperous bank, Mendelssohn & Co. which, by 1938, had become the second-most powerful private bank in Europe before it was liquidated by the Nazi régime. Banking was not limited to the Mendelssohn side of this extraordinary family, for Abraham's mother-in-law was the granddaughter of Daniel Itzig (1723-99), Master of the Royal Mint under the Prussian monarch Frederick the Great (1712-86), and court banker under his successor Frederick William II (1744-97). He also became extraordinarily wealthy as a result. By way of this legacy, and through the success of Mendelssohn & Co. and its powerful network, the Mendelssohns of Felix's generation, by birthright, were prominent members of the European elite. Yet, like many, they seemed convinced by Heinrich Heine's (1797-1856) proclamation that "conversion was the admission ticket to European society." As the distinguished historian Deborah Hertz informs:

Thousands of Jews across the German lands in the nineteenth century chose not the Jewish God but life as a Protestant. Yet few observers then and since, have been convinced that those who converted did so because

of spiritual experiences. The suspicion is that motives were either careerist, or romantic, because ethnic intermarriage was not legal until later in the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

Progressively, the bulk of the Mendelssohn family converted to Christianity. Felix's clan became members of the very liberal Reformed Church and never the Lutheran Church, as current scholarship would have us believe. (Doctrinal differences between the Lutheran and Reformed Churches were obscured by the Prussian Church Union of 1817.) Pressured by his wife, who wanted to convert for purely practical reasons, such as obtaining citizenship, Abraham eventually converted Felix and his siblings in 1816 in a private ceremony at their home in Berlin; their baptism took place, also privately, in 1823. This affirms the contention that, "a man felt he had to become a Christian in the nineteenth century in the same way he felt he had to learn English in the twentieth."<sup>3</sup> Further pressures from his brother-in-law Jakob, who had converted and adopted the name Bartholdy, led Abraham (1776-1835) and his wife Lea (1777-1842) to travel to Frankfurt am Main in 1822 for their private conversion ceremony so as to spare the family further turmoil. The six-year lapse between their and their children's conversion has come under much scrutiny and begs the question, why: In this writer's opinion, practical issues of inheritance from the Salomons and the prospect of ostracism from the Jewish financial communities were at stake. Furious that the conversions of her children and grandchildren had been enacted without her knowledge, Mme Salomon eventually excluded them from her Will.

Abraham Mendelssohn, who, in a now-famous quip referred to himself as the "human hyphen" – "Once I was the son of a famous father; now

I am the father of a famous son" – was, by all accounts, burdened by his father's legacy. During this age, when conversion had become a social norm for the Jewish elite (or "enlightened"), he correctly believed that no one bearing the name Mendelssohn could hide behind the hoopskirts of conversion, that the name Mendelssohn would forever represent "Judaism in transition."<sup>4</sup> Hence his insistence that Felix, as his international career was launched, drop Mendelssohn entirely in favor of Bartholdy on his business cards and in his programs. Had the children's initial religious instruction been in Judaism—Abraham, despite the seriousness of his initial religious instruction was by all accounts a deist, though not religious—it would, at best, have been lukewarm; after their conversion, they began to be educated in the least dogmatic among Protestant traditions and, as the family correspondence numerous evinces, they remained—and were forced by their environment to remain—acutely conscious of their Jewish heritage. Their grandfather's preponderant legacy and their direct experience of anti-Semitism, notably the *Hep-Hep* riots of 1819, when Felix was ten, serve to affirm this consciousness. The etymology of *hep-hep* is controversial: one explanation is that it is an acronym from the Latin *Hierosolyma est perdita* ("Jerusalem is Lost"). The lack of historical evidence that Mendelssohn ever attended synagogue is just as significant as the little, if any documentation that confirms regular church attendance, and this comes to us via the protestant minister, Julius Schubring (1806-89), who collaborated with Mendelssohn on the texts for his celebrated oratorios *St. Paul* (1836) and *Elijah* (1846).<sup>5</sup>

For their academic education and artistic training, the devoted parents had sought the best private tutors. By the time Felix had begun work on the "Reformation" Symphony in 1829, the young Mendelssohn had been heralded by Goethe and later Rob-

2 Deborah Hertz, *How Jews became Germans: This History of Conversion and Assimilation in Berlin*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007, 13.

3 Loc. cit.

4 See R. Larry Todd, *Mendelssohn, A Life in Music*. Oxford University Press, 2003, 139.

5 Jeffrey S. Sposato, "Mendelssohn and Assimilation: Two Case Studies," forthcoming, in *Ars Lyrica* 19 (2010): 1-26.

ert Schumann (1810-54) as the next, perhaps even greater prodigy after Mozart (1756-91); he had been universally confirmed by the greatest musicians of Europe as the Continent's new musical supernova: a virtuoso pianist and organist, a composer and conductor of unquestionably prodigious ability.

Even though his social status, wealth and extraordinary talent had served to launch Europe's new supernova to the zenith of European artistic life, Mendelssohn did not allow these privileges to isolate or alienate him from the people and communities he yearned to address, Jews included. Mirroring his grandfather's ideals, Felix strove to build bridges between people and unite them through music. This is confirmed by the vast cross-section of society, including professionals and amateurs, who accepted invitations to sing under Felix's baton at Berlin's Singakademie, and by his composition of sacred works for the Catholic and Protestant rites with words drawn from both Testaments; his setting of Psalm 24 to honor the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the New Israelite Temple of Hamburg was unfortunately lost.

For the tercentenary of the Augsburg Confession, the principal doctrine of the Lutheran faith, in 1830, Felix chose to demonstrate this spirit of ecumenism, and the burning desire of his family<sup>6</sup> to be recognized as assimilated Germans, by incorporating Catholic and Protestant liturgical motives (*cantus firmi*) with clear references to Judaism into this arguably first and greatest religiously-inspired ecumenical symphony. Recent scholarship has, in fact, disclosed that the national celebrations of the Augsburg Confession had been conceived and "marketed" by the Prussian authorities as ecumenical festivals, designed to promote social inclusion into the fabric of the Prussian state. Jews had been welcomed alongside Catholics and Protestants of every stripe into the many, year-long celebrations as expressions of national unity. Hence the references to the "Reformation" Symphony as being both political and pro-

grammatic.<sup>7</sup>

Felix's "Reformation" Symphony, as the family correspondence discloses, was a technical, idealistic, and emotional *tour de force*. From one movement to the next, one is obliged to experience the religious counterpoint of German history and the philosophical quest of the Enlightenment toward its resolution. To wit: his setting of Martin Luther's most famous hymn, *Ein' feste Burg is unser Gott* ("A Might Fortress is our God") bespeaks the foundation of all faiths. Mendelssohn's painstaking effort obliges us, therefore, to view him as a "people's composer", or a composer for the people. Without the benefit of a chorus or soloists, as is the case in Beethoven's "Ninth," with its last movement set to Friedrich Schiller's (1759-1805) poem *An die Freude* ("Ode to Joy," 1785), we are obliged to consider the "Reformation" Symphony a "people's symphony." For in his life as in his work, Felix, whose name means "happy," (for some, "lucky") strove to be happy by making people happy, to fulfill himself by enriching the lives of others. Here, we shall endeavor to demonstrate that the culture of Felix's "Reformation" Symphony is, therefore, the projected culture of a soul reconciled with both Judaism and Christianity.

### Ecumenism and its Discontents

Hector Berlioz (1803-69) perceived that Felix was very attached to his Protestant faith. The two had spent a good deal of time together in Rome, where the former, winner of the coveted *Prix de Rome*, was in residence during Felix's sojourn to the Eternal City in 1831. Despite Berlioz's witness, Felix was and continues to be perceived by cynics and religious fanatics—Jew and Christian alike—as an apostate who followed a self-interested professional agenda rather than a sincerely spiritual one by composing, among many Christian sacred works, a major, complex work

6 Judith Silber, *Mendelssohn and His "Reformation" Symphony*. PhD diss., Yale University, 1975, 39-41.

7 See Stan Landry, *That All May Be One? Church Unity, Luther Memory, and Ideas of the German Nation, 1817-1883*. PhD diss., University of Arizona, 2010, 68, 74-5, 82-103.

for the Augsburg tercentenary.<sup>8</sup> Was Mendelssohn's motivation truly sincere or career-related? Did he, with all the family's financial resources and moral support at his disposal, and approaching the crest of international renown really need to engage in a political charade of this magnitude? The composer's heritage merits examination will help clarify his motivations.

Felix's grandfather Moses was the sole Jewish philosopher whose impact shaped the future of contemporary Jewish-Christian relations. For his descendants, and for Germans in general, he was better understood as a philosopher rather than as a specifically Jewish figure. Nearly a century ahead of his time, he argued, as had many of his contemporaries, for the separation of church and state, claiming that social equality—a given in natural law—could never be achieved until this was enacted. Through learning and acculturation, by translating the Torah into Judeo-German (*Judendeutsch*, an admixture of German and Hebrew, written in the Hebrew alphabet), with side-by-side commentary in Hebrew, by insisting on the abandonment of Yiddish in favor of German, and by fighting for Jewish civil and political rights, he strove to evict his fellow Jews from the ghettos into the mainstream of German society, all the while preserving the integrity and inherent dignity of the Jewish faith. His enlightened, objective writings on the rationalist nature of Judaism as a conduit toward social harmony won the favor and friendship of the most illustrious philosophical thinker of his time, Gotthold Lessing (1729-81), and thwarted attempts by the Swiss zealot Johan Kaspar Lavater (1741-1801) to publicly undermine his faith in a futile attempt to convert him. In his play *Nathan der Weise* (1779)—for which Felix expresses unstinting admiration in his celebrated letter of March 28, 1834 to his father—Lessing incorporated the persona of Moses Mendelssohn into that of the protagonist as a plea for religious understanding, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence. Felix, in turn, would be influ-

enced by the greatest and most liberal German Protestant theologian of the nineteenth century, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) of the University of Berlin; during the last years of Schleiermacher's life, the two became quite close.

Moses Mendelssohn's writings had in all likelihood accelerated the spiritual and intellectual trajectory that, over time, largely succeeded in bridging the Jewish culture with that of Christian Europe. Through his personal example, Felix's grandfather inspired his co-religionists to do the same. It worked, and all too well: Within the 150 years that followed his death, Jews came to enjoy such prominent roles in German and European life, that their attempts to assimilate via conversion met with *crescendi* of resentment, jealousy, and hatred that resulted in the Holocaust. Felix's father, a cultured pragmatist rather than an a pure intellectual, understood that to avoid being called "Jewboy" and having stones thrown at him and his siblings, conversion, especially by one of Germany's best-known families, would enhance relations with the Christian community.<sup>9</sup> But did conversion really help the Mendelssohn family gain acceptance into German society? For acceptance into the world of commerce was not an issue. Their quest for acceptance, more than their need for residency rights and citizenship, must have evolved into a psychological obsession or emotional need.<sup>10</sup> On more than one occasion Abraham, who had enjoyed living in Paris between 1797 and 1804, contemplated leaving anti-Semitic environment of Berlin to return once and for all to the City of Lights. His celebrated letter to Fanny shortly after her conversion advises that Christianity was—at least for him—"the religion of most civilized people,"<sup>11</sup> for having supplanted Judaism in that role. To this point, I query what Abraham meant by "civilized." Who were the "uncivilized," and what, for him, constituted "civility," if only to

9 See Sebastian Hensel, *The Mendelssohn Family (1729-1847); From Letters and Journals*, Vol. 1, 25; trans. Carl Klingemann. New York: Harper & Bros., 1882.

10 See Silber, 39-41.

11 See Peter Mercer-Taylor, *The Life of Mendelssohn*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 30-32.

8 See Michael P. Steinberg, "Mendelssohn and Judaism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, *passim*.

be judged by the superficial trappings of one's religious tradition? His reasoning suggests that he had dismissed, among countless other "uncivilized," his relative and fellow Berlin banker Jacob Herz Beer (1769–1825), and his son, the composer Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791–1864). Beer had, in fact, opened among the first Reformed Temples in his home, and his son, who strongly opposed the recent incorporation of the organ in Jewish services, would arrange the music. Despite Abraham's vehement admonition that he dispense with the name Mendelssohn—"there can no more be a Christian Mendelssohn than there can be a Jewish Confucius"<sup>12</sup>—Felix, obviously proud of his grandfather's achievements and of his Jewish roots, rejected his father's position,<sup>13</sup> never abandoned the family name,<sup>14</sup> and succeeded, with family backing, in publishing his grandfather's collected works.<sup>15</sup> By extension, one can just as easily guffaw at the idea of a Christian Abraham Bartholdy as that of a Jewish Confucius, or why the Mendelssohn Bank was never renamed the Bartholdy Bank... One can not ignore the anxious undercurrent of angst suffused in Felix's alleged and famed, snide comment pointing out the irony of a "Jew-boy" reviving the greatest musical composition in Christendom, Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*,<sup>16</sup> for Felix's self-derogatory comment had evolved into a family joke and may be found repeated in a letter from Fanny to Felix dated February 2, 1838; this further reflects the innate angst the Mendelssohns felt about their situation as Jewish converts to Christianity.<sup>17</sup> Nor can we ignore Fanny's thought-provoking reference to "this

name [Bartholdy] that we all dislike."<sup>18</sup>

That Mendelssohn's vast correspondence rarely mentions his religious convictions also merits attention. It is clear that by his very nature, he viewed his spiritual life to be a private matter, but what appears even more obvious to this author is that Felix's reluctance to discuss religion at all bespeaks a lukewarm attitude to religion in general. Intense debate persists as to the sincerity of Felix's religious fervor and whether his prolific output of Christian sacred compositions was sincerely religious or simply pragmatic posturing.<sup>19</sup> What is certain is that Catholicism was not an option, as demonstrates a diary entry from Rome in 1840, upon attending a service at St. Peter's:

As in so many other cases, the Church of Rome has degraded this ancient and once simple and beautiful ceremony of the adoration of the cross to a mere outward display, and they bow like old women at a tea party. The prayer for the Jews alone is pronounced standing. *Tout dégénère entre les mains des hommes* ("Everything degenerates when left in the hands of man.")<sup>20</sup>

What becomes clear from this citation is Felix's openness to Christianity, and moreover, to faith, in general. But one must reckon that even if he had fervently practiced some form of Protestant Christianity, Felix, by zealously guarding his grandfather's name and legacy, continued to express solidarity with the Jewish communities at large.<sup>21</sup>

As the nineteenth century progressed, identity came to be defined by language, culture, and

12 Letter of July 7, 1829, cited in Werner, 36-38.

13 See Mercer-Taylor, 31.

14 Loc. cit.

15 See Daniel Langton, "Felix Mendelssohn's Oratorio *St Paul* and the Question of Jewish Self-Definition," in *Journal of Jewish Identities* 1/1 (2008), *passim*; and Leon Botstein, "Mendelssohn and the Jews," in *The Musical Quarterly* 82/1 (Spring 1998): 212.

16 See Eduard Devrient, *Meine Erinnerungen an Felix Mendelssohn*. Leipzig: J.J. Weber, 1872, 62.

17 See Marcia Citron, *The Letters of Fanny Hensel to Felix Mendelssohn*, Hillsdale (NY): Pendragon Press, 1987, 254. Cf. Werner, 42-44.

18 Loc. cit., n.13

19 See Silber, 41-42.

20 Cf. Note 1, letter of April 5, 1840, cited in Hensel, Vol. II, 96.

21 See Herbert Kupferberg, *Felix Mendelssohn, His Life, His Family, His Music*. New York: Scribner's, 1972, 37-39.

religion. And the newcomer to any society or community, especially if cultured, would be considered as mimicking local traditions as he tried, usually in vain, to assimilate. The idea that conversion, even by the intellectual elite, would convince Christians of the Jews' desire to fully assimilate becomes increasingly spurious as the century marched on, and the systematic rise of anti-Semitism had become so pervasive that one is obliged either to condemn Abraham Mendelssohn for having committed either a spiritual transgression or to pity this "tragic figure," as Eric Werner has called him,<sup>22</sup> for what had probably been an extremely naive miscalculation. Well before and well beyond Wagner's infamous diatribe, *Das Judentum in der Musik* ("Jewry in Music," of 1850), one reads unconscionably derisive pamphlets by countless, rabid anti-Semites across Europe on the inability of the Jew to truly integrate socially and, artistically, to be independently creative.

Sociologists Julia Kristeva and Frantz Fanon have posited, respectively, that cultural identification through assimilation, if successful, is "poised on the brink of a 'loss of identity' and 'cultural undecidability'."<sup>23</sup> And perhaps no better example of this exists than that of Felix Mendelssohn. For within the concept of the nation, nationhood or nationality, "nation" is obviously connected with "native." To paraphrase Homi Bhabha: people are born into relationships which are typically settled in a place. This form of primary and "placeable" bonding is of quite fundamental human and natural importance.<sup>24</sup> Such reasoning also defines the historically progressive levels of attachment of the Mendelssohn family to Germany, and corresponds to the bulk of the Jewish population of Germany (and Europe) unwilling or incapable of reading the handwritings on Hitler's walls and emigrating *en masse*.<sup>25</sup> For as Leon Botstein maintains:

Mendelssohn was the most widely recognized exemplar of the presumed folly of a faith in German-Jewish "symbiosis"... that the German-Jewish community had been living a dangerous lie from the 1790s on."<sup>26</sup>

## The Symphony

The psychological implications of the "Reformation" Symphony's emotional landscape are compelling and, if a hermeneutic perspective should gain validity, this reassessment may shed light on Mendelssohn's inner life, social conscience, and philosophical reasoning.

The Symphony itself is cyclic and therefore symbolic of oneness, of eternity, and of the Judeo-Christian belief in the eternal soul.<sup>27</sup> "A compact Beethoven 'Ninth'", some have lamely called it, due to a weak thematic link predicated on the perfect intervals:

22 See Werner, 38.

23 Cited in Homi Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, New York and London: Routledge, 1990, 304.

24 Ibid., 45.

25 Cf. Hertz, 15; also, n. 40.

26 Leon Botstein, "Mendelssohn and the Jews," in *The Musical Quarterly* 82 (Spring 1998), 216.

27 Cf. Mercea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, 124; see also Ecclesiastes 12:7; Genesis 2:7; and 1 Corinthians 15:45.

**Allegro ma non troppo, un poco maestoso** ♩=88

Viol. II

*sotto voce*

Ex. 1a: Beethoven: Symphony No. 9, opening  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mXOG4X-6bz8>  
 (The Hoboken Chamber Orchestra and the Chamber  
 Symphony of Princeton, Gary M. Schneider conductor)

**Allegro con fuoco**

*f*      *sf*      *sf*

Ex. 1b: Mendelssohn, “Reformation” Symphony, first movement, mm. 42ff.

Mendelssohn begins his ecumenical exegesis with a nod to Catholicism via a Palestrinian (cf. Pierluigi da Palestrina, 1525?-1594) point of imitation of the

Gregorian motive of the Cross, sometimes referred to as the “Jupiter” motive:

**Andante**

*p*      *mf*      *p*      *p*

Ex. 2a: Mendelssohn, “Reformation” Symphony, opening

and a citation from the so-called “Dresden Amen”:

The image displays a musical score for five instruments: Violino I, Violino II, Viola, Violoncello, and Basso. The score is written in G major (one sharp) and common time (C). The key signature is G major, and the time signature is common time. The score is divided into two systems, each containing five staves. The first system shows the beginning of the piece, with the first measure marked *pp*. The second system shows the continuation of the piece, with the second measure marked *pp*. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamics.

Ex. 2b: Mendelssohn, “Reformation” Symphony, first movement, mm. 38-41

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VJL2dwp06XE>

(First movement, complete, London Symphony Orchestra, Claudio Abbado, Conductor)

The peaceful introduction gives way to an impassioned contrapuntal battleground to evoke, as has been suggested, the conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism, concluded by the affirmation of Protestantism. This is symbolized in the Finale with the introduction of Martin Luther’s most famous hymn, *Ein’ feste Burg is unser Gott* (“A Mighty Fortress is our God”), here a wordless musical icon of this faith, admirably labeled “the *Marseillaise* of Lutheranism” by the distinguished musicologist Jürgen Thym:<sup>28</sup>

28 Personal communication, January 2011.

## CHORALE: Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott

Andante con moto

Flauti.

Oboi.

Clarinetti in C.

Fagotti.

Contrafagotto e Serpente.

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Bsn.

Cbsn.

*f*

*p*

*mf*

*p*

*mf*

*mf*

*cresc.*

*cresc.*

*cresc.*

*cresc.*

*p cresc.*

*p cresc.*

Ex. 2c: Mendelssohn: “Reformation” Symphony, fourth movement, opening  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u90QfO7VkCA&feature=related>  
 (The Netherlands Radio Chamber Orchestra, Ton Koopman, Conductor)

The emotional dynamics of Mendelssohn’s second and third movements, *Allegro vivace*, at times called its Scherzo, and Andante, respectively, are the ones that seem to have confounded scholars. The principal inquiry into the origins and motivation behind the “Reformation” Symphony remains Judith Silber’s doctoral dissertation (Yale University, 1987). Their missing, identifying labels, or “musical tags”, as Dr. Silber states,<sup>29</sup> accounts for this state of affairs. Yet are the “tags” entirely necessary? Purported to be Men-

delsssohn’s most ambitious and serious programmatic symphony, it is certainly one of the most ambitious symphonies after Beethoven’s Ninth. For some, the infusion of the latter’s invention, the Scherzo & Trio, reaffirm the superficial Beethovenian connection. Yet, even if this movement is structurally Beethovenian, is it Beethovenian in timbre? Beethoven’s symphonic scherzi are scarcely singable, as evinced by the jaunty opening theme of the corresponding movement in his Seventh:

29 See Silber, 163ff.



Ex. 3a: Beethoven: Symphony No. 7, third movement, opening  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OiEt9y\\_r-og&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OiEt9y_r-og&feature=related)  
 (Bavarian State Radio Orchestra, Carlos Kleiber, Conductor)

The Scherzo of Mendelssohn's Fifth, however, is indeed singable:



Ex. 3b: Mendelssohn: "Reformation" Symphony, second movement, opening  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pgYoFi4Q9O0>  
 (Orquestra Sinfonica do Teatro Nacional Claudio Santoro Brasilia, Ira Levin, Conductor)

Should we accept that the symphony transcends the realm of the programmatic and enters into that of the narrative, this becomes our first indication that the "Reformation" Symphony is autobiographical, for here, Mendelssohn may be regarded as reminiscing, through its happiness and singable *Volkstümlichkeit*, about the boy Felix, before his parents converted him, at seven, and obviously without his consent. Beyond this subjective conjecture one must understand that thematically, Mendelssohn has bonded this movement with the Symphony's outer movements. He achieves further cyclic unity by deriving the Scherzo's opening theme from Luther's hymn by way of their common, descending scalar motives and the embellished perfect fourth figures that begin *Ein' feste Burg. ist unser Gott* and conclude the theme of the Scherzo.

The source of my argument that this symphony is autobiographical lies not as much with its second movement as with its following, stylistically controversial Andante, which many have described as "mournful" and labeled a "lament".<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> See Douglass Seaton, "Symphony and Overture," in *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000, 104-106.

**Andante**

Violino I.

Violino II.

Viola.

Violoncello.

Basso.

*p*

*dolce*

*simili*

*p*

*p*

*sfz*

*p*

6

Vln. I.

Vln. II.

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

Ex. 4a: Mendelssohn, “Reformation” Symphony, *Andante*, opening  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dDq3QxEckhY&feature=related>  
 (Wiener Philharmoniker, John Eliot Gardiner, Conductor, June 1996, live)

Indeed, it is mournful—but mournful of what? Douglass Seaton of has perspicaciously situated this movement, which he calls an “arioso,” as follows:

One might hear it as expressing nostalgia, a voice from outside the main action of the symphony that tends to turn the symphonic plot into narrative rather than direct dramatic action.<sup>31</sup>

definitely the case. I hear this movement, and understand Professor Seaton’s allusion to its minor modality, quite foreign to the melodic and harmonic timbres of its neighboring movements, as being, euphemistically, “Jewish-sounding,” if, for any reason, that its melody, in minor, evokes, quite symbolically, the Jewish folksong, *Havenu shalom alechem* (“Peace unto you”), for which no precise date has been found:

To the ears of Biedermeier-era Germans, this was

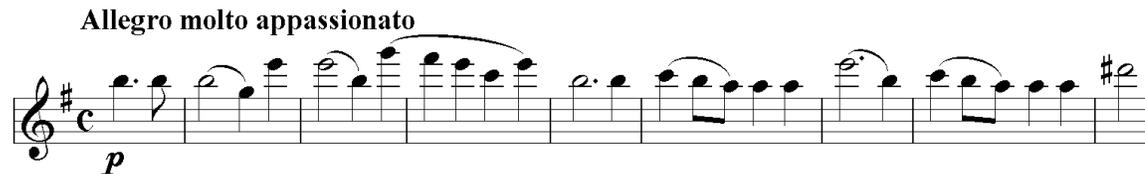
31      Loc. cit.



Ex. 4b: *Havenu shalom aleichem*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nANMTH3rzH4&feature=related>

Let us consider one of the melodies that all but defines Mendelssohn, the opening theme of his Violin Concerto, Op. 64 (1838-45), which Steven Lindeman has qualified as “haunting”,<sup>32</sup> that which “haunts” suggests “other-worldliness,” and this may again suggest a euphemism for “Jewish-sounding;” for this author, the melody takes root directly from the *Selicha* mode of the Synagogue, where the augmented fourth (diminished fifth) dominates:<sup>33</sup>



Ex. 4c: Mendelssohn, Violin Concerto, opening theme

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C0aZt5vgFHE>

(Henryk Szeryng, Violin; London Symphony Orchestra, Antal Dorati, Conductor)

The same psycho-spiritual reasoning can be attributed to the melodic roadmaps that punctuate many of Mendelssohn’s secular compositions throughout his life.

What did the young Mendelssohn wish to evoke or inspire, or even to confess, with the inclusion of such a stylistically different movement into a symphony the outer movements of which are decisively and undisputedly Christian? A simple, albeit willful expression of sadness for the religious strife within his family? A profound inner regret for his enforced conversion to Protestantism, which had, in fact, done little to placate his anti-Semitic environ-

ment, and had probably done more to estrange him from childhood friends? Or, perhaps more plausibly, to evoke the celebrations concurrently honoring the memory of his grandfather, born a century earlier.

To this writer, the most pregnant, and poignant autobiographical symbol within this epicurean spiritual landscape, lies in Mendelssohn’s direct, dual reference to Mozart who, inspired by the ecumenical spirit of the Enlightenment, had become a Freema-

son and joined one of the most liberal-thinking lodges in Vienna, and to his father. There is no doubt that Mendelssohn was fully acquainted with Mozart’s final op-

era *Die Zauberflöte* (1790), K. 620, which enters his correspondence, and into the reminiscences of his inner circle, quite often. In fact, his friend Ferdinand Hiller (1811-85) informs us that among all of Mozart’s operas, this was Felix’s favorite.<sup>34</sup> *Die Zauberflöte* is the most powerful, most palpable—and chronologically the most conclusive—symbol of the religious “shift” in Mozart’s spiritual life, from the strictures of Roman Catholicism to the ecumenical tenets of Freemasonry. It is highly probable that this signpost of Mozart’s spiritual evolution had been the magnet that drew the young Mendelssohn so closely to this opera—and to ecumenism—in particular.

Let us examine the opening words of the Queen of the Night’s first aria, “O zittre nicht, mein lieber Sohn!” (Oh, fear not, my dear son! (my emphasis))

32 Steven Lindeman, “The Works for Solo Instrument(s) and Orchestra,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 127.

33 Emmanuel Rubin and John H. Baron, ed. *Music in Jewish History and Culture*. Sterling Heights (MI): Harmonie Park Press, 2006, 135.

34 Ferdinand Hiller, *Mendelssohn: Letters and Recollections*. New York: Vienna House, 1972, 33.

**Recitativo**

Oboe I, II

Fagotto I, II

Corno I, II  
in Sib alto / B hoch

Violino I

Violino II

Viola

Königin der Nacht

Violoncello  
e Basso

O zitt - re nicht, mein lie-ber Sohn.

Ex. 5a: Mozart: “The Magic Flute,” Act I, no. 4, Aria of the Queen of the Night, opening recitativo  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ov1hRqPnm58&feature=related>  
 (Diana Damrau, Soprano, The Royal Opera, Covent Garden, Sir Colin Davis, Conductor)

At the first important cadence of the “Reformation” Symphony’s Andante, Mendelssohn recalls the Queen of the Night’s words of consolation to Tamino, which end with “mein lieber Sohn”:

Ex. 5b: “Reformation” Symphony, Andante, mm. 16-18

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rhgk8HudRA>  
 Orquestra Sinfônica da Universidade Estadual de Londrina, Marcelo Urias, Conductor)

The citation occurs at measure 18. This is highly significant, for in Hebrew gematria, stenographically, eighteen reads not only as the number 18 but also as

*chai*, which means “life”<sup>35</sup> and thus echoes the quotation of “son” from Mozart. That Mendelssohn was unaware of this, is inconceivable; that this citation at measure 18—with its direct Judaic reference and paternal inference—could be coincidental is highly improbable, given the young man’s level of erudition and his acute awareness of the family’s Jewish heritage. One should remember that when Abraham and Lea converted, Felix’s Bar Mitzvah would have been but a year away; he likely celebrated the Bar Mitzvahs of his friends where he must have heard the toast *L’Haim* (“To life!”), just as at Jewish weddings. Because his home schooling had probably been intended to shelter him from the assured anti-Semitism he would have experienced in public school, the Mendelssohn home, despite conversion, therefore

<sup>35</sup> In the Jewish tradition, a *chai* is a gesture of generosity; accordingly, gifts are often offered in multiples of 18.

remained at heart a Jewish home, as many of the letters, peppered with Yiddish expressions, reveal.<sup>36</sup> With his parents and uncles, who had been educated in very conservative, even orthodox Judaism, Felix likely made the yearly pilgrimage to his ancestors' grave sites to pray and place stones—symbolizing the eternity of the soul—on their tombs. He had doubtless heard and probably knew the supreme doxological Jewish prayer, the *Kaddish*, which he may even have recited in Hebrew along with Abraham and his uncles, at Moses' grave. Or must the current assessment of Abraham's spirituality be such that it obliges us to consider him as being so self-despising that he would willingly—and demonstratively—forego honoring the memory of his father, of *such* a father? Felix could easily have dispensed with the opening two introductory measures and left unaltered neither the movement's thematic import nor logical construction, leaving us with a pure *vierhebig* opening phrase. That at measure 18 Felix should interlock a symbolic echo of his paternally-imposed conversion and the arrival of the evil Queen of the Night—at the height of Abraham's extreme frustration with his son over his refusal to abandon Mendelssohn in favor of Bartholdy—is compelling.<sup>37</sup>

The Andante concludes with a peaceful *tierce de Picardie* in G major, from which Mendelssohn summons Luther's *Ein' feste Burg is unser Gott*. Intoned by the solo flute, the hymn spreads gradually across the winds, then across the orchestra to symbolize not only the spread of Protestantism—a *wind* of liberalism and change—but its growing, dynamic presence within his own family. As in the first movement, this movement also explodes into repeated episodes of virtuoso counterpoint, once again symbolic of the religious wars fought, and the spiritual struggles within the family. The symphony concludes majestically with a restatement of Luther's hymn.

To be remembered is that a good number of

36 See David Conway, "Short, Dark and Jewish-Looking: Felix Mendelssohn in Britain," in *The Jewish Year Book 2009*, ed. S. Massil. London: Valentine Mitchell, 2009, *passim*.

37 See Werner, 36-38.

Felix's compositions are autobiographical and reflect his life directly: his travels across Britain and Italy, his literary tastes and his love for painting and art. But *this* autobiographical narrative bespeaks not only the affirmation of Protestantism within Christendom. It underscores Mendelssohn's probative, personal and probable intellectual reconciliation of Judaism with Christianity. We must not lose sight of the fact that Luther's words accommodate the tenets of any religion: that for those who believe in God, He is man's tower of strength, and that many of Mendelssohn's sacred works are not exclusively Christian but strongly ecumenical in their incorporation of passages from both the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament, at times within the same work. In the "Reformation" Symphony the words of Luther's hymn are drawn from Psalm 46, where one finds only one Christological reference. And as a reflection of Mendelssohn's religious life, this symphony appears as the "Confession Without Words" by the inventor of the "Songs Without Words." Felix had indeed proposed alternate titles to the "Reformation" Symphony, including *Kirchensymphonie* and *Konfessionssymphonie*.<sup>38</sup>

The history books disclose in ample detail that Mendelssohn and his entire family were very enthusiastic about this symphony in particular and, as highly respected citizens and protected Jews of Berlin, that they expected Felix to receive the commission for the celebrations surrounding the tercentenary of the Augsburg Confession.<sup>39</sup> Such an event—fully confluent with the intended spirit of the state-sanctioned ecumenical celebrations—would have symbolized the family's final assimilation into German society.<sup>40</sup> Yet, this did not come to pass as the commission was declined Mendelssohn in favor of the Protestant, more musically conservative Eduard Grell (1800-86). Despite Mendelssohn's attempts to

38 See Judith Silber, "Mendelssohn and His 'Reformation Symphony,'" in *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 40/2 (Summer, 1987), 136.

39 See Silber, *diss.*, 32.

40 Cf. Judith Silber, "Mendelssohn and His 'Reformation Symphony,'" in *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 40/2 (Summer, 1987), *passim*.

conduct the symphony in a number of cities across Europe, these attempts were fruitless. One performance was given during his lifetime, in Berlin, on November 15, 1832; the next occurred after its publication in 1868, well after the composer's death, and just when the next great ecumenical work of the German sacred repertoire, Johannes Brahms' (1833-97) *German Requiem* (1865-68), appeared.

After its premiere, Mendelssohn claimed the "Reformation" Symphony to be overtly childish, amateurish, and he ordered its destruction. Happily, this did not come to pass. But one can well understand his frustration. As Mendelssohn's confession without words, this rejection was so deeply personal, so deeply and socially significant for him, and for his family—especially because of the stature they enjoyed in Berlin—that denying them the opportunity to demonstrate their assimilation into German society would have been understood as a severe social setback. Felix's apparent profession of Christian faith—whether it was sincere or public posturing—was so direct that it did not require words; for the words were built in and everyone knew them. Including a chorus in the last movement would have been perceived as kitsch, overly Beethovenian, and extremely obsequious. He probably felt that everyone would understand him and his family through the less-than-cryptic religious program of the symphony. The young Mendelssohn's unusually bitter writings on the subject, and accounts of his despondency all attest to the intense frustration he felt.<sup>41</sup> Doubtless, the young Felix wished to move on and continue to grow artistically.

My position is that this symphony's final movements symbolize the continuity and reconciliation of the Biblical prophecies. Mendelssohn has willed a *dénouement* of the "other-worldly"—or Judaic-sounding—Andante and has moved, *attacca*, into the Lutheran Finale. The score affirms the immediacy—albeit *inevitability*—of this connection by the absence of a concluding double-bar. If this exegesis is to be considered plausible, how else could

Mendelssohn have better, or more logically concluded his Andante?

## Conclusion

In his famed Sorbonne lecture of 1882, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation ?* ("What is a nation?"), the great Breton philosopher-historian Ernest Renan (1823-92) denied any naturalistic determinism of the boundaries of nations, maintaining that these are *not* dictated by language, geography, race, religion, or anything else, but that nationalities are made by human will.<sup>42</sup> Johannes Brahms's *Requiem* exemplifies this contention, further explicated by Renan's prodigious observation that "A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle." (*Une nation est une âme, un principe spirituel.*) Brahms had initially wished to call his most deeply personal sacred work, his ecumenical requiem, "A Human Requiem." Yet, we were bequeathed *Ein deutsches Requiem* to underscore the accruing nationalistic fervor of its times.

How, then, are we to "locate" Felix Mendelssohn's culture and cultural *Zeitgeist* but to affirm his *will* to be identified as an assimilated German, and to be accepted as such? This, obviously, did not happen during his lifetime, and his disjunction from German society was all but finalized during the 1930s by the Nazi regime. Yet Felix and his family, all born in Germany, morally and ethically, were and felt entitled to both *jus sanguinis* and *jus soli*, the right to citizenship by both parentage and birth. Felix's culture was not his imposed, "administrated" Christianity, his "admission ticket to European society," but his broad, European education, the culture of the German language, its literature and, above all, the preponderant legacy of Johann Sebastian Bach as a musical exegesis of Lutheranism rather than the theology of Martin Luther. And the foundation of this culture, the genetrix of Felix's process of acculturation, had been his home, not a Lutheran home, but a

---

42 Cited in Gellner, "Nationalism and Cohesion in Complex Societies," in *Culture, Identity and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, 8.

---

41 See Werner, 215.

Jewish home. One must remember that his great-aunt Sarah Itzig Levy (1761-1854) had been a patron of Bach's sons Wilhelm Friedemann (1710-84) and Carl Philipp Emanuel (1714-88); nor must one forget that it was his grandmother Bella Salomon, an Orthodox Jew, who had given Felix a copy of the score of Sebastian Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* as a present for his fifteenth birthday in 1824; she would pass away a month later. This score became, to quote the distinguished Mendelssohn scholar R. Larry Todd, "the cornerstone of his musical faith,"<sup>43</sup> rather than the cornerstone of his religious faith. By extension, it is inconceivable that such a brilliant young man, raised in this environment, and knowing his grandmother's hostility toward conversion, could have remained unaware that Jewish law (*Halakhah*) does not recognize conversion. Nor, given the quality and intensity of his home-schooled education, and his intellectual curiosity, could he have remained unaware of Luther's rabid anti-Semitism and remained indifferent to its legacy or to Luther himself. Nor was he naive enough to disregard the fragility of German-Jewish relations or to ignore positive developments for Jews in England. Felix's mindful attention, in 1833, to the simultaneity of the British Parliamentary debates to grant Jews the right to vote and to hold office, just as the Prussian monarch had begun dismantling civil rights statutes for Jews in the German Duchy of Posen, is noteworthy: Professor Todd has suggested that Felix's comments on these events—*Das amusirt mich prächtig* ("This greatly amuses me")—reflect those of a "detached spectator."<sup>44</sup> I respectfully disagree with Professor Todd's understated translation of *prächtig* which, in fact, attaches itself to effusive adverbs such as "marvelously." The tone of Mendelssohn's writing can well be interpreted as cynical hyperbole grounded in irony, resignation, even disgust, rather than of dispassion or actual amusement. My translation, in contemporary vernacular, would be "This is really over-the-top!" or "This is ridiculous!", or "This is hilarious!" Unquestionably fearful for his own family's safety and well-being, Mendels-

43 R. Larry Todd, *A Life in Music*, Oxford University Press: New York and Oxford: 2003, 123-124.

44 *Ibid.*, 283.

sohn followed these developments not as a Christian but as a Jew. And, at his death, Felix joined his parents in a section of Berlin's *Dreifaltigkeitsfriedhof* reserved for converted Jews, the *Neuchristen*. This, and this *alone* substantiates his understanding—and that of upper-class Jews living in Germany—of how German Christians perceived even privileged, converted Jews: as outsiders.<sup>45</sup>

When, over a century later, the German musicologist Carl Dahlhaus (1928-89) bequeathed his concept *Das Problem Mendelssohn*, he bequeathed nothing more than a colossal pseudo-intellectual abstraction, if not obstruction, or infection to proper and dignified Mendelssohn scholarship. To wit: has any other composer's circumcision ever come under scrutiny? *Das Problem Wagner*, even *Das Problem Irgendwem* ("Whoever") would have been a more plausible quest for the problem-hungry Dahlhaus.<sup>46</sup> One is compelled to query why, indeed, Dahlhaus's problem was Mendelssohn and not Wagner... For if one must concede to the existence of a "problem" surrounding Felix Mendelssohn and his family, the essential "problem" was and remains for Wagner and his kind, the indestructibility of Judaism—the very foundation of Christianity—as the governing matrix behind the metaphoric, analytical framework constructed around them. To quote Michael Steinberg:

The so-called "Mendelssohn problem," as we know, originates with Wagner and stands at the source of a powerful trope in which Jewishness, femininity, and the inability to create become shared indicators of cultural weakness, danger, and pollution. *Internally* [my emphasis], there is no Mendelssohn problem, just as there is

45 See Langton, 3-4.

46 *Das Problem Mendelssohn*. Regensburg: Bosse, 1974. See also Eric Werner, "Das Problem Mendelssohn by Carl Dahlhaus," in *Notes*, Second Series, Vol. 33, No. 2 (December, 1976): 281-284; and Albrecht Riethmüller, "Das Problem Mendelssohn," in *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft*, 59/3 (2002): 210-221. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2002.

no Jewish problem.<sup>47</sup>

A trope of jealousy borne out by history: For when the greatest literary of the German language, Goethe, declared a Jew to be an even greater prodigy than Mozart, he unwittingly sowed the seeds of Mendelssohn's vulnerability. To wit: the conversations between Felix's teacher Zelter and Goethe in 1821, demonstrating clearly their anti-Semitic attitudes by stigmatizing him as "the son of a Jew," and that "it would be something rare if a Jew became an artist," horrified the family and revealed the roots of Mendelssohn's subsequent rejection by future generations of Germans.<sup>48</sup>

It is my position that Felix's spirituality, from within, was hybrid; for his environment, he lived in a religious No-Man's-Land. Crisscrossing Europe on tour he quickly realized that the only other country where he could be religiously more comfortable was in a more tolerant Britain. But he was German, and *the* most versatile, virtuosic German composer of the generation that followed Beethoven. Steeped in the ecumenical tenets of the Enlightenment, he held steadfastly to his celebrated grandfather's logical trajectory of faith, in turn supported by Moses' Christian philosopher-friend Lessing and by his friend, Schleiermacher. Lessing's reasoning on education, "What education is to the individual being, revelation is to the whole human race,"<sup>49</sup> and Schleiermacher's discourse on religion, wherein he writes "It matters not what conceptions a man adheres to, he can still be pious"<sup>50</sup> amply reflect the enlightened theology that Mendelssohn imparted to his children, to his grandchildren, and to the Jewish people. Mendelssohn, who saw history as a continuum of both discipline and emancipation, had created not a new philosophi-

cal system but a mechanism for understanding and outreach.

Hand in hand with this extraordinary leap of faith came Gotthold Lessing's choice to incarnate the person, character, spirit, and teachings of his lifelong friend as *Nathan der Weise*. In time, this became one of the most important plays of the German literature. Central to this great work is the parable of the rings, a latter-day projection of the Wisdom of Solomon. Set in Jerusalem during the Third Crusade, Lessing's protagonist, the Jewish merchant Nathan, responds to the Sultan Saladin's and the Templar's query as to which is the true religion, and succeeds in bridging the gaps between their faiths. Nathan advances the parable of a family's heirloom ring, imbued with magical powers to transform its owner into a creature as worthy of God as to his earthly environment. The ring was to be passed down by the father to his three sons. During moments of "pious weakness" he promises it to each, and in order to keep his promise, the father had had two replicas made, each indistinguishable from the original. On his deathbed, he offers one to each of his sons. Quarreling between the brothers ensued as to which was authentic. A wise judge retorted that no definitive decision could be rendered at the time, that they must also entertain the possibility the original had been lost, that all three rings were replicas, and that it was up to each of them to live a righteous life rather than depend upon the powers of the ring to imbue them with virtue. Nathan's reasoning as to which religion is true exonerates the simple rationale that one should live according to the religion learned from those we respect.

Two generations later, Moses Mendelssohn's grandson applied this axiom, through his own, prolific legacy of sacred and secular-exegetical works, to continue bridging the gap between Christians and Jews. By creating works which address the tenets central to both faiths, Felix Mendelssohn assumed his grandfather's mantle to become a genuine musical philosopher whose compositions, through their reason, emotional balance and structural equilibrium, link him—and his most fervent prayers and wishes—

47 Michael P. Steinberg, Introduction to *Culture, Gender, and Music: A Forum on the Mendelssohn Family*, in *The Musical Quarterly* (Winter, 1993): 649.

48 See Todd, 30.

49 Frederick Copelston, *A History of Philosophy: The Enlightenment*. New York: Continuum, 1960, 128.

50 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Reden über die Religion an die Gebildeten unter ihre Verächtern* (1799); trans. John Oman. New York: Ungar, 1955, 79.

in solidarity with his fellow man.<sup>51</sup> The culture of his “Reformation” Symphony is, indeed, the projection of a cultured soul reconciled with both Judaism and Christianity.

Through his many musings on what is culture, what is a nation’s culture, what and where are one’s individual culture or cultures, Homi Bhabha has proposed—and paraphrasing, I relate this to Jews in particular—that

In the midst of these lonely gatherings of scattered peoples, their myths and fantasies and experiences, there emerges a historical fact of singular importance... The [new] nation fills the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin, and turns that loss into the language of *metaphor*. Metaphor, as the etymology of the word suggests, transfers the meaning of home and belonging... across those distances and cultural differences that span the imagined community of the nation-people... The locality of culture is more around *temporality* than about *historicity*: a form of living that is more complex than ‘community’; more symbolic than ‘society’; more connotative than ‘country’; less patriotic than *patrie*; more rhetorical than the reason of and for the state; more mythological than ideology; less homogenous than hegemony; less centered than the citizen; more collective than subjective; more psychic than civility; more hybrid in the articulation of cultural differences and identifications...<sup>52</sup>

---

51 Cf. Leon Botstein, “Songs without Words: Thoughts on Music, Theology, and the Role of the Jewish Question in the Work of Felix Mendelssohn,” in *The Musical Quarterly* 77/4 (Winter, 1993): 561-78; see, in particular, 572, 575.

52 Homi Bhabha, “DissemiNation,” in *Nation and Narration*, 291-92.

This profoundly humanist perspective further explicates the roots, the foundations, and the thrust of the “Reformation” Symphony. When H. G. Wells astutely claimed that “Our true nationality is mankind,”<sup>53</sup> he unwittingly bespoke Felix Mendelssohn’s legacy: that to be German, French, or Arab, Jewish, Christian, or Muslim, or what have you, these are psychological and spiritual entrapments. For one, the hybridity, for another, the uniqueness, for a third, the dichotomy, *Zerrissenheit* or *déchirure* of Mendelssohn’s spirituality—deeply and fundamentally rooted in the wisdom of his visionary grandfather, the pragmatism of his father and the universality of Enlightenment thought—each of these assessments transcends Friedrich Schiller’s maxim, “All men will become brothers” (“Alle Menschen werden Brüder”), into Felix’s own: Reveling *without* words, Mendelssohn’s spirit soared through his “Reformation” Symphony to proclaim “Alle Menschen *sind* Brüder”—that “All men *are* brothers”.

---

53 H.G. Wells, *The Outline of History*, Vol. 2, New York: Macmillan, 580.

## REFERENCES

---

Applegate, Celia. *Bach in Berlin: Nation and Culture in Mendelssohn's Revival of the St. Matthew Passion*. Ithaca (NY): Cornell University Press, 2005.

Beethoven, Ludwig van. *Symphony No. 7 in A major*, Op. 92. Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2007.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Symphony No. 9 in D minor*, Op. 125. Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2010.

Behm, Britta L. *Moses Mendelssohn und die Transformation der jüdischen Erziehung in Berlin: eine bildungsgeschichtliche Analyse zur jüdischen Aufklärung im 18. Jahrhundert*. Münster: Waxman, 2002.

Berlioz, Hector. *Mémoires*. Flammarion: Paris, 1991.

Bhabha, Homi. "DissemiNation," in *Nation and Narration*. New York and London: Routledge, 1990.

\_\_\_\_\_. ed. *Nation and Narration*. New York and London: Routledge, 1990.

Botstein, Leon. "Mendelssohn and the Jews," in *The Musical Quarterly* 82 (1998/1): 210-19.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Songs without Words: Thoughts on Music, Theology, and the Role of the Jewish Question in the Work of Felix Mendelssohn," in *The Musical Quarterly* 77 (1993/4): 561-78.

Bourel, Dominique. *Moses Mendelssohn: la naissance du judaïsme moderne*. Paris: Gallimard, 2004.

Citron, Marcia. *The Letters of Fanny Hensel to Felix Mendelssohn*. Hillsdale (NY): Pendragon Press, 1987.

Conway, David. "Short, Dark and Jewish-Looking: Felix Mendelssohn in Britain," in *The Jewish Year Book* 2009, ed. S. Massil. London: Valentine Mitchell, 2009.

Copelston, Frederick. *A History of Philosophy: The Enlightenment*. New York: Continuum, 1960.

Dahlhaus, Carl. *Das Problem Mendelssohn*. Regensburg: Bosse, 1974.

Devrient, Eduard. *Meine Erinnerungen an Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy und seine Briefe an mich*. Leipzig: J.J. Weber, 1869.

Eliade, Mercea. *The Myth of the Eternal Return*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

Endelman, Todd M. "Anti-Semitism and Apostasy in Nineteenth-Century France: A Response to Jonathan Helfand," in *Jewish History* 5/2 (Fall 1991): 57-64.

## REFERENCES

---

- Gellner, Ernest. *Culture, Identity and Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Hensel, Sebastian. *The Mendelssohn Family (1729-1847); From Letters and Journals*, trans. Karl Klingemann. New York: Harper & Bros., 1882.
- Hertz, Deborah. *How Jews became Germans: The History of Conversion and Assimilation in Berlin*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Why Did the Christian Gentleman Assault the Judischer Elegant? Four Conversion Stories from Berlin, 1816-1825," in *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* (1995) 40 (1): 85-106.
- Hiller, Ferdinand. *Mendelssohn: Letters and Recollections*. Trans. M. E. von Glehn. New York: Vienna House, 1972.
- Hoensbroech, Raphael, Graf von. *Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdys unvollendtes Oratorium Christus*. Kassel: Bosse, 2006.
- Jacob, Heinrich Eduard. *Felix Mendelssohn and His Time*. Trans. R. & C. Winston. London: Barrie, 1963.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Nations without Nationalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.
- Kunold, Wolf. "Opus 11 und Opus 107 – Analytische Bemerkungen zu zwei Sinfonien von Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy," in *Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1982.
- Kupferberg, Herbert. *The Mendelssohns: Three Generations of Genius*. New York: Scribner, 1972.
- Landry, Stan. *That All May Be One? Church Unity, Luther Memory, and Ideas of the German Nation, 1817-1883*. PhD diss., University of Arizona, 2010.
- Langton, Daniel. "Felix Mendelssohn's Oratorio *St Paul* and the Question of Jewish Self-Definition," in *Journal of Jewish Identities* (2008) I/1: 1-15.
- Lebrett, Jeffrey S. *The Rhetoric of Cultural Dialogue: Jews and Germans from Moses Mendelssohn to Richard Wagner and Beyond*. Stanford (CA): Stanford University Press, 2000.
- Lessing, Gotthold. *Nathan der Weise*. Munich: Hanser, 1970.
- Lindeman, Stephen. "The Works for Solo Instrument(s) and Orchestra," in *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Mack, Michael. *German Idealism and the Jew: The Inner Anti-Semitism of Philosophy and German Jewish Responses*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

## REFERENCES

---

- Mendelssohn, Felix. *Reformation Symphony*, Op. 107. Kassel and New York: Bärenreiter, 2009.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Sämtliche Briefe*. Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2008.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Violin Concerto in E minor*, Op. 64. Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2006.
- Mendelssohn, Lea. *Ewig die deine: Briefe von Lea Mendelssohn Bartholdy an Henriette von Pereira-Arnstein*, 2 vols. W. Dinglinger and R., ed. Hannover: Wehrhahn, 2010.
- Mercer-Taylor, Peter. *The Life of Mendelssohn*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus. *Die Zauberflöte*. Leipzig: Peters, 1986.
- Nichols, Roger. *Mendelssohn Remembered*. Boston and London: Faber & Faber, 1997.
- Olivier, Philippe. *Félix Mendelssohn : un intercesseur multiculturel ?* Paris: Hermann, 2008.
- Rehding, Alexander. *Monumentality and Music: Commemoration and Wonderment in Nineteenth Century Germany*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Renan, Ernest. *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation ?* Paris: Laffond, 1882.
- Riethmüller, Albrecht. "Das Problem Mendelssohn," in *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft*, 59/3 (2002): 210-221. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2002.
- Rubin, Emmanuel and John H. Baron, ed. *Music in Jewish History and Culture*. Sterling Heights: Harmonie Park Press, 2006.
- Schleiermacher, Friedrich. *Reden über die Religion and die Gebildeten unter ihre Verächtern (1799)*. Trans. J. Oman. New York: Ungar, 1955.
- Seaton, Douglass, ed. *The Mendelssohn Companion*. Westport (CT): Greenwood Press, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Symphony and Overture," in *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000, 104-106.
- Silber, Judith K. *Mendelssohn and the Reformation Symphony: A critical and historical study*. PhD diss., Yale University, 1987.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Mendelssohn and His 'Reformation Symphony,'" in *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 40/2 (Summer, 1987): 310-36.
- Smith, David Charles. *Protestant Anti-Judaism in the German Emancipation Era, in Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 3/4 (July – October , 1974): 203-19.

## REFERENCES

---

Sorkin, David. "The Mendelssohn Myth and its Method," in *New German Critique* No. 77, Special Issue on German-Jewish Religious Thought (Spring – Summer, 1999): 7-28.

Sposato, Jeffrey S. "Mendelssohn and Assimilation: Two Case Studies," forthcoming, in *Ars Lyrica* 19 (2010): 1-26.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Price of Assimilation: Felix Mendelssohn and the Nineteenth-Century Anti-Semitic Tradition*. Oxford and London: Oxford University Press, 2006.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Creative Writing: The [Self-] Identification of Mendelssohn as Jew," in *The Musical Quarterly* 82/1 (Spring, 1998), 190-209.

Stahelin, Martin. "Der frühreife Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy: Bemerkung zu seinem 'Konfirmationsbekenntnis,'" in *Mendelssohn-Studien* 16 (2009): 11–49, Hannover: Wehrhahn, 2009.

Steinberg, Michael P. "Mendelssohn and Judaism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

\_\_\_\_\_. Introduction to *Culture, Gender, and Music: A Forum on the Mendelssohn Family*, in *The Musical Quarterly* (Winter 1993): 649-50.

Todd, R. Larry. *Fanny Hensel: The Other Mendelssohn*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Mendelssohn, A Life in Music*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

\_\_\_\_\_. "On Mendelssohn's Sacred Music, Real and Imaginary," in *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*, ed. P. Mercer-Taylor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Wagner, Richard. *Das Judentum in der Musik*. Leipzig: J.J. Weber, 1869.

Wells, H.G. *The Outline of History*. New York: Macmillan, 1920.

Werner, Eric. "Das Problem Mendelssohn by Carl Dahlhaus," in *Notes*, 2nd Series, Vol. 33/2 (December, 1976): 281-84.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Mendelssohn, A New Image of the Composer and His Age*. New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963.

Witte, Martin. "Zur Programmgebundenheit der Sinfonien Mendelssohns," in *Das Problem Mendelssohn*, ed. C. Dahlhaus. Regensburg: Bosse, 1974.