Felix Mendelssohn’s 1829 Revival of Bach’s St. Matthew Passion

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Research Question

Methods

Historical, socio-cultural, music-analytical

- First: Analyze and Summarize
  - Study the existing argument in the literature regarding whether or not the cuts were made in order to bypass Anti-Semitic text of the original Passion

- Second: Reconsider the Cuts
  - View the cuts from a purely musical standpoint by using music-analytical methods
Background

- Bach’s St. Matthew Passion - 1727
- Mendelssohn’s revival: a result of family tradition
- Mendelssohn received the manuscript as a 20-year-old from his grandmother

-The Scholarly Debate:

Did Mendelssohn make cuts in order to bypass Anti-Semitism in the original Passion?

OR

Were cuts made due to:
- Romantic Aesthetics
- Length (nearly 3 hours to 2 hours)
- Texts being out-of-date/less relevant
- Other?
Bach’s Passion

Part 1: Chorus, E, Choral, E, Chori, E, Chorus, E, Recit, Aria, E, Aria, E, Chorus, E, E, Chorus, Choral, E, Recit, Aria, E, Choral, E, Choral, E, Recit, Aria, E, Recit, Aria, E, Recit, Aria, E, Choral, E, A, Chori, E, Choral

Part 2: Aria, E, Choral, E, Recit, Aria, E, Chori, E, Chori, Choral, E, Chorus, E, Aria, Choral, E, Chori, Choral, E, Recit, Aria, E, Chori, E, Chori, E, Recit, Aria, E, Chori, E, Aria, Choral, E, Recit, Aria, E, Chori, E, Chori, E, Recit, Aria, E, Chori, E, Chori, E, Recit, Aria, E, Chori, E, Chori, E, Choral

Mendelssohn’s Revival

Part 1: Chorus, E, Choral, E, Chori, E, Chorus, E, Recit, Aria, E, Aria, E, Chorus, E, E, Chorus, Choral, E, Recit, Aria, E, Choral, E, Choral, E, Recit, Aria, E, Recit, Aria, E, Recit, Aria, E, Choral, E, A, Chori, E, Choral

Part 2: Aria, E, Choral, E, Recit, Aria, E, Chori, E, Chori, Choral, E, Chorus, E, Aria, Choral, E, Chori, Choral, E, Recit, Aria, E, Chori, E, Chori, E, Recit, Aria, E, Chori, E, Chori, E, Choral, E, Recit, Aria, E, Chori, E, Chori, E, Choral, E, Recit, Aria, E, Chori, E, Chori, E, Choral, E, Recit, Aria, E, Chori, E, Chori, E, Recit, Aria, E, Chori, E, Chori, E, Recit, Chorus

E = Evangelist (and sometimes other roles) Narration, RED = Removed from original, YELLOW = slightly adapted
Literature Review


Specific Eliminated Chorales

No. 17 (Pt. I)

“Ich will hier bei Dir stehen”
(I will stay here with you)

No. 54 (Pt. II)

“O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden”
(Oh Head full of blood and wounds)
(same melody as Chorale #15, #17, and #62)
Specific Eliminated Chorales: No. 17

No. 15 - Chorale (“Passion Chorale” melody)
No. 16 - Narration Ev., Jesus, Peter
No. 17 - Chorale (“Passion Chorale” melody)
No. 18 - Narration Ev. & Jesus
No. 19 - Tenor recit with inserted choir lines (chorale-like)

No. 52 - Alto Aria
No. 53 - recit, chorus, recit
No. 54 - Chorale (“Passion Chorale” melody)
No. 55 - Ev. narration
No. 56 - Bass recit
[No. 62] - Chorale (“Passion Chorale” melody)
Specific Eliminated Chorales: No. 54

No. 15 - Chorale (“Passion Chorale” Melody)
No. 16 - Narration Ev., Jesus, Peter
No. 17 - Chorale (“Passion Chorale” Melody)
No. 18 - Narration Ev. & Jesus
No. 19 - Tenor recit with inserted choir lines (chorale-like)

No. 52 - Alto Aria
No. 53 - in 3 parts: recit., chorus, recit
No. 54 - Chorale (“Passion Chorale” Melody)
No. 55 - Ev. narration
No. 56 - Bass recit. (leading to 57, aria)
[No. 62] - Chorale (“Passion Chorale” Melody)
Conclusions

➔ There are still many unanswered questions:
  ◆ Anti-Semitic vs. Aesthetics
  ◆ Was the Passion just too long?
  ◆ Mendelssohn/Fanny’s Jewish upbringing
  ◆ Was Bach himself, anti semitic?
  ◆ Why the chorales?
  ◆ Why so much in Part 2?