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*Bach in Berlin* is a wonderful piece of scholarship from a leading historian of German national identity. Whereas Celia Applegate’s seminal study of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Heimat movement[1] adroitly directed our attention to the regional and local foundations of "German-ness," this book examines how music—thinking about it, writing about it, and performing it—came to occupy a central place in the discourse about German national culture at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Applegate takes as her point of departure Felix Mendelssohn’s "discovery" of Johann Sebastian Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* and his wildly successful performances of the work at Berlin’s Singakademie in 1829, which scholars have long regarded as one of the seminal musico-logical events in modern German history. Applegate takes as her point of departure Felix Mendelssohn's "discovery" of Johann Sebastian Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* and his wildly successful performances of the work at Berlin's Singakademie in 1829, which scholars have long regarded as one of the seminal musico-logical events in modern German history. Applegate demonstrates that this triumph owed little to the intrinsic merits of "Sebastian's" masterwork. Rather, it was the culmination of a series of developments in German cultural, intellectual, musical, religious and social life over the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This, then, is not so much an account of the revival itself, but instead an examination of how educated Germans (the Bildungsbürgertum) learned to view music as a fundamental component of German culture and how they saw Bach, especially in his vocal music, as the epitome of German music: serious, profound, religious. Applegate tells the story brilliantly, traversing disciplinary boundaries with virtuoso ease.

After a brief introduction, the book’s argument unfolds over the course of six chapters. Chapter 1 takes up the part of the tale that will be most familiar to readers: the young Mendelssohn’s efforts to have the *St. Matthew Passion* performed in Berlin. Applegate reveals how the revival owed much to the development of a bourgeois "public sphere." She shows us the salons of Berlin's social and cultural elite, a milieu open to assimilated (and Christianized) Jews such as the Mendelssohn family, where the esoteric Sebastian Bach was still respected and performed. She introduces us to Carl Friedrich Zelter, Mendelssohn’s first music teacher and, after 1800, director of Berlin’s preeminent voluntary choral association, the Singakademie. We also meet here Adolf Bernhard Marx, editor of the *Berliner Allge-
meine Musikalische Zeitung, who served as the self-appointed publicist for Mendelssohn's undertaking. In this context, Applegate also weighs in on the debates over who should be credited with the revival (the Christian Zelter or the "Jew" Mendelssohn), arguing convincingly that that while many people played key roles in making the revival possible, the project was undeniably Mendelssohn's.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 trace how music came to define both Germans and Germanness. In chapter 2 the focus is on aesthetics. Applegate demonstrates how over the course of the eighteenth-century writers on music (like Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder and Ludwig Tieck) exploited the nascent nation of letters (i.e., print culture) to challenge existing views on music. Rejecting Kant and Hegel, they argued that music was indeed noble and capable of elevating the individual. Music taught one to feel, "thereby [allowing us] to know ourselves and to transcend everyday things" (p. 58). Musicians also played a major role in altering public perceptions of music, thereby reinforcing the intellectuals' claims that music was indeed essential to cultivation (Bildung). By 1790, we learn, the decline of German court culture threatened musicians with the loss of status and livelihood. Some turned to public concertizing, which—because of the need for considerable personal training and discipline—helped to mark the musician as a serious, gebildete individual. Others, like Johann Nikolaus Forkel, became writers, advocating musical enlightenment among the reading public and proffering a definition of "German" music—one that emphasized harmony over melody, effort over showmanship and profundity over superficiality.

Applegate continues this discussion of the links between print culture and music's emergence as a national cultural force in chapter 3, exploring now the phenomenon of musical journalism. The many short-lived eighteenth-century periodicals devoted to music, she points out, collec-

tively represented a major contribution to the "nationalizing project of literary culture" (p. 83). Furthermore, writing about music—and, thus, trying to teach educated Germans why music mattered—was an almost exclusively north German phenomenon. Applegate warns against viewing this as a harbinger of kleindeutsch unification, however, for journalists in fact promoted an inclusive vision of Germany. Indicative of a new approach to music journalism was Friedrich Rochlitz's Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung (AEZ).

First published in 1798 by the Leipzig firm of Breitkopf and Haertel, this journal set the standard for providing serious discussions of music and musical performance to the general, educated reader. It also helped readers visualize the German nation, thanks to concert reviews from across German Europe and articles that explored German musical history. The AEZ's success also encouraged imitation, notably Adolph Bernhard Marx's Berliner Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung, which endeavored to heighten musical standards in Berlin and, after 1828, promoted Bach and the St. Matthew Passion as German cultural treasures.

Chapter 4 examines one of the important consequences of all this talk about serious music: educated elites increasingly sought to make music themselves. This encouragement of musical amateurism and its equation with cultivation, Applegate asserts, directly fostered the perception that the Germans were a people of music. In addition, by gathering to make music, German men—and women—actively engaged in the practice of nation-building. Attending singing rehearsals, Applegate observes, created a tangible sense of community. It also enabled people to participate directly in the recovery of Germany's musical treasures. In discussing the rise of musical amateurism, Applegate touches on a wide range of topics. She points out the largely "private" dimension of amateur music making, which enabled middle-class women to participate in it (public performances by associations, it turns out, were exceptional).
She also surveys changes in the music publishing business and considers ideas about musical instruction. Above all, she explores the activities of Carl Friedrich Zelter, who fashioned the Berlin Singakademie into the model German amateur musical society, creating just the band of singers that Mendelssohn (a one time member of the group) would need for the Passion performances. Zelter's advocacy of amateur music in Berlin produced other meaningful results as well. A friend of Goethe, he became the first musician to have a formal position in the prestigious Prussian Academy of Arts. And, in 1827, he celebrated the completion of Germany's first performance space for amateur musicians: the Singakademie building, which Mendelssohn rented two years later for his Passion revival.

With chapter 5, Applegate finally addresses the questions: Why Bach? Why the St. Matthew Passion? In developing a response, she leads us through a fascinating discussion of religion, church music and historicism that adds usefully to the recent historiography on modern German religion and the religious inflections of German national sentiment. Bach, we discover, was basically unknown at the beginning of the nineteenth century, thanks to the precipitous decline of Protestant church music and the momentous shifts in Protestant piety in the wake of the Enlightenment. Moreover, changes in musical taste and in Protestant liturgical practice after 1800 precluded music like Bach's sacred writings from returning as service music. Consequently, Applegate reveals, the preservation—and occasional "exposition"—of sacred music became the province of amateur groups like the Singakademie. Rehearsing Handel's Messiah or a Haydn oratorio, however, was also a deeply religious act, fulfilling spiritual needs that had welled up across Germany in the years after the Congress of Vienna. Mendelssohn's performance of the Passion in 1829 was thus sensational both because it was a religious work (indeed, many audience members felt that they were attending a religious service, thereby arguing against the popular "secular" interpretation of the revival) and because it presented a new Bach to the public: a man whose music was serious, dramatic, lyrical and beautiful (and, in the eyes of a young Johann Gustav Droysen, Protestant), fundamentally German, all at once.

Applegate treats her final chapter as an extended conclusion. Although the 1829 performances were a one-time event, the spirit of the concerts—the Hegelian possibility of using the musical past to promote present progress—lived on, shaping the future work of Felix Mendelssohn and his collaborators. For instance, in 1850 Cellist Julius Rietz helped form the Bach Society, which Applegate characterizes as a "pathbreaking" effort to "translate historical understanding into national patrimony" (p. 241). Eduard Devrient, who sang Jesus in 1829, became a prominent actor and theater director, noted above all for a four-volume history of German theater. As for Felix Mendelssohn, Applegate maintains, the experience with the St. Matthew Passion launched his efforts to realize a vision of what music could achieve for Germany: a devotion to the "universal values of enlightenment and ethical community" (p. 249). The last part of the chapter sketches the progress of Bach's emergence after 1870 as a German cultural hero. Significantly, in this era of heightened confessional tension, Catholics, Protestants and Jews could all accept Bach's music as national patrimony. Why? On the one hand, Applegate notes, the Bach revival unfolded outside of church and state establishments, which kept it largely free of confessional polemics and politics. On the other hand, German musical life was essentially indifferent to confessional difference, just as after 1866 and 1871 it basically overlooked the fact that Austria was not part of the German nation-state.

Stunningly original, well-written, and judicious in its handling of historical and musicological controversies, Bach in Berlin puts the review-
er in a difficult position. There is precious little of which to be critical. In chapter 2, Applegate's argument about a particularly German approach to writing about music would have been enhanced had she provided us a better sense of what was going on in France and Italy. A particularly salient aspect of the history of Protestant church music discussed in chapter 5 is also omitted: the heavy-handed suppression and edition of hymn texts to accord with "enlightened" religious sensibilities. But these are really minor points. Applegate has produced an engaging, first-rate book that should be on the reading list of anyone with interests in nineteenth-century music and German history.

Note


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