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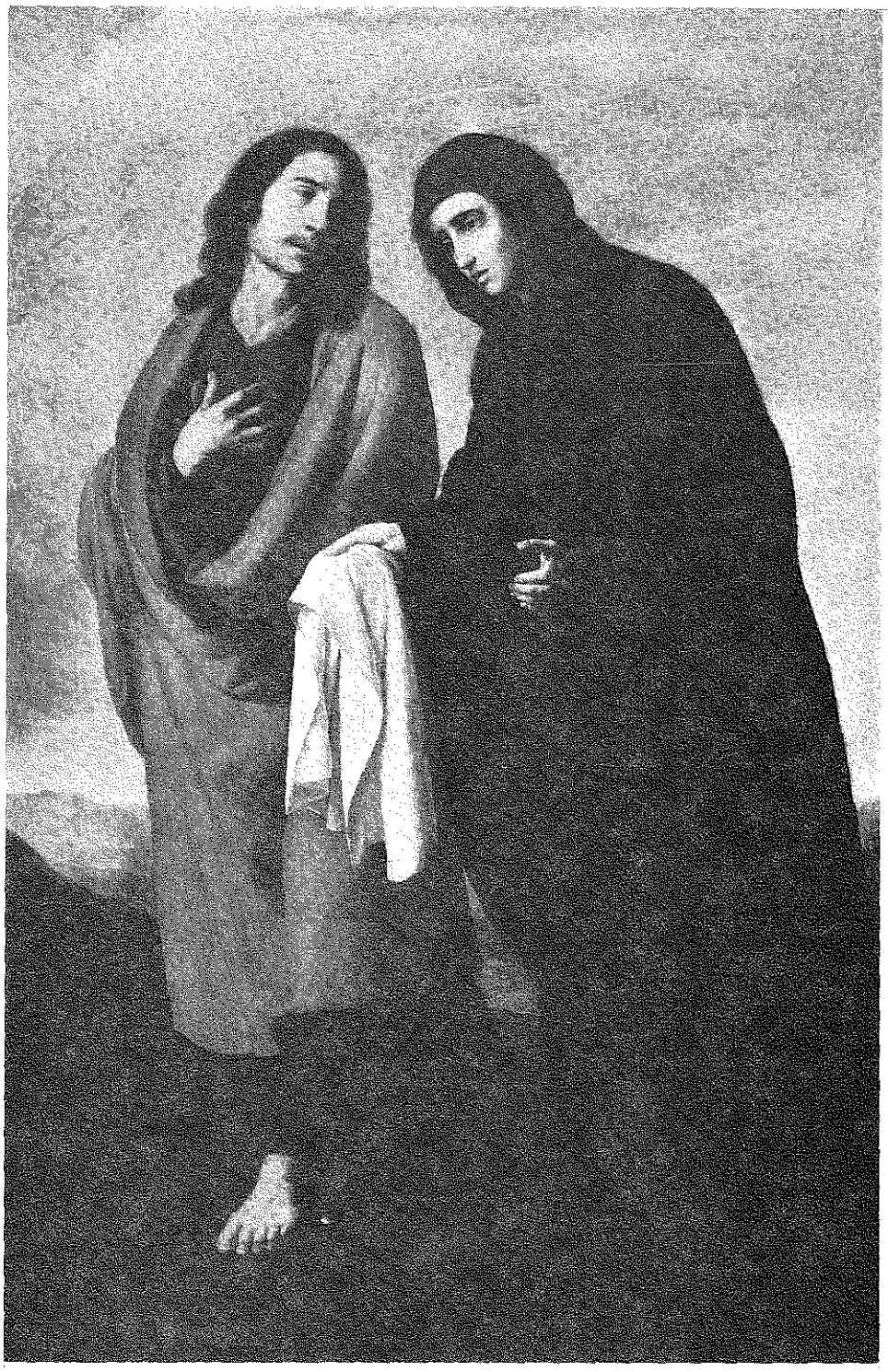


The painting by Antonio del Castillo y Saavedra that inspired Mendelssohn's composition

Alte Pinakothek

A Passion Cantata by Mendelssohn

by R. LARRY TODD

Between 1827 and 1832, a period encompassing the end of his student days in Berlin and the years of travel preceding his first position at Düsseldorf, Mendelssohn composed a substantial though little-known series of sacred cantatas, several of them based upon Lutheran chorales. Only two, *Aus tiefer Noth* and *Mitten wir im Leben sind,* did he judge worthy enough for release; they eventually appeared as part of the *Kirchenmusik,* Op. 23, of 1830. No fewer than eight others were withdrawn by Mendelssohn; indeed, only very recently have they begun to appear in print.[1]

It is not difficult to explain this prolific production of cantatas, or, for that matter, Mendelssohn's withholding the compositions from his publishers. These are essentially private student works, the fruits of Mendelssohn's devotion to the music of J. S. Bach. In April, 1829, with the begrudging consent of his teacher, Carl Friedrich Zelter, the young composer mounted a revival of the *St. Matthew Passion,* a work he had begun to study as early as 1823. This celebrated performance, which fell in the midst of the cantatas, sent tremors throughout musical Germany, inspiring performances of the Passion in Frankfurt, Breslau, Stettin, and elsewhere.[2] Beyond that, it provoked a widespread renewal of interest in Bach's music, and represented the culmination of Mendelssohn's best efforts toward this cause. Standing

[1]Most of these are now available, including *Jesu meine Freude* and *Ach Gott, vom Himmel sieh' darein* (ed. Brian Pritchard, Hilversum, 1972); *Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten* (ed. Oswald Bill, Kassel, 1976); *Wir glauben all an einen Gott* (ed. Günter Graulich, Neuhausen, 1980); and *Christe, du Lamm Gottes* (ed. Oswald Bill, Neuhausen, 1978). This author's edition of *O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden* has appeared in the Yale Collegium Musicum Series. Parts and rehearsal score are available from A-R Editions, Madison, Wisconsin. *Verleih' uns Frieden,* published in facsimile in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung,* Vol. XLI (1839), supplement for June 5, was issued posthumously in the standard Breitkopf & Härtel edition of Mendelssohn's works (Vol. XIV). The cantatas were first discussed by Rudolf Werner in *Felix Mendelssohn als Kirchenmusiker* (Frankfurt, 1930), pp. 65-76; more recently, in B. Pritchard, "Mendelssohn's Chorale Cantatas: an Appraisal," *The Musical Quarterly,* Vol. LXII (1976), pp. 1-24. Oswald Jonas prepared a facsimile edition of *Jesu meine Freude* (Chicago, 1966); see also his "An Unknown Mendelssohn Work," in this journal, Vol. IX, No. 2 (1967), pp. 16-22.

[2]Discussed in Martin Geck, *Die Wiederentdeckung der Matthäuspassion im 19. Jahrhundert* (Regensburg, 1967).

quite apart from the official promotion of Bach's masterpiece, his own church cantatas were probably intended by Mendelssohn as a means to acquire further experience with the contrapuntal choral idiom, and to assimilate for his own study elements of Bach's style.

One of the cantatas composed during the aftermath of the Berlin performance has significant ties to Bach's Passion. *O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden* is constructed upon a chorale presented conspicuously during the course of the Passion. Drawn from an unlikely secular source — the love song "Mein G'müt ist mir verwirret" of Hans Leo Hassler (*Lustgarten,* 1601) — the melody had been refitted by Bach's time to the Passion text of Paul Gerhardt. Bach selected five stanzas of the hymn, including "Erkenne dich mein Hüter," "Ich will hier bei dir stehen," "Befiehl du deine Wege," "O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden," and "Wenn ich einmal soll scheiden," and interspersed settings throughout his work, arranging them to portray in mounting emotional intensity the events of the Passion. The first three settings appear in very similar versions, but in a series of descending keys (E, E-flat and D major) — an appropriate tonal response to the unfolding drama. For the final two statements, however, framing the carrying of the cross and the crucifixion, Bach reserved his most expressive part writing and exploited the tonally ambiguous structure of the chorale melody. Thus, in "O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden" he oscillated between F major and D minor. "Wenn ich einmal soll scheiden," which demanded the most poignant treatment of all, he colored with severe chromatic progressions and finished inconclusively with a half cadence. Such an extraordinary treatment of the chorale was not lost upon Mendelssohn, who, in creating his cantata on the same Passion text, surely would have recalled Bach's example.

Written in September, 1830, while Mendelssohn was in Vienna, *O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden* was completed a year and a half after the Berlin revival of the *St. Matthew Passion,* tempting one to view Bach's work as the direct impetus for its composition.[3] But the "immediate" inspiration was provided not by Bach's masterpiece; rather, by a visual source. In an unpublished letter to his sister Rebekka, written on August 22, 1830, Mendelssohn disclosed the primary incentive for the cantata, which he described as a "very grave little sacred piece."[4] He urged her to visit an art dealer on Unter den Linden in Berlin to examine an engraving of a painting by Francesco Zurbarán:

[3]Fuller details of the chronology and the various manuscript sources of the cantata are in the preface to my edition (cf. footnote 1).

[4]"Eine sehr ernsthafte kleine Kirchenmusik." The letter is in the New York Public Library.

> ...It has hung there for some time and portrays John, who accompanies Mary homeward from the crucifixion. I saw the original in Munich and I think it is one of the most profound paintings I have seen.

Mendelssohn had reached Munich two months before, in June, on his way to Vienna from Weimar, where he had enjoyed the company of Goethe. In his family correspondence he stated his intention to visit the various Munich art galleries, among them the famous *Pinakothek*.[5] As we now know, none of the galleries exhibited a painting by Zurbarán matching Mendelssohn's description. What he did see can be identified rather as an oil painting by Antonio del Castillo y Saavedra (1616-68). Presently housed in the Depot of the *Alte Pinakothek,* the painting was formerly in the *Hofgartengalerie* from 1822 to 1836,[6] where Mendelssohn viewed it in June, 1830. It was erroneously thought to be by Zurbarán until 1881; not until 1911 was the attribution reassigned to Castillo, a Spanish Baroque artist active in Cordoba and influenced by Zurbarán.[7] In the painting, reproduced on page 2, the barefooted John leads Mary from Calvary. The two figures dominate the picture space; there is no visual reference to the crucifixion. Only the hilly landscape in the background, the accented right foot and hands of John, and the linen carried by Mary are seen as symbolic references. The masterly lighting, which draws the eyes from Mary's face to the linen and John's foot, and then, in a transverse motion, sweeps from Mary's left hand to John's hands, piously crossed on his chest, also creates a powerful, pathetic allusion. The cross, though not literally present in the painting, is thus embedded in its structure, and cogently impressed upon the viewer. It was the unforgettable effect of this painting, then, that prompted the inception of Mendelssohn's Passion cantata; the choice of "O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden" was logically determined by his intimate knowledge of Bach's Passion.

Had Mendelssohn not known the *St. Matthew Passion,* however, he still probably would have selected the same chorale. Before the momentous revival of 1829, the most popular comparable sacred work in Berlin was the cantata *Der Tod Jesu* (1755) by Carl Heinrich Graun. This work begins with a harmonization of "O Haupt" set to the text by Ramler, "Du, dessen Augen flossen." Even after Bach's Passion was widely performed, Graun's work, still highly regarded,

[5]Letter of June 14, 1830 (New York Public Library).

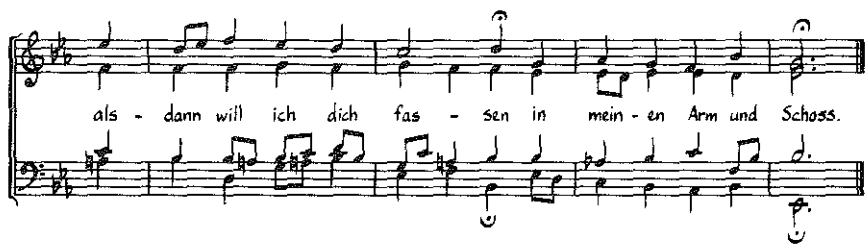
[6]Described in Georg von Dillis, *Verzeichnis der Gemälde in der königlichen Pinakothek zu München* (Munich, 1838), No. 357; facsimile reproduction in Peter Böttger, *Die Alte Pinakothek in München* (Munich, 1972), p. 514.

[7]Details of the provenance are in Halldor Soehner, *Spanische Meister* (Munich, 1963), Vol. I, p. 38.

was customarily performed by Zelter with the Berlin Singakademie on Good Friday, and many years after Zelter's death in 1832, with only a few exceptions.[8] Undoubtedly Mendelssohn knew this work very well. As a boy he had sung in the Singakademie and probably took part in or attended some of Zelter's performances. Graun's selection of C minor for his version of "O Haupt" — the key of Mendelssohn's cantata and, significantly, a key not used by Bach in his various settings — may be a superficial influence on Mendelssohn's composition; as we shall see, the third movement of Mendelssohn's cantata parallels several details of Graun's harmonization. The second chorus of *Der Tod Jesu,* "Sein Odem ist schwach," also in C minor, is filled with expressive chromatic progressions and imitative writing, and it is not unlike Mendelssohn's opening chorus, though Graun's movement is freely composed, and not structured on the chorale melody.

Der Tod Jesu and the *St. Matthew Passion,* in short, were two easily accessible scores with ample harmonizations of the chorale for Mendelssohn to study. A further attraction for him was the salient (and somewhat enigmatic) modal flavor of the melody. "O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden" does not admit a conventional tonal reading. Mendelssohn summed this up in his letter of August 22: "I am very happy with this piece — no one will be able to discern whether it will be in C minor or E-flat [major]." Mendelssohn, of course, was not alone in discovering this ambiguity. Previous composers harmonizing the chorale generally resorted to two different interpretations. If the melody was construed in a major key, its final two cadences could be arranged on the dominant and tonic, as in Bach's first three settings from the *St. Matthew Passion,* for example, "Ich will hier bei dir stehen" (see Ex. 1).

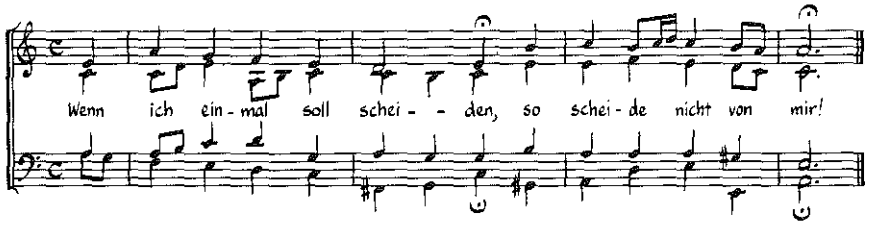
EXAMPLE 1



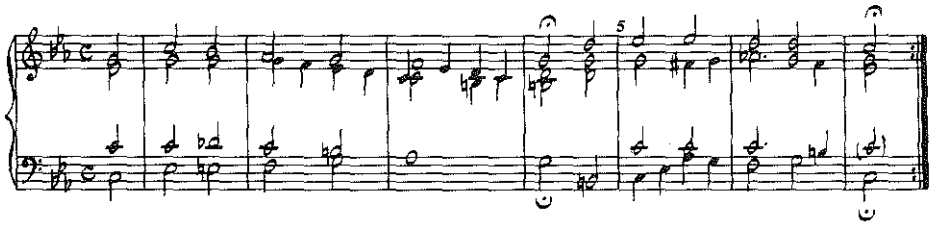
[8]See the preface to Howard Serwer's edition of *Der Tod Jesu* in the Yale Collegium Musicum Series (Madison, 1975), p. viii.

On the other hand, if the melody was set in a minor key, then it could be directed to end on a half cadence. Here the chorale usually began with turns to the mediant and tonic, as in Bach's A-minor setting, "Wenn ich einmal soll scheiden" (see Ex. 2), or the dominant and tonic, as in a setting in C minor by Johann Adam Hiller[9] (see Ex. 3).

EXAMPLE 2



EXAMPLE 3

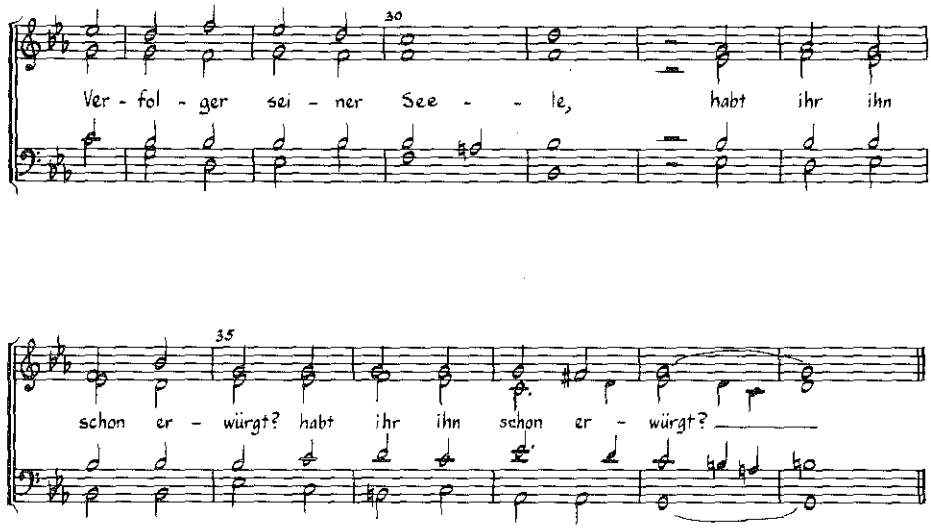


A third possibility yielded a combination of the two openings, by the writing out of the repetition of the first two phrases. This is the alternative chosen by Graun in *Der Tod Jesu*.

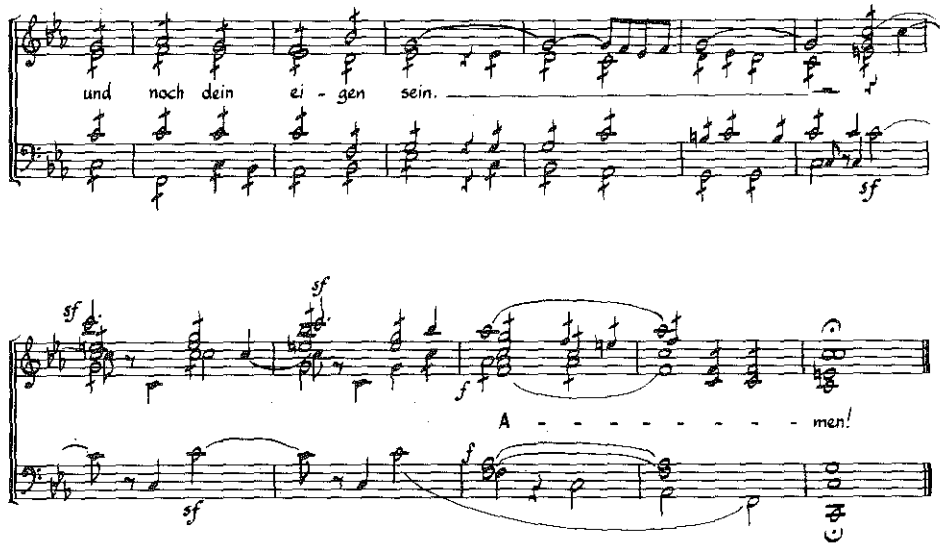
Graun's C-minor setting displays one other conspicuous feature. He harmonized the seventh and eighth phrases with cadences on B-flat and E-flat, or V/III and III, as if to hear the chorale in E-flat major, but then, by extending the last cadence, concluded the chorale on a half cadence. This effectively juxtaposed major and minor readings, confusing somewhat the listener's perception of the tonality (Ex. 4). Mendelssohn followed this pattern in the third movement of his cantata, a homophonic harmonization. The last phrase of Mendelssohn's setting, given in Example 5, illustrates a similar extension and diversion of the melody toward the dominant G major. But to lend tonal coherence to the entire composition, Mendelssohn added a few instrumental measures to draw the work to a final cadence on C major.

[9]*Allgemeines Choral-Melodienbuch* (Leipzig, n.d.; reprint Hildesheim, 1978), p. 76.

EXAMPLE 4



EXAMPLE 5



While Mendelssohn sought to interpret the chorale tonally, an earlier Berlin musician, the theorist Johann Philipp Kirnberger, attempted to analyze it according to modal precepts. In his *Die Kunst des reinen Satzes in der Musik*, Kirnberger argued forcefully, but in reactionary language, for the revitalization of church modes in chorale settings:

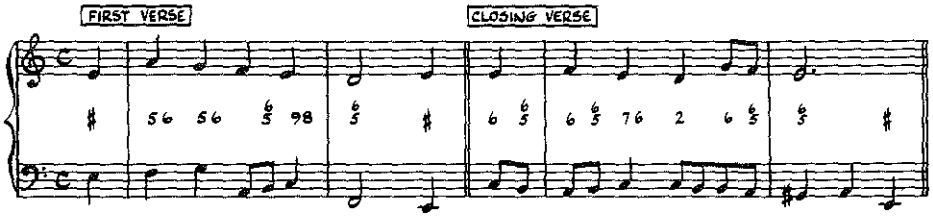
> The knowledge of these old church modes and their proper management is necessary not only because without them the correct art of fugal composition cannot be mastered...but also because the old manner has certain advantages which we lack in the newer [i.e., tonal]. We have some various old church tunes which are so fraught with feeling and expression that they cannot be set in tonal harmony without diminishing their appeal.[10]

"O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden" was one such melody for Kirnberger. Noting the settings by Graun and Bach, he summarized three solutions for the opening and final cadences. The first (Ex. 6) employed half cadences similar to Hiller's version (Ex. 3); the second, borrowed from Bach's "Wenn ich einmal soll scheiden," began with a turn to the mediant and concluded also on the half cadence; and the third, extracted from Bach's major-key settings, opened and finished with cadences on the tonic. Here is Kirnberger's interpretation:

> The first method is doubtless exactly according to the intention of the composer who invented this melody, namely in the Phrygian mode; the second begins in the subdominant of the Phrygian, or, if you will, the Aeolian mode, and concludes with the dominant; the third is in the Ionian mode. The last seems least in accordance with the wishes of the original composer; it is evidently utilized by the two composers mentioned before [Graun and Bach] since in most churches the congregation sings the bass in this manner.[11]

Considering his avowed preference for the Phrygian mode and unenthusiastic acceptance of the tonal setting — still viewed by Kirnberger in 1776 as being Ionian — this conservative theorist would have been disheartened, indeed, had he known the original version in Hassler's *Lustgarten*.[12] Contrary to what Kirnberger assumed, Hassler's succession of cadences follows the "Ionian" or major-key version — there is no question here of Phrygian cadences or somewhat distorted beginnings in the Aeolian mode.

EXAMPLE 6

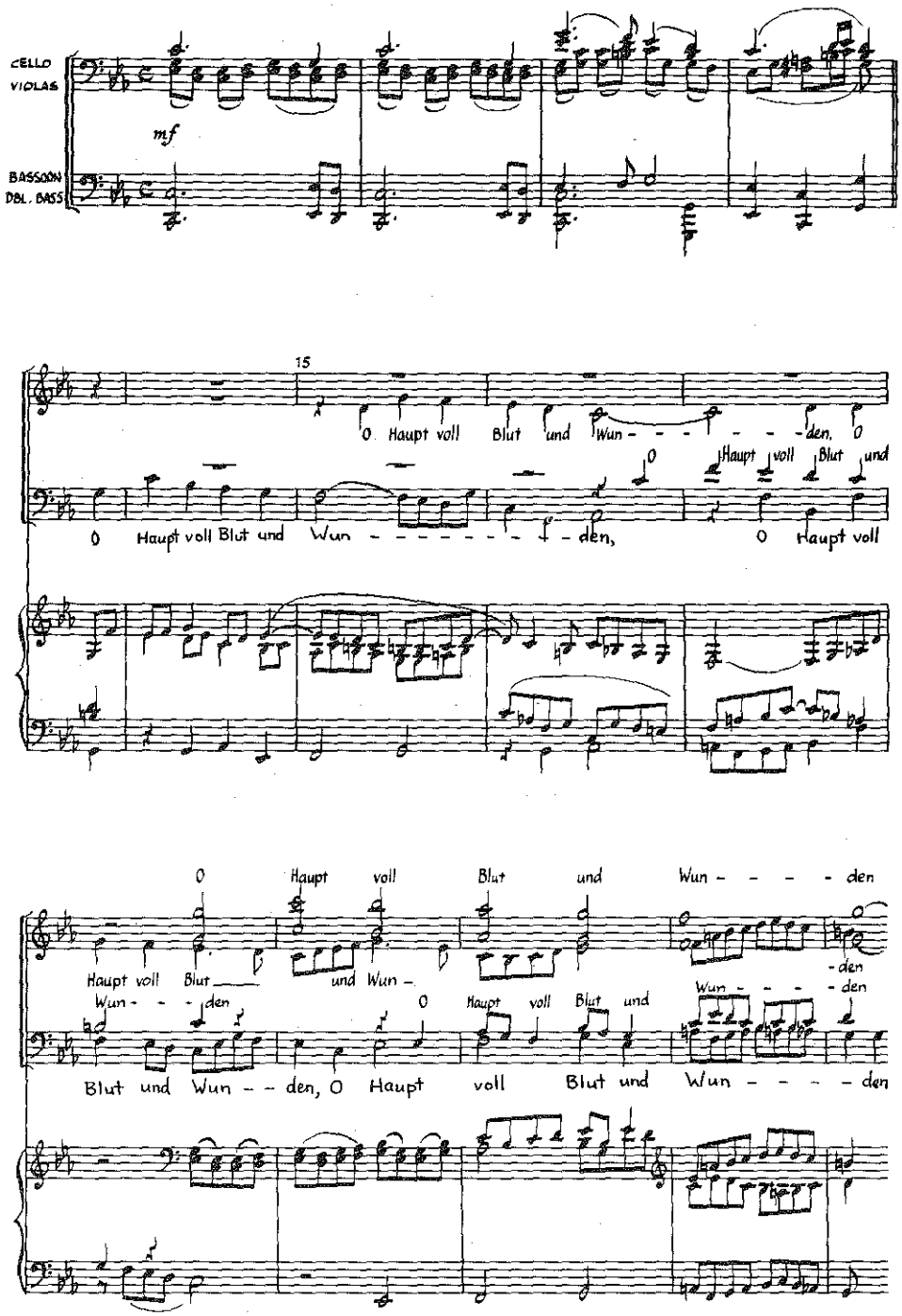


[10]*Die Kunst des reinen Satzes in der Musik* (Berlin, 1776; reprint Hildesheim, 1968), Vol. II, p. 47.

[11]*Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 222.

[12]Available in *Publikationen älterer praktischer und theoretischer Musikwerke* Vol. XV (1887), p. 24.

EXAMPLE 7


CELLO
VIOLAS
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15
O Haupt voll Blut und Wun - - - - - den, O
Haupt voll Blut und
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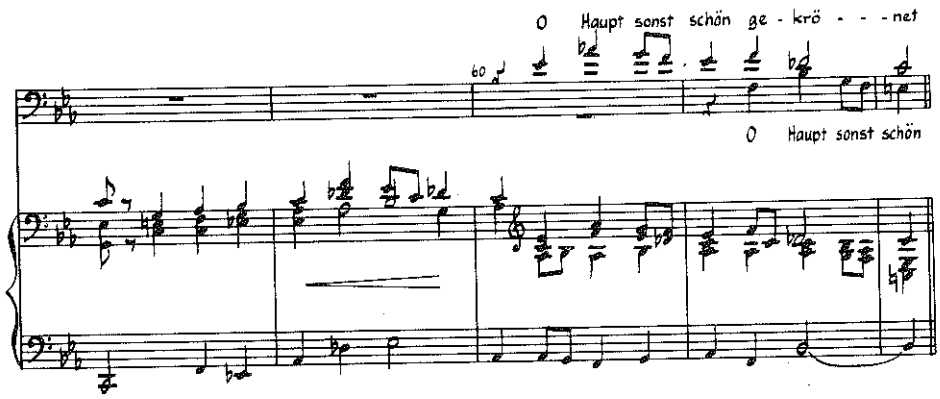
Whether modal or tonal, the melody clearly stimulated Mendelssohn to produce an unusual composition teetering between the tonalities of C minor and E-flat major. We can trace this procedure through the outer choral movements in C minor and the solo bass aria in E-flat major. Mendelssohn modeled the first movement upon the typical plan employed by Bach in numerous cantatas. After a few prefatory instrumental measures (Ex. 7; note the first melodic interval of the chorale, G-C, displayed in the celli), he introduced the chorus in imitative polyphony, reserving the soprano for the presentation of the cantus firmus in augmented note values. The rhythmic layering of the various forms, with the orchestra maintaining a steady flow in eighth notes, the chorus progressing in quarters, and the soprano proceeding in stately half notes, is in deference to the model of Bach. The remainder of the movement is built upon very similar principles, with phrases of the chorale frequently separated by brief instrumental interludes.

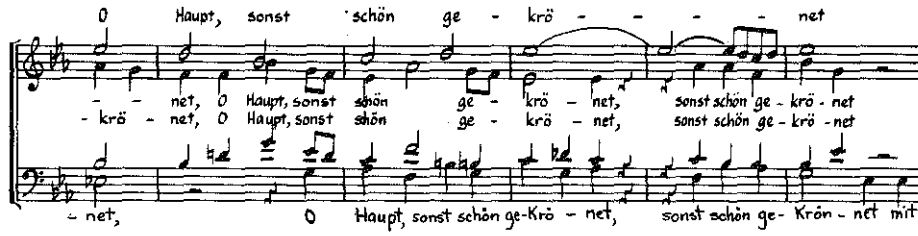
From this highly sectional movement emerges a ternary form organized around the various cadences of the chorale. The "A" section, incorporating the first two phrases and their repetition, is firmly centered in C minor (notwithstanding the raised third at the two cadences of measures 37 and 57). But in the contrasting "B" section, announced by a change in texture (measure 58, Ex. 8), Mendelssohn ingeniously begins to distort the cadences of the next two phrases. The third, "O Haupt sonst schön gekrönet," appearing

EXAMPLE 8

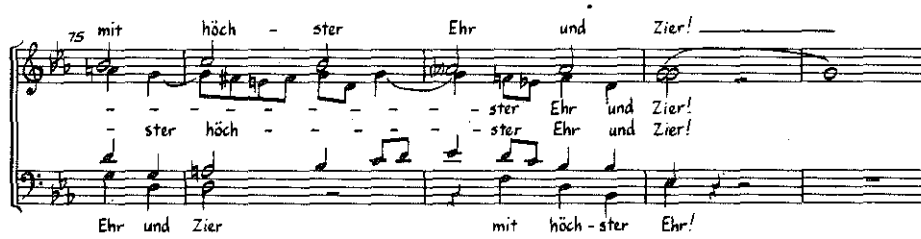


to conclude in C minor, is subsequently diverted to E-flat major (Ex. 9; only the chorus is shown). With the fourth, "mit höchster Ehr und Zier," just the opposite obtains: he directs the phrase to E-flat major but then swerves unexpectedly to C minor (Ex. 10; only the chorus is shown). A choral passage repeating lines 3 and 4 ensues, with G minor as its final goal, marking the end of the "B" section. Mendelssohn practices a similar kind of shifting cadence in the concluding "A[1]" section, which begins afresh in measures 88-93 with the opening material of the movement. "Jetzt aber höchst verhöhnet" is brought to a cadence on B-flat, twisted via the dominant and a few extra bars to the tonic C minor. "Gegrüsset seist du mir" combines E-flat and C, thus reasserting the dual tonic structure (Ex. 11). The orchestral coda turns to a half cadence on G, finally tipping the balance in favor of C minor.

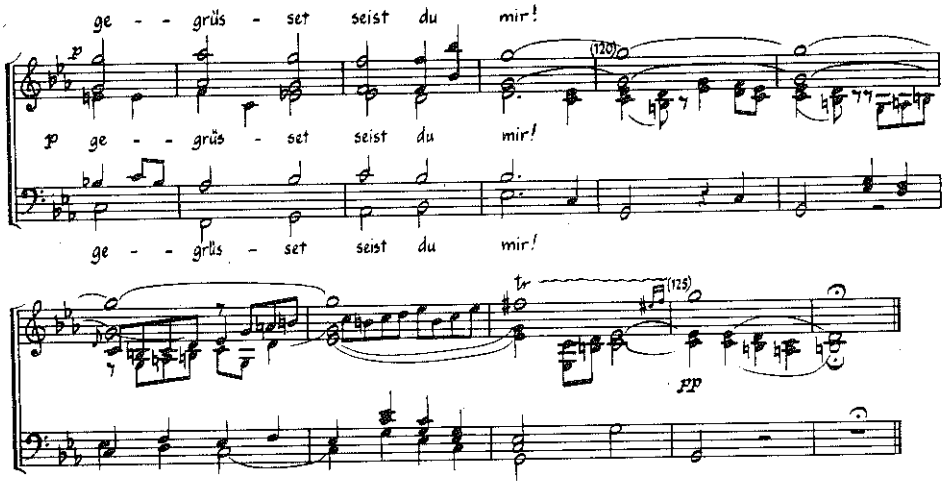
EXAMPLE 9



EXAMPLE 10



EXAMPLE 11



This manipulation of cadences readily bears out Mendelssohn's statement in his letter to his sister about the tonal ambiguity of the work. It also relates significantly to the meaning of the text. In the stanza, the human and divine qualities of Christ are juxtaposed by the symbol of the crown. The crown of thorns (line 4) and the image of Jesus mocked as the King of the Jews (note Gerhardt's choice of "höchst verhöhnet" [held in utter derision], line 7) are opposed to the crown of the Son of Man, line 5, here served "mit höchster Ehr und Zier" (with highest honor and glory), line 6. A musical parallel to this antithesis is achieved by Mendelssohn's treatment of the cadences, with their oscillation between the two tonalities. The stable "A" section contrasts with the middle section, with its tonal fluctuation; the "A¹" section, combining the two images ("verhöhnt" and "gegrüsset") has further examples of wavering cadences but also a clarification of the movement by the ultimate half cadence, as we have observed.

If the opening movement is centered around C minor, with some important excursions to E-flat major, in the aria Mendelssohn reverses this tonal association. E-flat major is now the tonic, but is accompanied by meanderings to C minor. Here he chooses a ternary form with ritornelli framing the outer "A" sections and introducing the contrasting "B" section.

The text, not a part of Gerhardt's hymn, remains unidentified, though it reads as a gloss on the content of "O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden":

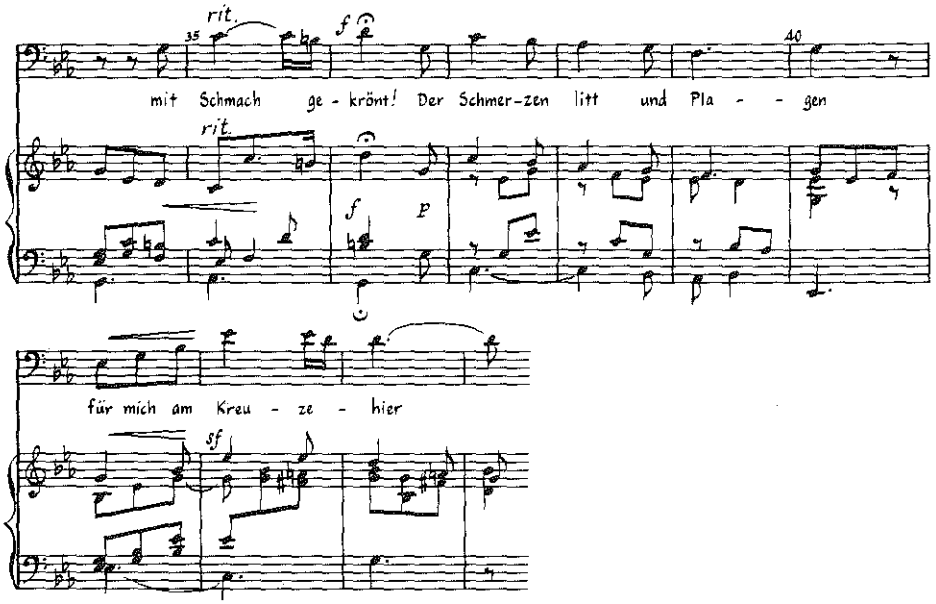
Du, dessen Todeswunden	Thou, whose deadly wounds
die sünd'ge Welt versöhnt,	Redeem the sinful world,
den sie dafür gebunden,	Thou who wert bound,
den sie mit Schmach gekrönt!	and crowned in derision!
Der Schmerzen litt und Plagen	Thou who didst suffer for us
für mich am Kreuze hier,	at the cross,
der meine Sünd getragen,	And didst bear my sins,
gegrüsset seist du mir!	I greet thee.

Several words or images are borrowed from "O Haupt" (e.g., "Todeswunden," "gebunden," "gekrönt," and "Schmerzen"), the rhyme and metrical schemes are analogous, and, most conspicuously, the final line, "gegrüsset seist du mir," is retained intact from Gerhardt's hymn. Could Mendelssohn have written this text? Knowing what we do about his literary interests,[13] we may take this possibility seriously. In any case, while composing his aria Mendelssohn attempted to link textual references to "O Haupt" with the music of the first movement. Thus, the fourth line, "den sie mit Schmach gekrönt," and its allusion to Gerhardt's text prompted him to interrupt his pastoral-like aria with a sudden fermata on the half cadence, in order to prepare a quotation of the chorale (see Ex. 12). The final line of the aria required a more exact correlation with the first movement, since it was a direct quotation of the final line of "O Haupt." In this instance, as Example 13 shows, Mendelssohn terminated the solo part on the half cadence, extended G by a pedal point, and, after citing the chorale again, redirected the ritornello to a cadence on E-flat major. This bears comparison to the end of the first movement, given in Example 11 (cf. the prolonged pedal point on G), notwithstanding the shift in harmonic emphasis: there the chorale concludes on E-flat major, and the orchestra then passes through C minor before the half cadence. The two passages are a striking example of how Mendelssohn revives textual and musical elements from the first movement in the aria.

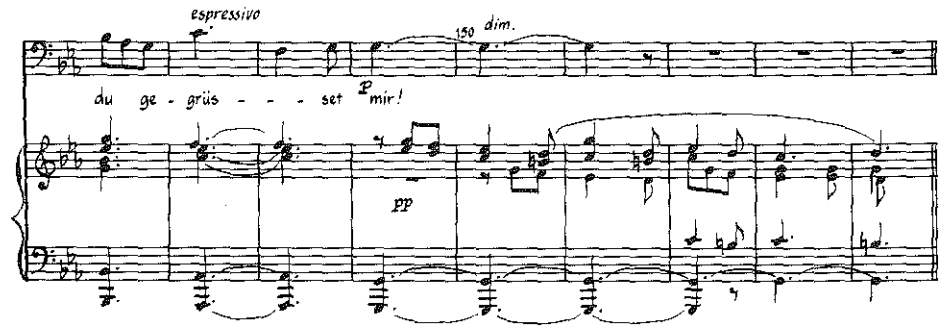
Returning to Gerhardt's hymn for the third movement, Mendelssohn composed a simple harmonization of the chorale with the text drawn from the sixth stanza of "O Haupt"; it is a reaffirmation of unwavering faith. The chorus, doubled by winds, is accompanied throughout by a steadfast eighth-note tremolo in the strings. Brief interludes with horn calls punctuate the several phrases of the

[13]Including translations of Terence's comedy *The Woman of Andros* and Horace's *Ars Poetica*.

EXAMPLE 12



EXAMPLE 13



melody. Apart from the treatment of the last phrase (see Ex. 5), Mendelssohn's choice of cadences is designed to reaffirm C minor. The movement thus resolves the continuing tension between C minor and E-flat major we have traced through the cantata.

On another level Mendelssohn reinforces throughout the cantata the idea of dichotomy that pervades the text and is reflected coincidentally by the structure of the chorale melody. The scoring of the work is among Mendelssohn's most unusual. Contrasts of register

are highlighted, with winds and violins often playing together, pitted against divided violas, divided celli, and the contrabass and bassoons.[14] The lower instruments produce a dark, ominous, murky sound quality; their treble counterparts, a pure, ringing effect, generally allied with the intoning of the chorale. In the aria Mendelssohn opts for a different division: he contrasts the full orchestra of the ritornelli against undivided strings, generally employed to accompany the solo voice. The concluding ritornello is especially deftly scored. The renewed suggestion of the chorale, with a seeming turn to C minor, is allotted to the flutes, bringing to mind their role as carriers of the cantus firmus in the first movement; the final few measures, confirming E-flat major, are performed by the strings. Only in the third movement is the division of orchestral forces abandoned. This, a fervent expression of faith, is supported by the entire orchestra, impelled by the unrelenting, pulsating tremolo.

Were such features as the tonal ambiguity of the first two movements, or the various divisions of the orchestra Mendelssohn's response to the chorale melody, to the text, or to the painting by Castillo, or — more likely — did all of these influence Mendelssohn? As we have seen, the melody yields divergent interpretations which resulted in Mendelssohn's modern approach in tonal organization of this composition. The text of "O Haupt," in turn, poses the dichotomy between the divine and mortal aspects of Christ. And the painting offers an equally cogent dualism: the presence of John and Mary, figures of human anguish, placed in vivid contrast to the "figure" of Christ, now present only in spiritual form.

"O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden" continued to inspire significant settings after Mendelssohn's cantata. Mendelssohn himself left a fragment of an organ composition based on the chorale, possibly a rejected movement originally planned for the Organ Sonatas, Op. 65.[15] At least two major composers after Mendelssohn, Liszt and Reger, produced important choral compositions with settings of "O Haupt." These works, Liszt's *Via Crucis* of 1879 and Reger's cantata on the chorale from 1904, enable us to place Mendelssohn's cantata in context. Liszt's setting of the stations of the cross is a strikingly novel work, far advanced beyond the tonal language of its time. Scored for chorus and organ (or, in an alternate programmatic version, for solo harmonium), it is filled with expressive chromatic sonorities and frankly atonal passages. The sixth station, assigned to St. Veronica,

[14]Mendelssohn also used divided celli in *Verleih' uns Frieden.*

[15]The fragment is included in my edition. Concerning the case for other rejected movements from Op. 65, see Robert Parkins and R. Larry Todd, "Mendelssohn's Fugue in F Minor: a Discarded Movement for the First Sonata," forthcoming in *The Organ Yearbook.*

includes a traditional harmonization of "O Haupt," and stands out as one of the few tonal reference points of the work.[16] But it is prefaced by an aimless introduction for organ, a highly chromatic prelude delineating the tortuous path of the procession past Veronica.

Some twenty years later, Reger, like Mendelssohn, devoted an entire cantata to the chorale. In contrast to Mendelssohn's three-movement plan, the organization of Reger's work is continuous, presenting several variations on the melody. Beginning with solo voices, Reger gradually amasses different combinations of a solo quartet, half and full chorus, culminating with the tenth stanza, "Erscheine mir zum Schilde." With its potential for widely diverging settings, the chorale is ideal for variation form, as Reger fully realized. Modal and tonal passages are used with great skill, and the whole is immersed in a (characteristic for Reger) severe application of chromaticism, no doubt prompted by the imagery of the text.

One wonders whether Reger, who admired Mendelssohn, as he admired Brahms and, of course, Bach, would have been impressed by Mendelssohn's cantata, had he known it. Mendelssohn, to be sure, does not approach in his work of 1830 Reger's comprehensive treatment of the chorale or his dense polyphony; nor does he anticipate anything such as Liszt's bold — though in 1879 unappreciated — conception. Ostensibly Mendelssohn's cantata shares many features with Bach's cantatas, to whom he pays homage. Despite this unabashed imitation, the association of Mendelssohn's cantata with Castillo's painting complicates the issue of simple parody by raising the question of extra-musical influences. (Only one year before composing the cantata, Mendelssohn sketched the opening of his *Hebrides* Overture, at the same time penning a landscape drawing of the Hebrides islands.[17]) Similarly, Liszt's *Via Crucis,* as far ahead of its time as it was, was inspired by paintings of the stations of the cross that Liszt viewed, and in this bears comparison with the cantata. Though its exact relation to Castillo's painting eludes precise analysis, Mendelssohn's *O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden,* in short, touched upon the same dilemma with which many nineteenth-century composers were preoccupied — the relation of music to the visual arts. It is almost as much a product of Mendelssohn's sensitivity to romantic aesthetics as it is a product of the Bach revival.

[16]Liszt's selection of cadences follows that of Hiller in Example 3.

[17]See R. Larry Todd, "Of Sea Gulls and Counterpoint: The Early Versions of Mendelssohn's *Hebrides* Overture," in *19th Century Music,* Vol. II (1979), p. 205.

Choral Conductors Forum

REMEMBERING ARTHUR MENDEL

REMINISCENCES OF A CHORAL SINGER

by MARY LAGO

The name of Arthur Mendel is associated today with the establishment of modern Bach research in this country. An entire generation of young Bach scholars has been trained in his seminars at Princeton University, and we are no longer aware of the fact that he began his distinguished career as choral conductor – the choral conductor who introduced the concept of authentic performance of Bach's choral music to New York audiences. With his Cantata Singers he presented numerous programs consisting entirely of Bach cantatas, programs that were a novelty in the concert life of the 1930's and 1940's and that soon gathered a devoted following.

The tribute to Arthur Mendel by one of his former chorus members seemed an especially interesting contribution to this column, not only because it recalls an era but because these personal recollections reflect the modest origins of a new American choral practice that in turn prompted a decisive share in modern international Bach scholarship.

* * *

My old French dictionary, a survivor from undergraduate days, has just fallen open to the front flyleaf, on which the following is written in pencil:

Cantata Singers – A. Mendel
Xmas Oratorio — Tues. Sept. 17 – 7 p.m.
St. John Passion — Dalcroze School – 9 E. 59 St.

I wrote that note to myself in the summer of 1940, copying it from a notice on a bulletin board at International House, on Riverside Drive. Thus I began, on the third Tuesday of September, 1940, one of the happiest experiences of my life, never duplicated since, and never surpassed. I was, and am, one of those for whom

choral singing is a uniquely soul-satisfying activity, and my years in Arthur Mendel's Cantata Singers were, and still are, years of the most heartwarming satisfaction. I refer to amateur, not professional choruses, who perform the best music publicly and without pay. On the contrary, the members pay annual dues to help defray expenses of performance. There are volunteer choruses in New York still, with loyal and devoted members. From me, however, any mention of the New York choral scene will always bring the response, "Ah, but did you sing for Arthur Mendel?"

Born in Boston in 1905 and educated at Harvard and in the Paris studio of Nadia Boulanger, Mendel organized the Cantata Singers in 1936, when he was a teacher at the Dalcroze School. In 1953 he left New York for Princeton University, to become the second chairman of its Music Department. At the time of his death in 1979, he was the Henry Putnam Professor of Music emeritus and a Bach scholar of international eminence.

I was a Cantata Singer from 1940 to 1947. I had arrived in New York fresh out of Bucknell University, where I had had the rare opportunity of singing in a small Baroque group, quite a novelty at that time, organized by Professor Paul Gies; we became a component of his Wyoming Valley Bach Festivals in Wilkes-Barre. It had not occurred to me that a New York chorus might accept me until I saw the notice at International House to the effect that the Cantata Singers, Arthur Mendel, conductor, were holding auditions and would open their 1940-41 season in December with Bach's *Christmas Oratorio.* This group of some thirty singers was dedicated to performing the works of Bach and his contemporaries in German, uncut, with instruments of the period, and in a church, not in a concert hall. I reflected, as I stood before the bulletin board, that the worst that could happen was that I would be rejected. Accordingly, I made my way to 9 East 59th Street, to the Dalcroze School — the old Dalcroze School, in a narrow old building now long gone, with a narrow old elevator that shivered and complained as it ascended to the third floor. If I remember correctly, there was a school of Spanish dancing on the floor below. The collision of sounds and rhythms was something to hear.

Nothing about the place was prepossessing. Nothing, that is, until Arthur Mendel arrived. He was of medium height, had begun to go bald on top, wore thick round glasses, and moved with a kind of energy that I would describe as optimistic. He wasted little time on pleasantries but got right to business, made me sing a scale and read the alto line of "Jauchzet frohlocket!" — the opening chorus of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio.* "All right," he said, when I had finished. All right,

what? Did he mean "All right, you'll do" or "All right, enough of that?" He indicated the cloakroom, and as I had my coat still with me, I concluded that I was to hang it up and stay around.

Soon the Cantata Singers began to arrive. They were a most extraordinary collection of individuals. That was my first impression, for, being not long out of small-town Pennsylvania, I had as yet had little experience of New Yorkers. This lot came in all sizes, shapes, and ages. They ranged in appearance from affluent to dowdy to downright shabby. There was an amazing variety of accents: Boston, Brooklyn, Bronx, and European — many European accents, but chiefly German. In those years refugees had been pouring into New York, and much of the upper West Side was a refugee community. At first I was not impressed, which reflected upon my ignorance, not on the singers. At the same time I was vaguely aware of a kind of camaraderie that was quite new to me.

Very quickly we settled to work. The conductor shed his jacket, pulled off his tie, rolled up his shirtsleeves, and ran his hands through his hair so that it stood on end. This was a Mendel hallmark; at concerts he would start out perfectly groomed, decorous in dark suit. By intermission he would still be wearing his jacket and tie but his hair would be wildly mussed. This was usually a sign that we were doing well.

That first rehearsal was a delight, a revelation, a homecoming. "Jauchzet frohlocket! auf, preiset die Tage!" — such a joyful noise, the like of which East 59th Street will never hear again. Not perfect, of course; the vicissitudes of rehearsal had still to be gone through. But the diversity of the group was in fact the basis of this exhilarating unity. They sang — we all sang — like exiles (I was homesick too) who fall naturally and gratefully into a mother-tongue that is linguistic, musical, or both.

My seat was next to that of a young lady who, like myself, professed to being a true alto. That is, we loved being *inside* the music, loved singing an inner line while the other parts moved around, with and against us. Let the sopranos soar; let the basses explore the depths; the altos and the tenors have the best of it. A good choral singer cultivates double hearing; half listening to the other singers of the same part; the other half listening to all the other parts, alert to the tensions that pull and push toward the final cadence, where everything will be resolved to perfection. We worked hard at cultivating this double hearing and at accommodating our voices, each to the other's, and to all of the other parts. I have not seen or heard from her for thirty years, but there are particular

harmonies, particular chorales, in which I still feel and hear the resonance of her voice beside me on the alto line.

Most of our concerts took place at All Souls Unitarian Church, at 90th Street and Lexington Avenue. Its chaste Georgian architecture and rear choir loft seemed to me exactly right for our kind of music. The *Christmas Oratorio* that was my first Cantata Singers concert was a benefit for the Myra Hess Fund, which eventually raised more than $8,000 in aid of the lunchtime concerts she organized in 1939 and, in defiance of the Blitz and every wartime inconvenience, kept going in London's National Gallery until 1948. I did not know until 1980 that it was Arthur Mendel who had organized the Myra Hess Fund. How much money it realized from our *Christmas Oratorio* on December 30, 1940, I do not know. I do remember how completely exhilarated I felt on that occasion. Now I find among my old programs Virgil Thomson's *New York Times* review of our performance.

> . . . Even with the resonance that must have been literally an earful for St. Thomas's congregation, the final chorus with three high trumpets tootling for dear life in the neighborhood of high D was as jolly a bit of Christmas cheerfulness as has come your reviewer's way this Nativity. God rest you merry, gentlemen! Let nothing you dismay!

I can picture some of the famous members of the Cantata Singers orchestra with perfect clarity, such as Ralph Kirkpatrick (eating oranges behind the harpsichord at rehearsals in All Souls Church and lining up the peels along the railing of the choir-loft) and Suzanne Bloch, facing the harpsichord and bending gracefully over her lute. Paul Hindemith, down from New Haven to play viola d'amore, sat literally at the feet of the altos in that crowded space and smiled benevolently up at us when we sent some especially lovely phrase out over his head.

I understand that many of the amateur choral groups performing in New York today have paid professional managers and receive grants from foundations. Grants! In the 1940's there were no grants for such groups. We operated on a budget that would now seem ludicrous. Neither conductor nor manager received a cent of payment. We paid our fine soloists very modestly — far less than they were worth. Our instrumentalists got the minimum union wage. We had some thirty non-singing Associate Members, whose contributions began at $5.00. The total cost of the 1940 *Christmas Oratorio,* including the use of the church, was $1,300. Even at a time of lower costs for everything, even with a conductor whose services came gratis, this took some doing, since All Souls, whose intimate setting was a requirement for the music upon which we would not compromise, seated only 800 persons, and ticket prices in those days began at $1.10, of which ten cents was wartime "entertainment tax."

Came Pearl Harbor and the draft, and one by one basses and tenors disappeared into the armed forces. We disbanded for a year, and the survivors joined the Dessoff Choirs. Paul Boepple was active then, and singing for him was another kind of exciting experience, never to be forgotten, but more impersonal. The Dessoff was both larger and professionally managed; it lacked the do-it-yourself atmosphere and the personal involvement that characterized the Cantata Singers. We were Dessoff singers until an ex-Cantata Singer named Marjorie Wolf (where is she now, I wonder?) more or less browbeat us back into existence. The Cantata Singers were something special, she insisted; war or no war, we had no right to let them die. We must make more of an effort to replace the drafted men. I believe we met with Arthur Mendel, who said that he would gladly resume if we would all help to recruit the men. Resume we did. I cannot now remember where we found the men. I do remember becoming expert at doubling on the tenor line. The Dalcroze School had now moved to the City Center, and we moved our rehearsals to the Diller-Quaile School, where Arthur Mendel also taught and where he and his wife had a top-floor apartment.

Besides the divine gifts of music and friendship, what do I recall most vividly about my seven years as a Cantata Singer? I think, for one thing, of all the nights, bitterly cold and windy, wet, snowy, or sleeting, when I trudged from my room on Riverside Drive to the Broadway trolley, rode to Columbus Circle, waited shivering for the 59th Street crosstown, and arrived numb and frozen at Number 9, to dash gratefully into its dingy warmth. Then I moved to West 16th Street, and it was the subway uptown, and again the crosstown; and, after the move to Diller-Quaile, a much longer journey uptown and across town. (In those days one went about at night with reasonable confidence.) Even now I can feel in my bones the weariness of dragging myself out, after a long day in the office and a hasty supper at home, wondering whether I could make it for one more Tuesday evening. But I feel also the floating excitement on which I always came home, singing Bach cantatas *sotto voce* on the subway. It was all a most precious gift, for which I am eternally grateful.

What made those years so special was our sense of being caught up by a new kind of excitement about music. The excitement, of course, sprang from the revival of the Baroque that had begun in the 1930's. Long-playing records were only a rumor. Really good recordings of Bach, Handel, Vivaldi, Telemann, Schütz, and their like were few and precious. The Musicraft Company's recordings of Carl Weinrich playing Bach on the Praetorius Organ at Princeton were an event. So was Ralph Kirkpatrick's recording of the *Goldberg Variations.*

We travelled all over town to hear those records in friends' apartments. When any of those friends received "Greetings" letters from the President, they left their record collections in the care of persons to whom they would have entrusted the family silver, if they had had any.[1] We were a community within the New York musical community, which for seventeen years kept Arthur Mendel conducting the Cantata Singers without monetary reward.

We repaid our conductor in a way, I suppose, by singing. We were a laboratory, a sounding board against which he could imagine the sounds of the Thomaskirche (although, as Virgil Thomson had noted, All Souls Church could not reproduce that authentic Baroque resonance) as an accompaniment to his work (with Hans David) on *The Bach Reader* and on editions of Bach's choral works. Arthur Mendel bore his great learning lightly and gracefully. He was scholarly at rehearsals but never pedantic. His explanations and reconstructions were our exercises of the imagination; they did for us what imagination ought always to do, put us into the continuum of history. As a conductor he was never temperamental and he was entirely uninterested in histrionics. He could be angry; when he was, he simply told us that we had done a rotten job and sent us home. We would creep out chastened and sorry and come back the next week with our parts memorized. A friend once urged me to come along to auditions for another chorus. I declined, for I had to choose, and I am very glad that I did. Since 1947 when I left New York, I had sung, and do sing, in excellent choral groups, but the Cantata Singers *were* something special. There will never be another such, or another Arthur Mendel, and I take this opportunity, belated but sincere, of returning thanks.

[1]This remark refers in particular to Herman Adler, founder of Musicraft and former record reviews editor for the *American Choral Review,* whose extraordinary record collection has recently been placed in a special room in the music library of Moravian College, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

Choral Performances

New York — Tradition, especially if it's musical, has a special meaning in Vienna, where people showing a visitor through their home are quick to point out that Brahms once gave a recital in the drawing room, and where the waiters at the Cafe Mozart arch their eyebrows in disbelief if asked what music is inscribed on the papers in which the sugar cubes come wrapped. *"Die Zauberflöte!"* they will bark, with ill-concealed irritation that their questioner either can't read music or doesn't recognize the tune.

At times, from the way the Viennese venerate their musical saints and lavish their attentions and intrigues on the institutions that remind them of their city's musical greatness, particularly the opera, it would appear that tradition itself has become a source of tradition there, and the older the better. But there is one musical tradition in Vienna that has never grown old — the *Wiener Sängerknaben,* or Vienna Choir Boys, who can trace their origins back to a decree of July 7, 1498, and who still behave like kids. It may be frightening to some to realize that the Vienna Choir Boys, who performed a program of works by Buxtehude, Grossi, Victoria, Schubert, Schumann, Elgar, Kodály, and Johann Strauss at Carnegie Hall, have been singing the music of Josquin Des Prez and Palestrina since it was written.

The choir that listeners heard in the second week of a three-month tour of the United States and Canada was actually one of three choirs into which the roughly eighty boys attending the choir school at any given time are divided. A boy must be ten years old before he can be admitted to the school and sing in the group, although prospective choirboys are allowed to receive training in voice, theory, and an instrument from the age of eight. The instruction is rigorous and prepares many of them for adult careers as vocalists, instrumentalists, and teachers.

Life has changed little for the Vienna Choir Boy in the nearly five centuries that he has been an institution. In the old days, under the Hapsburg emperors, the choirmaster was granted a lump sum by the court, out of which it was his duty to provide for the boys' room and board, clothing and tuition. After their voices changed, boys were

given severance pay and money for the trip home. Those who wanted to continue their studies were sent, at the emperor's expense, to a theological seminary, where they could receive three years' free instruction.

Although the *Sängerknaben* have outlived the monarchy that created them, that is still the way it is today. A chorister whose voice has changed is allowed to continue his studies at an annex of the school, supported, in a sense, by those who are still singing.

Like any school, the Choir Boys School has its share of highly regarded alumni. The most famous among them are Haydn and Schubert; the latter was a boy singer from 1808, when he was eleven, to 1813. His certificates, applications and other papers remain in the school's archives and show that he was recommended for entrance by Antonio Salieri — the composer who may someday be best known as the protagonist in the play *Amadeus.*

The tour on which the choirboys were embarked took them through twenty states and three Canadian provinces, more of North America than most native-born youths their age have seen. Their itinerary included Southern California, the Middle Atlantic states and the Middle West. They closed their tour with performances in New York and New England.

—Theodore W. Libbey Jr.

* * *

Banuta, a historic Latvian opera, (first performed in 1920, and revised between 1927-1933 while the composer lived in New York), received a resounding "first performance in North America" in Carnegie Hall. The concert performance of the complete opera confirmed to its audience the genuine lyric and dramatic gifts of the composer Alfreds Kalnins (1879-1951); for, in spite of a presentation without staging and action, the impact of the work was strong.

Written on a Latvian text (and so performed), the four-act opera libretto focuses on the heroine Banuta, the bride of Daumants, son of King Valgudis, and deals with a chain of events that will eventually seal her fate.

The music of the opera is couched in a nineteenth-century harmonic-chromatic style, which is interesting because we are concerned with a composer who lived most of his life in the twentieth century. There is a natural rise and fall of phrases, sequential patterns abound, pedal tones, tonic-dominant relationships are

submerged under chromatic passing linear activity. In the process, Kalnins refined the nineteenth-century musical language to suit his needs — the needs of a twentieth-century musical mind. Possibly his professional involvement as a church organist for many years influenced his choice of idiom.

In the performance the New York Latvian Concert Choir had many opportunities to shine forth — the singing was excellent. The rich, vibrant, natural approach of the amateur chorus contributed to the overall dramatic effect of the work, and stood in fine contrast to the vocal declamatory style of the solo voices. The Latvian costumes worn by the women in the chorus gave the audience a visual treat and suggested what a staged presentation of this work might look like.

Maralin Niska, in the title role, sang with fire and passion within a wide vocal range. William Hall, in the role of her lover, sang effectively, though not with the usual operatic sheen. Algis Grigas performed with authority in the roles of father and son, though it would have been dramatically more convincing if the roles had been divided. Karlis Grinbergs, Visvaldis Gedulis, Ilga Zenta Paups, Peteris Lielzuika all contributed to the performance in supporting roles.

The overall success of this performance was due to the precise, sensitive conducting of Andrejs Jansons. He showed a knowledgeable sense of the orchestra in bringing out details, yet keeping the orchestra from covering the voices, and in achieving an "operatic pace" within the confines of a concert hall situation (the orchestra was on stage and not in the pit). The Bronx Ensemble Orchestra, consisting of some of the finest New York musicians, played well indeed.

Banuta is a large-scale opera beautifully constructed. It would be much to be welcomed if this work could be repeated — be it in concert form or staged.

—Noel G. Da Costa

Westerly, Rhode Island — Musical Anglophiles had their hour in a Community Chorus of Westerly concert at the Center for the Arts. Two works by British composers were sung: Ralph Vaughan Williams's cantata, *In Windsor Forest,* and Patrick Hadley's oratorio, *The Hills,* an American première. George Kent conducted the 200-voice group, soloists, and a full orchestra. Although relatively short, the undertaking, for ears sympathetic to a particular brand of twentieth-century English writing, was as nourishing a feast as can be imagined.

The Hills, come upon by chance last summer when a recording of the score was bought by a member during the chorus's tour of England and Scotland, naturally seemed the drawing card because of its newness. Next to Vaughan Williams, it did not have a comparably distinguishable personality, yet it showed the markings of a fully organized, imaginative composer nevertheless.

Any country has its dominant figures. In Britain, for the first half of this century, they have been Elgar, Delius, Vaughan Williams, Britten and, to a slightly lesser extent, Holst, who, in addition to post-war avant-garde developments, left the worthy likes of a Hadley and others (Gerald Finzi comes to mind, too) quite overshadowed.

A single work cannot a reputation make, but *The Hills* does suggest that further investigations of Hadley's output should be interesting because the oratorio, written by Cambridge's former University Professor of Music in 1944, has real, expressive depth. Hadley's own text sensitively and sometimes humorously reveals a twin devotion — to his parents and the Derbyshire Peaks area where they met, courted, and married. Correspondingly, his music is by times lyrical, reflective of nature or forthright, the latter aspect exhibited in the taxing, highly syncopated, *a cappella* parts of the extended wedding section.

Both the vocal and orchestral composition are the products of a mind that knew music inside out. With a conductor, chorus, instrumentalists, and soloists who were on the same wave length, *The Hills* came off masterfully. Bass Thomas Paul, as narrator, and soprano Karen Smith and tenor Gary Glaze, in the roles of the parents (hauntingly supported by a trio of horn and clarinets at one juncture), took their assignments perfectly, benefiting the outcome through their obvious enjoyment of being part of it. The choral sound, filling the Center and acutely responsive to Kent's demands, as was his custom-picked orchestra, served the composer on the very best level.

In Windsor Forest, excerpted by Vaughan Williams from his opera on Falstaff, *Sir John in Love,* turned out to be a superb concert opening. Adult and children's voices all were in fine fettle, with Miss Smith appearing briefly in what may have been Anne Ford's role when, beside Herne's Oak, the randy knight was brought to terms. Robust humor contrasted with the composer's characteristically rhapsodic *See the Chariot at hand* on Ben Jonson's words. That moving chorus alone made the entire endeavor worth a visit to Westerly.

—Edwin Safford

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Los Angeles — The Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Master Chorale opened their respective subscription series last season with programs highlighting some remarkable firsts: two world premières and a long overdue local one.

It seems surprising that a major orchestra would have yet to survey a masterwork such as the Haydn *Nelson Mass,* but this in fact was what attracted choralophiles to the Philharmonic's opening program of the season. Maestro Carlo Maria Giulini was on the podium. To one who sought the revelation of new insight or depth of introspection that usually mark a Giulini reading of the standard repertory, the performance was a disappointment. To one who revels in the slick performance of a choral masterpiece, the event was a joy. Giulini's approach to the *Mass* was one of cool detachment.The music was largely monochromatic with, at least in this third and final performance of the program, occasional indications of the perfunctory. (At the close of the "Osanna in excelsis" the conductor seated the chorus with a signal almost simultaneous with the final phrase release and before the sound had died out in the hall.)

The solo quartet included soprano Sheila Armstrong, mezzo Claudine Carlson, tenor Jonathan Mack, and baritone Douglas Lawrence. Each sang with distinction and attention to detail. By dint of musical design and vocal gifts Miss Armstrong was dominant, especially in her production of clear fioritura in the "Benedictus."

The Los Angeles Master Chorale sang the *Mass* with accustomed polish, grace, and opulent tone. The Maestro had no difficulty coaxing transparent counterpoint at the close of the "Gloria" and steely choral entries in the "Dona nobis pacem." It is a tribute to the chorus that it is capable of suavely producing a performance of impeccable finish while it surely must be preoccupied in its rehearsals with the preparation of a world première of its own one week later.

Included in the program was the world première of Ezra Laderman's *Symphony for Brass and Orchestra.* The work was commissioned by the Philharmonic in honor of the eightieth birthday of Dorothy Chandler, the principal mover behind the establishment of the Music Center in Los Angeles. Stylistically, the *Symphony* is in line with Giulini's ultraconservative musical inclinations. Although its program notes pay lip service to serial techniques, the work is primarily a Neo-Romantic potboiler calculated to offend only the avant-garde.

With its director Roger Wagner at the helm, the Master Chorale had inaugurated its season with the world première of Louis Gruenberg's rhapsodic *Song of Faith.* After years of association with

the champions of modern music in this country, the Polish-born Gruenberg settled in Los Angeles where he scored films for which he garnered three Academy Award nominations. Spending his last years in relative obscurity (he died in 1964), he continued composing to the end. In the late 1950's he began working on a sprawling "spiritual rhapsody" for solo quartet, narrator, dancers, orchestra, and 400-voice chorus, which he finished in 1962. The *Song of Faith* is evidence that Gruenberg was influenced by the dimensions of the Hollywood film epic.

In 1964 he wrote,

> The theme of this work is to reveal the underlying oneness of all religions; the universality of God. Its purpose therefore is not the glorification of a particular religion, but of all religions; its goal is the unification of men of all faiths under the Author of all their beliefs . . . . It is dedicated to the memory of Mahatma Gandhi.

The text for the nearly two-hour work is drawn from the Bible, the Talmud, the Koran, the Bhagavad-Gita, Negro spirituals, and various known and anonymous sources ranging from American Indian songs to Oriental philosophers. Whether such an amalgam is the mark of lofty intentions or merely pretentious is open to question.

While Gruenberg intended the work include dancers and some 400 singers, the 120 choristers marshalled by Roger Wagner were easily sufficient in this concert performance. The various incidental solos fell to soprano Maurita Phillips-Thornburgh, mezzo Karen Yarmat, tenor David Romano, and baritone Hervey (sic) Hicks. Actor Lorne Green declaimed the part of the narrator in stentorian and unnecessarily amplified tones.

The oratorio strongly invokes the musical styles of Debussy and Ravel throughout. Thematically, as one might expect from a work inspired by such diverse textual sources, *Song of Faith* lacks clear definition and cohesion, although the unrelenting Neo-Impressionist caste is all pervasive. Gruenberg displays no apparent grasp of the choral idiom. Wagner reportedly had to revoice a number of passages that simply did not balance well as written and he deleted some parts he deemed "repetitious." Particularly irritating for the listener was the composer's penchant for octave choral passages. The desire for some harmonic or contrapuntal musical substance went largely unallayed.

The composition demands a large orchestra, which Gruenberg managed to apply effectively. One lyrical passage for bass solo and chorus based on a mountain song of the Navajo Indians, "In a holy place with a God I walk," stood out from the rest by virtue of its

thematic interplay between chorus and soloist. Its straight-forward delivery of text and melody was notably devoid of the affectations with which the larger work is rife. Gruenberg apparently was unable to avoid the temptation to include Eastern modal influences in setting texts drawn from sources such as the Bhagavad-Gita. Charming as they may be, when played on clarinets and other Western instruments, they betray a style that harks back to the early part of this century.

While the exhumation and lavish performance of a major work by a noteworthy composer is admirable, the larger issue called into question here is whether this work merits performance, given its somewhat dubious musical content. Further, given the expense of such enterprises today as well as the number of masterworks that lie in neglect, benign or otherwise, the sole criterion for performing *Song of Faith* would appear to be simply that it has not been done before. When questioned as to the "greatness" of the work, Wagner diplomatically replied, "Only time will tell that."

As one might expect, the dominant entity in this performance was the Los Angeles Master Chorale. The group's dynamic presence and assured sense of phrasing, articulation of text, and musical sensitivity rendered the *Song of Faith* sorely needed artistic largess.

Few areas can boast of the choral riches that are regularly lavished upon Southern California audiences, and the Los Angeles Master Chorale continues at the forefront of this choral life. Of the three premières included in these concerts, the Chorale was chief protagonist in the two that are most noteworthy. Of the three works premièred, the Haydn, though gray with age, is clearly the class of the lot.

—Jerome S. Kleinsasser

Report from Brazil

Rio de Janeiro — Every November, the Museu Villa-Lobos, a twig on the tree of the Brazilian Ministry of Education and Culture, sponsors a Villa-Lobos festival in Rio de Janeiro, the composer's native city, the highlight of which is an international competition. The medium changes each year, and in 1981 pianists were featured. But there was one event during the course of the festival that would have

been of considerable interest to the readers of the *American Choral Review* had they been in the *cidade maravilhoso* to hear it, and that was a moving performance of Villa-Lobos's rarely encountered *Missa São Sebastião* (1937) sung by the Associação de Canto Coral under the direction of Cleofe Person de Mattos, an excellent conductor who has long been associated with the music of the great Brazilian composer. The Mass, dedicated to the patron saint of Brazil, was sung on the morning of November 17, the 22nd anniversary of the death of Villa-Lobos, as part of a memorial service in the lovely neo-baroque Igreja da Candelária. Very much present was Arminda A. Villa-Lobos, the composer's dynamic and most attractive widow, who serves as director of the Museu and devotes all her energies to advancing the cause of her husband's music.

Heitor Villa-Lobos was an extraordinarily fecund and facile composer — a complete count of his works would approximate several thousand. In the light of that circumstance, it is hardly surprising that not everything he wrote can be classified as a masterpiece. But there can be no doubt that he was touched with genius, and his momentary neglect must be attributed to the vicissitudes of fashion. The wheel will turn, and his music will be heard with increasing frequency once again outside his native land.

Basically an autodidact, Villa-Lobos was an original who followed no man. One of the most fascinating aspects of his work is the curious crossblend of styles he utilized, not least of which was the juxtaposition of characteristically Brazilian harmonic and melodic traits with contrapuntal lines reminiscent of those of Johann Sebastian Bach which resulted in a long series of works Villa-Lobos dubbed "Bachianas Brasileiras." The *Missa São Sebastião,* roughly thirty minutes in duration, is very much in that tradition, and is a very attractive piece. Composed for three-part choir, it combines rhythmic complexity with long, soaring, melodic tracery. It is firmly anchored in orthodox harmonic and modulatory patterns, but there is something distinctively individualistic about the work. It is clearly among Villa-Lobos's best efforts, and it reminds the listener that the composer devoted years of his life in Brazil to work as a choral conductor. The score is easily available, having been published in the United States by Associated Music Publishers, and a recording on the Brazilian Festa label is extant and purchasable in Rio de Janeiro. It is a Mass that deserves occasional performance in this country.

—Irving Lowens

Report from Switzerland

Zürich – A Mass by Donizetti was recently presented in its first performance in Switzerland. Made available only a few years ago from manuscript sources, the *Messa di Gloria e Credo* does not deny the engaging style of the opera composer. A work of major proportions and marked by all the melodic grace of Europe's South, it met with grateful response. Especially rewarding were the four arias of the *Gloria:* "Laudamus te" for soprano with obbligato flute, "Domine Deus" for bass, "Qui tollis" for tenor and chorus, and "Qui sedes" for alto with obbligato violin. Alto, tenor, and bass joined for the "Et incarnatus est" of the *Credo* in a magnificent trio. The "Et vitam venturi saeculi" grew into a grand concluding fugue. The work was performed by the *Musikkollegium Winterthur,* with the *Thurgauer Kammerchor* and the civic orchestra of Winterthur as participating ensembles, under the direction of Raimund Ruegge. The able soloists were Helge Spatzek, soprano; Clara Wirz, alto; Beat Spörri, tenor; and Arthur Looslo, bass.

At the occasion of Paul Sacher's seventy-fifth birthday, the UER *(Union Européenne de Radiodiffusion)* had asked the Basle conductor to choose a program of works he himself had commissioned during his long and distinguished career. He selected three works whose première performances he had given in Basle. Aside from Stravinsky's *Concerto en ré* and Bartok's *Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta,* this choice included Arthur Honegger's *La danse des morts,* an oratorio for chorus, solo voices, orchestra, and organ. The performance, broadcast from Basle to all Middle European stations, proved to be an immense success. The participating choruses were the *Basler Kammerchor* and the Theological Seminary Choir of Küssnacht (both prepared by Karl Scheuber); the participating orchestras were the Basle Chamber Orchestra and the Basle Symphony. The roster of soloists (Beatrice Haldas, soprano; Nicole Buloze, alto; Jules Bastin, bass; Derrick Olsen, narrator; Janine Lehmann, organ) did justice to the occasion — a singular tribute to the conductor.

A concert of special choral interest took place at the Cathedral of Our Lady *(Fraumünster)* in Zürich, the church that once served as the chapel for a convent founded in 853 by a grandson of Charlemagne. The *Ars Cantata,* under the direction of Peter Scheuch, presented *a cappella* works by Arcadelt, Allegri, and Giovanni Gabrieli in impeccable performances. No less impressive was their rendering of various twentieth-century works — two motets by Bernhard Henking (more or less in a neo-Schütz style); three motets by Adolf Brunner, born 1901 in Zürich and one of the foremost representatives of a new

school of Protestant church composers. A refreshing "find" for this reviewer was the group of four *Penitential Motets* by Francis Poulenc, the most original member of *Les Six* — works whose sublime choral writing enriches the picture of the composer with an otherworldly color.[1]

A Swiss première was the performance of the Tenth Symphony by Robert Blum (born 1900). The fifty-minute work culminates in a "pentatonic hymn" for baritone solo, mixed choir, organ, and orchestra. Based on texts from the fourth and fifth chapters of Revelation, the work is in its choral idiom somewhat reminiscent of Janáček. The pentatonic scale is understood by Blum as symbolizing the idea of the universe. The excellence of the performance (Räto Tschupp conducting the mixed chorus and orchestra of the Tonhalle, Zürich) could not hide a number of rather tiresome stretches, though the superb quality of the baritone soloist, Philippe Huttenlocher, helped a great deal towards redeeming some of them. He was also heard in another première, *Ed è subito sera* ("and dark descends") — a most impressive work for baritone and orchestra by Hermann Haller (born in 1914), written on a text by Salvatore Quasimodo.

Without doubt the prize of last season's choral events was a Christmas concert given in Zürich by the Czech Philharmonic Chamber Ensemble. Consisting of eight singers and instrumentalists, the Ensemble treated a large, grateful audience to a choice of anonymous Christmas carols and Bohemian, Moravian, and Slovenian music from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. There were madrigals from the *Harmoniae morales* (1589-90) by Jacobus Gallus, dances from the same period as well as from anonymous collections of the eighteenth century, and, above all, a sublime Christmas Mass from the *Harmonia pastoralis* by the little known composer Edmund Pascha (1714-62). Versatile voices merged with the instrumental sound in an expressive style, but without vibrato, under the direction of Svatopluk Janys, who also appeared as oboist and recorder player; the Christmas Mass was conducted by Miroslav Venhoda. The whole program was a rare delight.

—Viktoria Haefer

[1]See *American Choral Review*, Vol. XXIV, No. 1: Keith Daniel, *The Choral Music of Francis Poulenc*, pp. 19 f.

Towards the Bach Tercentenary

In cooperation with the American Chapter of the International New Bach Society (Neue Bach-Gesellschaft), *the American Choral Foundation is pleased to publish the following request:*

1985
The Bach Year in America:
A Proposed Documentation

Dear Colleague:

The plans you, your group, or your institution may be making in connection with the Bach Tercentenary are of great potential interest to a wide international audience. The *Neue Bach-Gesellschaft,* the oldest continuously active organization of its kind in the world, is proposing to publish a documentation of the Tercentenary in the United States. The officers of the American Chapter of the Society are therefore issuing this appeal for information.

We recognize that your plans for 1985 may still be in a formative stage. Nonetheless, we urgently request that you establish contact now by writing, as briefly and as noncommittally as you like, to the Chapter office, indicating your interest in being included in the publication, which is to be internationally distributed and will include dates, times, general nature (and in many cases, we hope, specific details) of the programs in question. Inclusion in the project will be at *no cost* to participants.

Please address your letter to:

New Bach Society
1725 Main Street
Bethlehem, PA. 18018

Sincerely,

Paul Brainard (Princeton University)
Chapter Chairman

Recent Records

ROBERT WHITE: *Lamentations of Jeremiah; Four Motets.* The Clerkes of Oxenford, David Wulstan. Nonesuch H-71400 stereo.

Robert White is an "unknown" composer, contemporary in his music with that of Byrd and Tallis in England and probably as well known in the period. Judging by the sense of these performances, his music has again found its time and is good, from our point of view, after centuries of oblivion. In this ineffably English church recording out of Oxford, White shows a fine mastery of counterpoint and fluent line with enticing touches of an Orlando Gibbons sort, as well as Byrd, very much in the English tradition. So, also, are the performances themselves masterful, if in a curious way, with the whole panoply of trebles, means, countertenors, and the rest, and that pure tone minus vibrato that is the glory of English church singing.

Further I dare not go. For there is much that simply baffles in the Wulstan approach. Scholarly research on vocal practices — yes. These are voices trained, it is said, to sing as did those of the sixteenth century (though much of the sound is of a sort that other English choirs share extensively, I would say). But how about tempi, phrasing of the texts, the sense of words? Are they, too, the subject of deep research — and is this, then, the way these motets, and the fine Lamentations, contemporary with those of Tallis, were actually sung?

Well, I can only say I have my doubts. There is one dirge-like slow tempo for all of this music, almost unvarying from beginning to end of the recording. And it is not the first recording by the group with this same characteristic. If I know anything about sixteenth-century choral music, it is that — from abundant internal evidence alone — it is solidly, marvelously based on the shape and rhythm of words and, even more, of word phrases and sentences. Moreover, it responds to a "natural" word treatment, at approximately a "speaking" tempo, with, one might say, alacrity. No better word. There is, to be sure, some dirge-like music; there are long-drawn-out plainchant *canti fermi;* but the body of the texts is treated by just about every composer in every language so that the words are singable in normal

word fashion, at a tempo that promotes the speaking sense of the texts. What else, after all, was the purpose?

Yet David Wulstan leads his group at a snail's pace, with the utmost reverence and beauty of tone, but with a relentless, steady beat that simply overrides the free rhythm, shapes, and contrasts of the textual counterpoint. Why, even the "Romantic" rediscoverers of Renaissance church music, back at the turn of the century, eschewed any such heavy beat, though they swelled up and died away like Wagner and moved even more slowly.

After a few minutes of this music, I did not even bother to follow the further texts, since everything sounded more or less alike, if of an ineffably beautiful ambience. Should it be that way?

Even with the proper, historically accurate voice timbres, via exhaustive research and special vocal training, one can still pace the music according to word sense and shape, for a free reign of motion in which the pulse is no more than a pulse, a gentle binding force, not a relentless beat! Can those of us (plenty) who conduct Renaissance music in this fashion, even with the wrong voices, be so very wrong? Is Mr. Wulstan's unchanging beat musicologically correct — is this the way it was? I do hope not.

—Edward Tatnall Canby

Recent Scores

The scores listed below were selected from material received by the editor of this column. Single copies are available for perusal from THE AMERICAN CHORAL FOUNDATION'S *reference library at 130 West 56th Street, New York, New York 10019.*

ARGENTO, DOMINICK. *A Thanksgiving to God, for His House.* SATB. Boosey & Hawkes, N.Y. (12 p., .60)

CALDARA, ANTONIO. *Regina coeli laetare (Freue dich, Maria, Himmelskönigin).* SATB, basso continuo. Bärenreiter. BA 6236 (20 p. DM 9.-)

COPLAND, AARON. *Have Mercy On Us, O My Lord* from *Four Motets.* SATB. Boosey & Hawkes, N.Y. (8 p., .50)

—. *Help Us, O Lord* from *Four Motets.* SATB. Boosey & Hawkes, N.Y. (7 p., .50)

—. *Thou, O Jehovah, Abideth Forever* from *Four Motets.* SATB. Boosey & Hawkes, N.Y. (8 p., .50)

DOBROLOVSKI, KUNIBERTAS and ULRICH W. ZIMMER, eds. *Nun jauchzt dem Herren, alle Welt.* Choral settings for parish church songs. SATB. Bärenreiter. BA 6331 (24 p., DM 4.-)

ELIAS, AL. *Noah.* A multi-media play for four child actors, two adults, and two-part youth choir with piano or prerecorded accompaniment, from "It's a Brand New World." Based on Teleplay by Max Wilk and Romeo Muller. GlorySound (Shawnee Press, Delaware Water Gap, Pa.). (director's score — script, piano-vocal score, 40 p., 2.50; choral parts, .60; film strip — color, 88 frames, 10.00; pre-recorded accompaniment tape — 7 1/2 i.p.s., reel to reel, 15.00)

FINZI, GERALD. *Three Short Elegies.* SATB. Boosey & Hawkes, N.Y. (15 p., .75)

GRIER, GENE and LOWELL EVERSON. *American Folk Collage.* SATB, keyboard. Heritage Music Press, Dayton, Ohio (11 p., .50)

HAMPTON, CALVIN. *God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen.* SATB. McAfee Music Corp., N.Y. (7 p., .50)

HANDEL, GEORGE F. *Endless Glory, Endless Love.* Arranged by Vernon Fay. SATB, keyboard. Harold Flammer (Shawnee Press, Delaware Water Gap, Pa.) (9 p., .50)

HAYDN, JOSEPH. *O Praise the Lord With Heart and Voice.* From the oratorio *The Creation.* Arranged by Hal H. Hopson. SATB, keyboard. Harold Flammer (Shawnee Press, Delaware Water Gap, Pa.) (8 p., .45)

—. *Sechs Psalmen* (Six Psalms). SAB. Bärenreiter. BA 6232 (23 p., DM 7.-)

HEDGES, ANTHONY, arr. *Ally Croaker.* TTBB. Scottish folk song. Roberton Publications, Bucks, England. (8 p., 20 pence)

HUGHES, MIKI. *Wait, Little Shammes.* (A Hanukkah song.) SAB, keyboard. Heritage Music Press, Dayton, Ohio (8 p., .45)

LEIGHTON, KENNETH. *Sequence for All Saints.* SATB, Bar. solo, organ. Roberton Publications, Bucks, England. (43 p., 1 pound 20 pence)

PELZ, WALTER L. *Now Is the Hour of Darkness Past.* SATB, organ. Concordia, St. Louis, Mo. (8 p., .50)

PENINGER, DAVID. *A Time to Laugh* (Four pieces: *Laughing Time; Stately Verse; The Ingenious Little Old Man; The Tale of a Pigtail.)* SA, piano. Heritage Music Press, Dayton, Ohio (20 p., .75)

POSEGATE, MAXCINE WOODBRIDGE. *Three Anthems for Holy Week.* I. *The Procession to Jerusalem.* (6 p., .45) II. *The Accursed Tree.* (6 p., .45) III. *The Empty Tomb.* (6 p., .45) SAB, keyboard. Harold Flammer (Shawnee Press, Delaware Water Gap, Pa.).

PRAETORIUS, MICHAEL. *Weihnachtskonzerte (Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland; In dulci jubilo).* SATB, SATB. Bärenreiter. BA 6235 (24 p., DM 7.-)

ROBERTON, HUGH S. *Two Scottish Psalm Tunes.* TTBB. Roberton Publications, Bucks, England. (11 p., 20 pence)

SCHMIDT, HARVEY. *Try to Remember,* from *The Fantasticks.* Arranged by Frank Pooler. SSA, piano. Shawnee Press, Delaware Water Gap. Pa. (8 p., .50)

SCHÜTZ, HEINRICH. *Ich bin die Auferstehung und das Leben,* SWV 464; SATB; *Herr, nun lässest du deinen Diener in Friede fahren,* SWV 432; SSATTB, Basso continuo. Bärenreiter. BA 5919 (24 p., no price given)

STANTON, ROYAL. *He Is Born.* French carol. SAB, flute, percussion (finger cymbals, triangle, tambourine, small tom-tom). Harold Flammer (Shawnee Press, Delaware Water Gap, Pa.). (score 8 p., .45)

STUART, HUGH. *'Cause It's Luv!* SATB, piano, opt. guitar, bass, drums, and choreography. Shawnee Press, Delaware Water Gap, Pa. (vocal score 12 p., 50; set of parts plus list of choreographic moves, 3.50)

TERRI, SALLI. *A Moravian Lovefeast.* A complete service of music for choir, trombones, and people (congregation or audience). Mark Foster Music Co., Champaign, Ill. (vocal score — includes Moravian Lovefeast Recipes from the cookbook of Salli Terri — 52 p., 4.00; set of trombone parts, 15.00; programs with the order of service, texts, and melody lines are also available for sale from the publisher)

VANDA, HARRY and GEORGE YOUNG. *Love Is In the Air.* SAB, piano, opt. guitar, bass, drums, tambourines and claves. Arranged by Jerry Nowak. Shawnee Press, Delaware Water Gap, Pa. (vocal score 11 p., .55; set of parts, 3.50)

YOUNG, GORDON. *I Will Lift Up Mine Eyes.* SAB, keyboard. Harold Flammer (Shawnee Press, Delaware Water Gap, Pa.). (6 p., .50)

—Richard Jackson

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Through its fifty-two state and seven divisional organizations, as well as on the national level, the Association sponsors workshops, conventions, and festivals where ideas are shared and explored, problems discussed, and music is heard. Its publications program includes monographs on various specialized subjects of interest to choral directors, state and division newsletters, and the monthly *Choral Journal,* which contains articles, reviews of books, recordings, and music, as well as notices of choral activities throughout the nation.

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