

**Karen Gordon's program notes for April 2019 Santa Cruz Chorale Concert
(v4/19/2019)**

Our program presents works by two composers who exemplify different musical eras. Joseph Haydn is one of the best-known representatives of the Classical period, and Felix Mendelssohn is an early example of the Romantic period that followed. Mendelssohn actually stepped immediately into Haydn's shoes, so to speak, for he was born the same year Haydn died. It is for this reason that compositions by Haydn and Mendelssohn were chosen to complement each other in our program. Interspersed in our performance of Haydn's *Mass*—as quasi commentaries on the text—are choral settings of Psalms from Felix Mendelssohn's *Elijah* (Op. 70, MWV A 25). The reason our director interrupts the performance of a mass such as Haydn's [which consists of the *ordinarium* parts of the Roman Catholic mass] is that it was never intended for performance in a concert. Furthermore, in an actual service, the parts of such a mass were never sung one right after another, but were interrupted by Psalms and prayers.

Mass in B-flat major ("Harmoniemesse"), HOB. XXII:14
(Franz) Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

The Austrian composer Haydn is mainly remembered as the "father of the symphony" and "father of the string quartet," but as he himself modestly put it, "I am somewhat proud of my masses." The *Mass in B-flat major* was the last of fourteen masses he composed during his life, and it was also his last completed work. It is famous for its opulent orchestration, which (in addition to strings, organ and timpani) includes a full range of wind instruments: flute, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns and two trumpets—indeed, the *Mass* includes more wind instruments than all of Haydn's other masses. The German term "Harmoniemusik" refers to music for wind instruments, and it is because of the orchestration that, years after it was composed, the *Mass in B-flat major* was given the name "Harmoniemesse."

In the "Harmoniemesse" Haydn underlines the meaning of the mass text in many ways, and somber passages are impressed upon the listener with as much intensity as are joyous ones. Alternation between soloists and choir, between polyphony and homophony, changes in harmony, and dynamics ranging from fortissimo to pianissimo, serve to express the meaning of the words. All the while, the wind instruments add intensity and splendor to deepen the impact of the text.

Haydn's contemporary detractors criticized his masses for their overly "cheerful" character, and for the "sheer musical joy" of the performances. Those who dismissed his masses as having no relationship to the text, of being "secular, lacking in dignity, and not suited for performance in churches"—indeed, of consisting of "superficial musical profanities," etc.—ignored how deeply religious he was. When the *Mass in B-flat major* was first published in 1802, the publisher (Breitkopf & Härtel) noted that Haydn's piety is not of that "perpetually penitent" kind, that his *Mass* is not burdened by "dark holiness," and that the character of his sacred music is "cheerfully reverent, consoled, and joyously aware of the heavenly gifts." As Haydn once explained, "I don't know how to

do otherwise—I give it as I have it. And when I think of God my heart is so full of happiness that the notes just come pouring from me, as thread unspooling. And since God gave me a joyous heart, He will surely forgive me for serving him joyously.” (The *Mass* was first performed in 1802 in a service at the Bergkirche of Eisenstadt, Austria, and was conducted by Haydn himself.)

Cast thy burden upon the Lord (Number 15 from *Elijah*)

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

Text: adapted from Psalm 55:22, KJV Bible. [In Luther’s Bible this verse is number 23.]

Eng. transl.: William Bartholomew (1793-1867)

[English and German versions of *Elijah* were written in parallel, but the premier performance (which Mendelssohn conducted in Birmingham in 1846) was in English. The German version premiered in Leipzig on the composer’s birthday, a few months after his death.]

Felix Mendelssohn was of Jewish heritage, but his parents had him and his siblings baptized into the Protestant faith when Felix was seven. Despite the fundamental contributions to German culture of Felix’s grandfather, the great Jewish intellectual of the German Enlightenment, Moses Mendelssohn, and of course Felix’s own copious contributions as a German composer (not to mention the fact that he had “rescued” J.S. Bach from obscurity with his ground-breaking performance of Bach’s St. Matthew’s Passion), Felix at times dealt with anti-Semitism in an intolerant society. The family actually added the surname “Bartholdy” to their existing name to help conceal their Jewish identity. The following quote is from a Library of Congress article *Felix Mendelssohn and Jewish Identity*. “While Felix Mendelssohn was raised and remained a practicing Lutheran throughout his life, it would appear that he retained a substantial sense of his Jewish identity. It is revealing that the subjects of the two biblically-inspired oratorios produced in the last year of his life—*Elijah* and *Christus*—reflect, respectively, the Old Testament of his Jewish heritage and the New Testament of the Protestant faith adopted by his family. With these works Felix Mendelssohn may have been striving to reconcile issues of spirituality and religious tolerance within society, as well as these two parts of his own identity.”

“Cast thy burden upon the Lord” confidently promises that the Lord will sustain those who place their trust in Him, and Mendelssohn set the words to music with the straightforward optimism of a Lutheran hymn—except that, as a Romantic composer, even in this musically sedate setting he couldn’t resist using a joyously soaring line to describe the greatness of His mercy that is “far above the heav’ns.”

Cast thy burden upon the Lord;
And he shall sustain thee.
He never will suffer the righteous to fall.
He is at thy right hand.
Thy mercy, Lord, is great,
And far above the heav'ns.
Let none be made ashamed
That wait upon thee!

“Kyrie” and “Gloria” (from *Mass in B-flat major*)
Haydn

Kyrie

Kyrie, eleison.
Christe, eleison.
Kyrie, eleison.

Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Gloria

Gloria in excelsis Deo,
Et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.
Laudamus te. Benedicimus te.
Adoramus te. Glorificamus te.
Gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam.
Domine Deus, Rex coelestis,
Deus Pater omnipotens.
Domine Fili unigenite Jesu Christe.
Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris.
Qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.
Qui tollis peccata mundi, suscipe deprecationem nostram.
Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris, miserere nobis.
Quoniam tu solus sanctus.
Tu solus Dominus,
Tu solus altissimus, Jesu Christe.
Cum Sancto Spiritu, in gloria Dei Patris.
Amen.

Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace to men of good will.
We praise thee. We bless thee.
We adore thee. We glorify thee.
We give thee thanks for thy great glory.
Lord God, heavenly King,
Almighty God, Father.
Lord Jesus Christ, only begotten Son of the Father.
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
Thou who takest away the sins of the world,
Have mercy on us.
Thou who takest away the sins of the world,

Receive our prayer.
Thou who sittest at the right hand of the Father,
Have mercy on us.
For thou alone art holy.
Thou alone art the Lord,
Thou alone art the Most High, Jesus Christ.
With the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

Lift thine eyes (Number 28 from *Elijah*)
Mendelssohn
Text: from Psalm 121:1-3
Engl. transl.: Bartholomew

The words of the Psalm direct us to lift our eyes toward the mountains “whence cometh help,” and Mendelssohn opens his setting with a line that reaches heavenward—indeed lifting our spirits to the realm where help resides.

Lift thine eyes, O lift thine eyes to the mountains,
Whence cometh help.
Thy help cometh from the Lord,
The maker of heaven and earth.
He hath said thy foot shall not be moved.
Thy keeper will never slumber, will never slumber.
Lift thine eyes, O lift thine eyes to the mountains,
Whence cometh help.

“Credo” (from *Mass in B-flat major*)
Haydn

Credo in unum Deum, Patrem omnipotentem,
Factorem caeli et terrae,
Visibilium omnium et invisibilium.
Et in unum Dominum Jesum Christum,
Filium Dei unigenitum.
Et ex Patre natum ante omnia saecula.
Deum de Deo, lumen de lumine,
Deum verum de Deo vero;
Genitum, non factum, consubstantialem Patri,
Per quem omnia facta sunt.
Qui propter nos homines, et propter nostram salutem
Descendit de caelis.
Et incarnatus est
De Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine:
Et homo factus est.
Crucifixus etiam pro nobis:

Sub Pontio Pilato passus, et sepultus est.
Et resurrexit tertia die,
Secundum scripturas.
Et ascendit in caelum:
Sedet ad dexteram Patris.
Et iterum venturus est cum gloria
Judicare vivos et mortuos:
Cujus regni non erit finis.
Et in Spiritum sanctum,
Dominum et vivificantem:
Qui ex Patre, Filioque procedit.
Qui cum Patre et Filio
Simul adoratur et onglorificatur:
Qui locutus est per Prophetas.
Et unam sanctam catholicam
Et apostolicam Ecclesiam.
Confiteor unum baptisma
In remissionem peccatorum.
Et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum,
Et vitam venturi saeculi. Amen.

I believe in one God, the Father almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth,
And of all things visible and invisible.
And in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
The only begotten Son of God.
Born of the Father before all ages.
God of God, light of light,
True God of true God;
Begotten, not made: of one being with the Father,
By whom all things were made.
For us men, and for our salvation,
He came down from heaven;
And became incarnate
By the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary:
And was made man.
For our sake He was crucified:
Under Pontius Pilatus He died and was buried.
On the third day He rose again,
According to the Scriptures;
And He ascended into heaven:
And is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory,
To judge the living and the dead:
And His kingdom will have no end.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,

The Lord, the giver of life:
Who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
Together with the Father and the Son
He is worshipped and glorified:
Who spoke through the prophets.
I believe in one holy, catholic
And apostolic Church.
I acknowledge one baptism
For the forgiveness of sins.
I await the resurrection of the dead,
And the life of the world to come. Amen.

He watching over Israel (Number 29 from *Elijah*)
Mendelssohn
Text: from Psalm 121:3-4
Engl. transl.: Bartholomew

The music promises an all-encompassing tranquility as His watchful gaze continuously sweeps over Israel: “He watching over Israel slumbers not nor sleeps.” An atmosphere of well-being pervades all, until the words “shouldst thou walking in grief languish...” introduce a doubtful and questioning tone, but after “He will quicken thee” is sung in decisive homophony, the opening serenity returns. The sound becomes ever more peaceful as the piece gradually draws to a close, and the choir, singing a calm piano, becomes silent for a short moment—as if listening for something. Then, as a far off call, the words “slee-ee-eeps not” are sung on the long pianissimo notes of a triad. The notes of the triad have the sound of a sentry’s horn—as a night watchman guarding a European city of yore. Mendelssohn’s allusion to call of the night watchman’s horn offers assurance to those who slumber that they are safe. Thus HE watches over Israel, and she may sleep because He does not.

He watching over Israel,
Slumbers not nor sleeps;
He slumbers not, nor sleeps.
Shouldst thou walking in grief languish,
He will quicken thee.
He watching over Israel,
Slumbers not nor sleeps;
He slumbers not, nor sleeps.
He slumbers not, sleeps not,
He watching Israel,
Slumbers not nor sleeps.

“Sanctus” and “Benedictus” (from *Mass in B-flat major*)
Haydn

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus,

Dominus Deus Sabaoth.
Pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria tua.
Osanna in excelsis.

Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God of hosts.
Heaven and earth are full of thy glory.
Hosanna in the highest.

Benedictus

Benedictus qui venit
in nomine Domini.
Osanna in excelsis.

Blessed is he who comes
in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.

For he shall give His Angels (“Denn er hat seinen Engeln befohlen über dir,” MWV B 53, re-used as Number 6 in *Elijah*)

Mendelssohn

Text: from Psalm 91:11-12

Engl. transl.: Bartholomew

“For he shall give His Angels (charge over thee)” was not originally composed for *Elijah*, although it was through the oratorio that it became well-known. Mendelssohn had composed the piece two years earlier, in German, as a personal gift for King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia, for whom he was serving as General Music Director. The king had just survived an assassination attempt, and it was under this immediate impression that Mendelssohn, overcome with emotion, composed “Denn er hat seinen Engeln befohlen über Dir.” He sent the score to the king, together with a touching letter, explaining that from the moment he had heard of the attack, certain verses had again and again forced themselves into his mind. He had set them to music, and he herewith laid the composition “at his majesty’s feet,” in the hopes that it expressed his relief and gratitude for the king’s “miraculous survival” as sincerely as these emotions were felt in the “depths of his heart.”

For He shall give His angels charge over thee;
That they shall protect thee in all the ways thou goest.
That their hands shall uphold and guide thee,
Lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.
They shall uphold and guide thee.
They shall protect thee in all the ways thou goest.

“Agnus Dei” (from *Mass in B-flat major*)

It seems somewhat strange that Haydn's setting of the words "dona nobis pacem" ("give us peace") are characterized by militaristic sounds, but the fact is that due to Napoleon's advances and France's declaration of war on Austria in 1792, these sounds actually reflect twenty three years of almost continuous conflict, or preparation for conflict, that impacted daily life. (In the night of May 11-12, 1809, Napoleon's forces besieged and entered Vienna, where Haydn was living. Although canon balls actually hit Haydn's house, he refused take refuge in the inner city, so Napoleon placed a guard of honor outside his house. The elderly and enfeebled composer was much touched by the visit of a French officer who serenaded him with an aria from *The Creation*. Haydn died peacefully on May 31.) But despite bellicose sounds, the "Dona Nobis" is optimistic, triumphant—dominated by certainty that He will grant not only earthly victory but eternal peace.

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,
Miserere nobis.
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,
Miserere nobis.
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,
Dona nobis pacem.

Lamb of God, thou who bearest the sins of the world,
Have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, thou who bearest the sins of the world,
Have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, thou who bearest the sins of the world,
Grant us peace.

(Traditional transl.)

INTERMISSION

"Wie der Hirsch schreit nach frischem Wasser," Psalm 42, op. 42 (MWV A 15)

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

Text: Martin Luther's German translation of Psalm 42

["Wie der Hirsch" was composed and published in 1837 and revised for soloists, mixed choir and orchestra in 1938, at which time the final chorus was added. In 1843 Mendelssohn reused the final chorus of Psalm 42 as the conclusion of Psalm 43 (in opus 78, "Three Psalms"). Both Psalms end with the same text.

A note about the text. Mendelssohn's composition is based on Martin Luther's German translation of the Hebrew Psalm, not on the KJV English rendition. The translation below translates Luther's German into English, for in order to understand Mendelssohn's musical intentions one must know which words he actually set to music. An example: the opening lines of the KJV translation read "as the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God" ("hart" is an archaic term for "stag"), whereas Luther's translation (translated into English) reads "as the hart screams out...so my soul, O God, screams out to Thee." (Also, the KJV rendition of "harre auf Gott" is "hope thou in God," whereas the literal

translation of the German is “wait for God,” or “await God.” I have translated this phrase simply as “have faith in God.” K.G.]

The Psalms inspired the Romantic composer Felix Mendelssohn throughout his working life, and in addition to *a cappella* settings, he composed five great orchestral Psalms. Foremost among these is his setting of Psalm 42, “Wie der Hirsch schreit nach frischem Wasser.” Robert Schumann was of the opinion that this composition was “the highest pinnacle ever reached by Mendelssohn the church composer or, indeed, by more recent church music altogether.” Mendelssohn himself particularly loved his setting of Psalm 42, indeed, as he wrote to his sister, Fanny, “my Psalm ‘Wie der Hirsch’ is, and always will be, my favorite piece of sacred music.”

With a powerful image from nature, the Psalmist likens the spiritual longings of a desperate soul to the physical longings of a stag for water in times of drought; the central message of the Psalm is that if one has faith in God, His life-giving presence (“His countenance”) will give sustenance. The text moves back and forth between doubt and faith, faith and doubt, but the promise of “His Countenance” gives strength to the Psalmist’s disquieted soul. He longs to join the “multitudes” that are on “pilgrimage to the house of God”—to “that distant place” where “His countenance” will be revealed, where suffering will end—and where “the Lord, the God of Israel,” will forever be praised. The “pilgrimage” the Psalmist wishes to join surely refers to the yearly pilgrimages of ancient Israelites to Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem, where the faithful gathered for festivities and ritual worship. The Temple was considered by some to be the dwelling place of God, and His presence was said to appear there, in the inner sanctuary (in the Holy of Holies).

For Mendelssohn, as a Christian, the “house of God” is His heavenly dwelling, and the “pilgrimage” is life’s journey there, where those who have faith in Him, the redeemed, will praise Him eternally. Mendelssohn was a Romantic composer, and in the Romantic period a general “longing,” a yearning for the unfathomable or the “far away” (expressed by the German word “Sehnsucht”), was the central theme. It was perhaps particularly the “longing” expressed in Psalm 42 that struck a chord in Mendelssohn’s soul.

As Mendelssohn’s setting moves along the text, back and forth dialogues between male and female choral groups, or between the soprano soloist and choral groups, variously express doubt or give assurance that He will indeed help the tormented souls of the faithful as they struggle along on life’s “pilgrimage” to His eternal “house.”

1: Opening chorus

As the setting opens, the orchestra paints an idyllic picture of the rising sun, and of the gradual dawning of a blissful and glorious day. (It is surely not coincidental that the music paints a picture, for the composer Mendelssohn was also an enthusiastic artist who worked in pencil and watercolor—he carried a sketch book along on all his travels.) The music carries the promise of redemption—it expresses patience and trust—and in this atmosphere of utter tranquility the mellow voices of the altos enter, singing in a calm low range of a stag in need of water. The character of the music says that the animal is merely ambling along unconcernedly, with no rush and apparently in no doubt that water

is there. The main theme (which the altos introduced) passes through all voices, sometimes sung in two parts, sometimes three or four, but although the intensity of the “longing” increases, a sense of serenity pervades the entire opening chorus—it remains *lento e sostenuto*.

Despite the gentle tone of the music, however, the actual words say that the stag “SCREAMS OUT” for life-sustaining water, and that it is with the same desperation that the Psalmist’s own soul “SCREAMS OUT” for God. It is difficult to imagine a stronger expression of existential need—either physical or spiritual—and one is baffled why Mendelssohn would set this imagery to music that so contradicts the words. Perhaps he wrapped the drastic words in serenely reassuring music—music that carries the promise of redemption—to express the intensity of his own faith: the greater the need, the greater his faith, and simultaneously the greater the grace of redemption.

But the contradictory opening of the setting can also be understood in the context of the circumstances under which the piece was composed. Truth be told, when Mendelssohn wrote of a stag in need of water, he was not in the parched landscape of Israel. He was spending several weeks in the lush Black Forest of southern Germany (the sound of a “Waldhorn” points to those surroundings) in and around Freiburg, where he and his bride, the clergyman’s daughter, Cécile Jeanrenaud, were on their honeymoon. The River Dreisam flows right through the city of Freiburg, and streams are everywhere—no lack of water. The two had just embarked on their grand “pilgrimage” through life together, and it is presumably not a coincidence that Mendelssohn chose to set the text of this particular Psalm to music at this particular moment in his life. Nor is it presumably a coincidence that the setting composed on their honeymoon opens with the promise that a glorious new day is dawning—a promise (or a prayer) that He will bless the “pilgrimage” of the young couple and lead them to eternal bliss.

Wie der Hirsch schreit nach frischem Wasser,
So schreit meine Seele, Gott, zu dir.

As the stag screams out for fresh water,
So my soul, O God, screams out to Thee.

2: Aria (soprano)

The gender of the German word for “soul” (“Seele”) is feminine, which is perhaps why Mendelssohn chose a soprano soloist to represent the individual soul. Perhaps he also found the higher range of the soprano particularly suited to the “spiritual” realm. In any event, when one now hears true desperation in the music, it is heart-rendingly expressed by a lone soprano. As her voice frantically wanders and searches, she sings of her lost soul’s doubts, and of her desperate longings for Him—for “His countenance.”

Meine Seele dürstet nach Gott,
Nach dem lebendigen Gotte.
Wann werde ich dahin kommen,
Dass ich Gottes Angesicht schaue?

My soul thirsts for God,
For the living God.
When will I reach that distant place
Where I behold God's countenance?

3a: Recitative (soprano)

In a Bach-like recitative the soprano continues to sing of her longings, and she sheds bitter tears of uncertainty and sorrow when her enemies ridicule her in her need: "so where is thy God?"

Meine Tränen sind meine Speise Tag und Nacht,
Weil man täglich zu mir saget:
"Wo ist nun dein Gott?"
Wenn ich dess' innerwerde,
So schütte ich mein Herz aus bei mir selbst.

My tears are my food by day and by night,
For every day I am asked,
"So where is thy God?"
When I contemplate this,
I pour out my heart in solitude.

3b: Aria (soprano, with women's chorus)

But the tone of the music changes when the soprano makes a decision based on faith: she decides to join the multitudes on a pilgrimage to His house, to that place where all will rejoice. She sings an actively forward-striving aria that is happy with anticipation as she sets off on her pilgrimage, whereby *crescendi* on the ascending words "make pilgrimage to the house of God" ("wallen zum Hause Gottes") express an "onward and upward" enthusiasm. She first strides along alone singing her pilgrimage theme, but when she catches up with a multitude of women—a women's chorus that is also singing the theme—she joins them, and all then sing together as they happily strive forward on their journey.

Denn ich wollte gern hingehen
Mit dem Haufen und mit ihnen wallen
Zum Hause Gottes,
Mit Frohlocken und mit Danken
Wallen zum Hause Gottes,
Mit Frohlocken und mit Danken
Unter dem Haufen, die da feiern.

For I truly wanted to go
With the multitudes on pilgrimage
To the house of God,
With rejoicing and with thanks,

And make pilgrimage to the house of God,
With all the people that are celebrating.

4: Chorus

When the men ask “why art thou disquieted, my soul,” it is not the lament of a tortured soul as before, but instead it questions why the soul was ever disquieted (“you see, now that you are on ‘pilgrimage’ all is well”). With brass accompaniment and triumphant fanfare, the entire choir confidently expresses the central message of the Psalm: if one has faith in God He will give “the aid of His countenance,” and there will be reason to thank Him in the end. With the repetition of a short insistent motif “have faith in God” (“harre auf Gott”), Mendelssohn drives this truth home.

Was betrübst du dich, meine Seele,
Und bist so unruhig in mir?
Harre auf Gott!
Denn ich werde ihm noch danken,
Dass er mir hilft mit seinem Angesicht.

Why art thou disquieted, my soul,
And art so restless within me?
Have faith in God!
For I shall yet thank Him
For the help of His countenance.

5: Recitative (soprano)

But the soul that had so confidently joined the happy multitudes on pilgrimage has now lost her way. She sings alone again (i.e., separated from the group), and as her tormented voice wanders and searches, the music expresses sadness and anguish. Her “disquieted” soul longs desperately for Him, and she attempts to revive her faith (“therefore I remind myself of Thee”)—but to no avail. She struggles with a turbulent and threatening situation, which she describes as being deluged by waters: “...the depths roar, all the billows and waves of thy waters wash over me”—and as she sings, the instruments imitate the rolling waves of the waters washing over her. It is noteworthy that when she says “Thy waters wash over me,” she is addressing God, which means she is dealing with waters that He has sent (apparently as a test of her faith). In any event, she is simply overwhelmed by all of this, her faith is not regained, and her “disquieted” soul continues struggling as her recitative ends.

Mein Gott, betrübt ist meine Seele in mir,
Darum gedenke ich an dich!
Deine Fluten rauschen daher,
Dass hier eine Tiefe,
Und dort eine Tiefe brausen;
Alle Deine Wasserwogen
Und Wellen geh’n über mich.
Mein Gott, betrübt ist meine Seele in mir!

My God, my soul is disquieted within me,
Therefore I remind myself of Thee!
Thy waters rush along,
So that here the depths,
And there the depths roar;
All the billows and waves of Thy waters
Wash over me.
My God, my soul is troubled within me.

6: Quintet (men's TTBB quartet with soprano solo)

As the men's chorus and the soprano's song grapple with each other in this quintet, Mendelssohn gives musical expression to the conflict between doubt and faith along life's pilgrimage.

In her wanderings, the distraught soul comes upon a group (a "multitude") of men singing His praise. They are singing now, at night ("des Nachts"), they say, because He has kept the promises He made by day (He kept His promises because they kept their faith in Him), and the warm mellow character of their song expresses utter content. (The sounds have the character of a "Liedertafel"—a type of men's chorus that Mendelssohn particularly liked.) The soprano sings a tortured aria, telling them of her soul's torment and her doubts, but the anxiety she expressed in the previous recitative has now become so great that she believes God has truly forsaken her. "My God...why hast Thou forgotten me?" she asks in desperation, "why? why?" The men attempt to comfort her with a repetition of their song, but they have been touched by her suffering, and whereas they previously sang in a happy major key, they now sing in a saddened—yet still hopeful—minor. The soprano will have none of this, and again sings of her soul's agony. The men again try to reassure her, promising to her the goodness that He has shown to them—goodness that gives them reason to sing His praise. She now just interrupts the men's song with hers—but the men valiantly keep on singing their song of faith, while she continues singing hers that expresses a lack of faith. As the men's voices thus enfold the soprano's lament in the warm, comforting sounds of their song, they are ultimately able to console her. Previously, when asking Him why He had abandoned her, she always called out to Him in desperation, with upward reaching intervals—she even virtually screeched out "my God" with a frantic octave jump. Now, however, she sings "my God!" Now, however, she sings "my God!" with a half step down that comes to rest on a gently resolved major chord. The lost soul has now again found faith, and with relief and thanksgiving, she and the men's chorus end the quintet blissfully together, with long peaceful notes of praise.

Men

Der Herr hat des Tages
Verheißen seine Güte,
Und des Nachts singe ich zu ihm,
Und bete zu dem Gotte meines Lebens.
Und des Nachts singe ich zu ihm.

By day the Lord
Has ordained his loving kindness,
And by night I sing to Him,
And worship the God of my life,
And by night I sing to Him.

Solo soprano

Mein Gott, betrübt ist meine Seele in mir,
Warum hast du meiner vergessen?
Warum muss ich so traurig geh'n,
Warum hast du meiner vergessen?
Warum, warum?
Wenn mein Feind mich drängt?
(Mein Gott!)

My God, my soul is disquieted within me,
Why hast Thou forgotten me?
Why must I go mourning
When my enemy oppresses me?
Why hast Thou forgotten me?
Why, why?
When my enemy oppresses me?
(My God!)

7: Final chorus

The text says that when the “pilgrimage” ends at the “house of God” (His heavenly dwelling) and we see “His Countenance” (see Him face to face, so to speak), our own “countenance” will be “helped”—in other words, when our longing for Him is satisfied all traces of doubt and sorrow will disappear from our faces. We will be in the midst of the faithful “multitudes” that thank Him “in all eternity” for sustaining our souls and for keeping His promises—the greatest of which is the promise of eternal life.

At the end of the pilgrimage Mendelssohn takes up the words and motif of the fourth chorus, “have faith in God” (“harre auf Gott”), and expands them into an ecstatic outpouring of praise, with the added regal magnificence of brass, woodwind instruments and timpani. He also adds the phrase “praised be the Lord” (“Preis sei dem Herrn”), and he ingeniously underlines the inseparable link between faith and praise by using the same short “have faith in God” motif for both phrases. (Our faith has brought us to the place where we may offer praise eternally.) As the words are repeated again and again, an “...in all eternity” (“...bis in Ewigkeit”) motif is also added to the mix. The repetition of motifs is an obvious way of pointing to eternity, but Mendelssohn also achieves this, e.g., with the ascending tendency of the lines (the sopranos end up singing multiple high “a’s” as the circularly forward moving “eternity” motif becomes higher and higher), or once even by stretching out the actual word “eternity” (“Ewigkeit”) over seven measures. All of this contributes to an eternal continuation of praise. But there is a fascinating feature

of the short “have faith in God”/“praised be the Lord” motif itself that points to eternity. The motif has an open end, in that it doesn’t land on the root of the chord. It ends on the unresolved fifth of a chord, and musically it demands to be sung again and again—“in Ewigkeit.” The chorus ends with a long triumphant homophonic block, and the insistent rhythm gives the words “have faith in God” and “praised be the Lord” the character of a command and of the truth proclaimed.

Was betrübst du dich, meine Seele,
Und bist so unruhig in mir?
Harre auf Gott!
Denn ich werde ihm noch danken,
Dass er meines Angesichts Hilfe
Und mein Gott ist.
Preis sei dem Herrn, dem Gott Israels,
Von nun an bis in Ewigkeit!

Why art thou disquieted, my soul,
And art so restless within me?
Have faith in God!
For I shall yet thank Him,
Who is the help of my countenance,
And my God.
Praised be the Lord, the God of Israel,
From now and in all eternity.

Program notes, texts and translations by Karen Gordon
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