

The 200th anniversary of the birth of Felix Mendelssohn (February 3, 1809-November 4, 1847) is being celebrated around the world with concerts, recitals and lectures. The Bach Society will use its talents to create something unique: a program based on Mendelssohn's relationship to its namesake, Johann Sebastian Bach.

The Society's awareness of Bach and his music derives, to a large extent, from the efforts of Mendelssohn. By Bach's death in 1750, musical style had changed and interest in his compositions had waned. For all intent his music disappeared.

As a student Mendelssohn studied the music of Bach and became a passionate collector of "ancient" music, gathering manuscripts by Palestrina, Victoria, and Schütz, as well as Bach. The music of these masters inspired and influenced him. In some of Mendelssohn's choral works, the stamp of Bach can be easily heard, most obvious in the motet *Aus tiefer Not*.

Mendelssohn and Bach were both devout Lutherans, knew their Bible exceptionally well, and created music that supported the sacred texts they set. They also shared a basic philosophical tenet: "Every kind of music ought...to attend to the glory of God." While we expect a statement like this from Bach, it was actually made by Mendelssohn.

In 1829, the 20-year-old Mendelssohn conducted a performance of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* at the Berlin Singakademie, commemorating the centennial of Bach's first performance of the work. It was the first time it had been heard since the composer's death ...nearly 80 years earlier.

Mendelssohn was appointed conductor of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra in 1835. His popularity as a composer and conductor gave him the ability to incorporate Bach's music into performances, cultivating a renewed interest. Single-handedly, Mendelssohn introduced a new

generation—and consequently, the world—to the music of Bach.

Unlike Bach, Mendelssohn was popular and successful during his lifetime, and he was praised by his contemporaries. Robert Schumann (1810-1856) wrote, "he is the Mozart of the nineteenth century, the most limpid of musicians, the one who most clearly reveals the contradiction of his time who is the first to reconcile them."

Belgian conductor Philippe Herreweghe (b. 1947) further discussed this 'contradiction': "what seems to me to be Mendelssohn's principal quality is his crystalline clarity: in the middle of the nineteenth century he had the misfortune of being balanced. His music is not the sublimation of some neurosis, but an abundant reflection of his love for life. This clarity would often be confused with a facile elegance and he would be execrated for it. But it also makes Mendelssohn one of the great composers of religious music. In the direct line of the great predecessors he admired so much, it made it possible for him to efface himself before the divine word and to set it *to music* with the necessary humility."

Through performances, recordings and radio broadcasts, Mendelssohn is known today for his symphonies, concertos, overtures and piano music. But in 1907, musicologist Hermann Kretzschmar (1848-1924) wrote that the religious works were "the most significant portion of his output." Armed with this assessment, Dr. Sparger searched through his complete works to prepare this program, and a body of well-crafted pieces emerged, a body neglected by past generations. Somewhere in the last century we lost extraordinary compositions, music that deserves to be heard.

The Program

Bach and Mendelssohn

7:30 p.m., Saturday, October 17, 2009, St. Anselm, The St. Louis Abbey
3:00 p.m., Sunday, October 18, 2009, The Shrine of St. Joseph

Four Anthems, from Sechs Stücke, Op. 79 (1846)
Felix Mendelssohn 1809-1847

Weinachten – Christmas

Rejoice, O nations of the earth

Am Neujahrstage – New Year's Day

Lord God, thou art our refuge

Am Himmelfahrtstage – Ascension Day

Exalted, o Lord, above all praise

Im Advent – Advent

Let us rejoice, the Savior comes

Ave Maria, Op. 23, No. 2 (1830) Mendelssohn
Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.

Three Chorales Harmonized by Johann Sebastian Bach 1685-1750

Veni, Sancte Spiritus – Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord

Nunc Dimittis – In Peace and Joy I Now Depart

De Profundis – Out of the Depths I Cry to Thee

Latin texts adapted by Martin Luther

Aus tiefer Not, Op. 23, No. 1 (1830) Mendelssohn

Chorale – Aus tiefer Not

In deep distress I cry to you

Fugue – Aus tiefer Not

In deep distress I cry to you

Aria – Bei dir gilt nicht denn Gnad'

With you nothing matters but grace

Chorale prelude – Und ob es währt bis in die Nacht

And even if it lasts into the night

Chorale – Ob bei uns ist der Sünden viel
Although with us are many sins
Adapted by Martin Luther from Psalm 150

Suite No. 1 in G major, BWV 1007, Prelude & Gigue J.S. Bach
Elizabeth Macdonald, Cello

Surrexit pastor bonus, Op. 39, No. 3 Mendelssohn
Women of the Chorus
The good Shepherd has risen

Vespergesang, Op. 121 Mendelssohn

Men of the Chorus

Adspice Domine de sede sancta tua

Look, Lord, from your holy seat

Aperi oculos tuo

Open your eyes and see our tribulation

Qui Regis Israle, intende

You who rule Israel, heed us

Der Geist hilft unsrer Schwachheit auf, BWV 226 J.S. Bach

Der Geist hilft unsrer Schwachheit auf

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities

Der aber die Herzen forschet der weiss

But he who searches our hearts knows the mind

Du heilige Brunst, süßer Trost

Your holy fire, sweet consolation, now help us

Romans 8: 26 & 27, Martin Luther

Lass', o Herr, mich Hülfe finden, Drei geistliche Lieder, No. 1 Mendelssohn

Let me, o Lord, find help

Mitten wir im Leben sind, Op. 23, No. 3 (1830) Mendelssohn

In the midst of life we are surrounded by death

Martin Luther

Nunc dimittis: Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart (1847) Mendelssohn