

TITLE: There Shall a Star Come Out of Jacob
COMPOSER: Mendelssohn
PUBLISHER: Boosey&Hawkes
BOX #: 23

ANALYSIS:

Broad Description: From unfinished oratorio “Christus” which was published posthumously as Opus No. 92. Whether “Christus” was to be one work or multiple is unclear. There are sketches of movements that may or may not be related.

Type/Genre: Movement from an oratorio that concludes with a familiar hymn.

Background Information: Mendelssohn was born into a wealthy family that had its share of overachievers. Grandfather was a well-known philosopher, father started a banking firm. Money also came from mother’s side of the family. Family values promoted free-thinking and making the most of your abilities no matter what. Parents converted to Christianity prior to the birth of their children. Mendelssohn was inspired to great heights by his sister Fanny. Her death may have helped lead to his early demise. It was during the last year of his life that he was working on the sketches that have become “Christus.”

Philipp Nicolai was a Lutheran theologian, preacher and hymn writer. Having to flee several times in his life due to religious wars, he would preach in underground services. In 1597, he lost 1300 of his parishioners, 170 in one week due to the plague. His response was to write a series of meditations called *Freudenspiegel* (Mirror of Joy(?), Reflections on Joy(?)) which also included some hymns. The chorale used in this piece is *Wie schoen leuchtet der Morgenstern*. Typically used as an Advent/Christmas/Epiphany hymn.

Text: Original language is in German, translation here done by Philip Brunelle. See article “What Language Shall I Borrow?” Choral Journal, May 2016. Other than the first sentence, the language that is used in the chorale is not the text that Nicolai wrote. It is my assumption that Christian Karl Josias von Bunsen made the text changes while compiling the text. (Side note: I used this particular edition because it was already in my files.) The text comes from Numbers 24 story of Balaam calling out blessings on Israel (the enemy of his king.) In this instance, the star is a symbol of victory and the smiting of cities is good for Israel. Musically, Mendelssohn set it in a way that seems to indicate the destruction of the princes and cities is not a pleasant thing. Balaam says, “I see him, but not now. I behold him, but not near.” Who the star will be is not described in detail in the prophecy. There is indication that it means King David (in the short term) and the Messiah (in the long term.) In the Hebrew tradition this became a prophecy that spoke of the coming greatness of Israel as a nation: even the seers of the enemy heard the voice of God and spoke blessings and greatness for Israel.

FORM:

- Movement from an unfinished oratorio with concluding chorale. The opening section of the movement is in three sections which will be discussed below.

RHYTHM:

- Vocal lines: Section A:1(m. 1-32): Vocal main theme is quarter notes with one quarter dot eighth on the word “star.” Symbolic of stretching the idea of hope and longing. Section A:2(m. 33-63-ish): (corresponds with text change) Quarters and half notes begin this section. Juxtapose with the “prophet” voice repeating the main theme. Section A:3(m60-ish-80): Similar to section 1, utilizing the main theme rhythms again. Chorale (m. 80-116): Half notes and whole notes entirely.
- Accompaniment lines: Section A:1: Undulating triplet figure m 1-15. Measure 16-28 mirrors vocal lines, reverting to triplets through m. 32. This sets up the “surprise” in m.32. (Section A:2) Triplets again occur on and off through m. 55 but in a “he tied her to the railroad tracks” sort of way (harmonic structure in play here.) Section A:3: Quarter notes basically throughout. Chorale: return of the undulating triplets introduce chorale. Chromatic triplet scales.
- Most intriguing rhythm spot m. 105. Goes into straight eighth note feel for one measure. Creates a nice stretch of the rhythmic feel, but was that the sole purpose?
- **MUSINGS:**
- *Is the triplet versus the duple to indicate God and man? Particularly at m. 105. Original German text says “who can raise Him up enough?” praise going up from the duality of mankind? Then turning it back over to God with the main melody and rhythms from the beginning?*
- *The exact same rhythms in all voices (A:2) is powerful as it is the first time that happens. The whole world is conspiring the destruction. (Theologically: sin; metaphorically: life events)*
- *Chorale utilizes both the undulating and scale triplet figures while voices are holding their longest notes. Creates a beautiful confident feeling. “I can hold on with God (guiding principles) and in the face of life’s challenges.”*

MELODY:

- The opening of the chorale gives us the melodic material that Mendelssohn uses (with an additional “fa”) to begin the movement. The opening statement of “There shall a star come out of Jacob” is the musical tie that binds. Arpeggiated melody that lifts to the peak holds for a half beat longer than all the other notes. We are looking for the “star.” When will it get here? What will it be like?
- The second section is about harmony and how it is juxtaposed with the melodic theme and forces change upon that melodic idea. Melodic theme functions as the voice of the person/prophet reminding us to calm down, things will get better. Or is this an internal conversation of a reminding guiding life principle?
- **MUSINGS:**
- *I believe that Mendelssohn was very purposeful in his opening phrase. The notes are too close to the Nicolai to be a “lucky chance.” Theological underpinnings of*

this from Balaam: "I see him, but not now. I behold him, but not near. A star will come out..." this is the text leading into the words here. Theologically, if this is speaking of the Messiah, there was great debate about what the Messiah would be. An earthly king? A spiritual leader? A great prophet to teach new ways? Melodically Mendelssohn gives the material we are looking for, just not in a picture perfect clear way. Part of the reason that the chorale melody is so comforting is that we already recognize the pitches, it is just a new way of looking at/hearing them.

- *The four times the melody is repeated at the end A:3- Is this indicative the story is complete? Four is an ancient symbol of completion, hence four gospels.*
- *The harmony destroys the key A:2 BUT the first time the MT comes back? It is almost exact, just in the wrong key. Each subsequent entrance it becomes a little further afield. Last one ending with a tri-tone interval. Do we let the devil (world) in to change us? How can we pull it together and persevere?*

HARMONY:

- Beginning in E-Flat Maj, there is some modulating beginning in 16 resolving section 1 in the dominant of B-Flat Maj.
- Section 2 is where things get interesting. German translation talks of smashing or smiting and that is what happens harmonically. B-Flat played and sung in unison breaks the old key when it lands on a full diminished seventh chord: g-b flat-d flat-e "destroying" the old key.
- Modulation to D-Flat Maj, with the theme stated almost exactly. Harmonic change rhythm speeds up here. Each measure we are in a new sound. Usually with a tritone somewhere.
- Harmonic reminders of A:2 occur throughout A:3. A- E-flat line motion, but used as a secondary dominant seventh chord rather than fully diminished releases the distress from A:2.
- Interesting harmonic point m. 73, deceptive cadence. This is later repeated m 105.
- Chorale is all diatonic except for the m. 104-105 deceptive cadence. This is the only use of a secondary dominant in that section.
- **MUSINGS:**
- *First entrance of MT is harmonically non-dissonant. That voice is still somewhat calm. Second entrance star lands on a diminished chord. Voice is slightly more distressed. Third time lands on the seventh (as figured from the bass note) giving us a fully diminished chord, this is quickly repeated in the soprano voice creating an alarming sound. This ends with the downward tritone. Is the voice giving up? I can no longer make any change? I have to go along with the world?*
- *The "collapsing" harmony is as if the world has beaten us down, we are so weary. Plenty of current events to ponder when thinking of this.*
- *Mendelssohn could have put a full cadence at measure 73. Why not? From a musical standpoint it gives the A section a better balance. A:1 and A:2 are almost identical in length, if he had ended it there and gone into the chorale we would feel musically shortchanged. This also allows the choir to act as one to declare "the star." Bass is the voice of the prophet and the other voices are the wise men*

from the preceding movement? I believe it allows us to remember the challenges we had in the earlier section, acknowledge them and then move on. As we do in life. There are events that have challenged us perhaps we did not rise to them as we should have, but we have to accept that and move on, hopefully the better for it. It also foreshadows the same event in the chorale.

- *A-e-flats this is reminder of the distress the music has gone through. However, the use here is as V7/V. Which is what occurred in A:1.*
- *Why the secondary dominant in the chorale? Lands on the word “life” in German. This translation uses “salvation” which theologically speaking is eternal life. Did Mendelssohn mean to say that sin causes us to need that salvation? Or did he just like the way it sounded?*

TIMBRE:

- The song requires subtle shifts of color to highlight the sections and the significance of the text. Though never over the top Wagnerian singing, during the dramatic second section there should be an increased intensity to the tone. Meanwhile, whenever the main melodic theme is heard, it should be done with a rich, nurturing tone. The chorale sits in easy tessitura and is a statement of confidence and faith. A transcendent warmth should be the goal.

TEXTURE:

- Section A:1: Polyphonic. Special attention should be given to the main melodic theme in whichever voice has the dotted rhythm on the word star. This should weave out of the tapestry so that our attention is subtly drawn to it.
- Section A:2: Begins four part homophonic. Then individual vocal lines will begin to restate the main theme, in varying degrees of “distress/exasperation?”
- Section A:3: Orchestra reintroduces the shape of the main theme with a subtle arpeggio. The MT is then restated four times in fairly quick succession in the vocal lines.
- Chorale is four part hymn writing at its finest.
- **MUSINGS:**
- *The MT being brought to the forefront of the vocal texture is the repeating of a guiding life principle. The “choices become actions, actions become habits, habits become character” philosophy.*
- *The combined homophonic, rhythmic and harmonic material A:2 is a jarring turn of events. The calm of the preceding section is shattered and not subtly.*
- *The quick four restatements of the MT again is a symbol of completion. That other voices “catch on” indicates to me leadership by example.*

EXPRESSION:

- Understanding how to sing legato versus marcato will add spark and interest to this piece.
- Refined dynamic control without going overboard is also key to creating the emotional trip. Life is going smoothly, bam something bad happens we can

- choose to stick with our values (theme) or not, hit the lowest point and a subtle reminder puts us back on track.
- The main theme when stated with a quarter dot on the word “star” should rise out of the other accompanying lines.
 - **MUSINGS:**
 - *A:2 sung marcato in destructive voices adds to the jarring quality of the section. Juxtaposed with a legato MT heightens the difference between the two. Can they coexist or must one become the other? Can the one lead the rest to a new understanding?*
 - *MT coming to forefront is the “choice-character” idea. This should lead who you are as a person when you are faced with new situations.*

HEART OF THE PIECE:

- *The heart of There Shall a Star is how the main melodic theme remains a constant beacon of purity, truth and beauty, even amidst the contrast of harmonic chaos and destruction.*

INTRODUCING THE PIECE:

- Composition activity. Students given staff paper and the task to create a melodic theme in the key of E-flat that uses: 2-do, 1-mi, 3-so, 2-la. If they choose to, they may add one more syllable that is not one of the listed ones.
- Pondering question: What do you use or do to help you maintain your personal beliefs and integrity during the toughest of times?

SKILL OUTCOME:

- *Students will sing legato and marcato with appropriate use of voiced and unvoiced consonants.*

STRATEGY 1:

- Vocal warm-ups: Scale arpeggios do-mi-so-mi-do-do. Add words: Where will four years take us? (goal: as legato as possible without slowing down or stretching the voiced consonants, connotations for the text in the piece)
- Vocal Warm-ups: Single note marcato: Don’t defeat me since its my game! (Goal separating t-d, sts, connotations for the text in the piece)

STRATEGY 2:

- Creation of body kinesthetic motions that create the feel (and the visual) of the sound.

STRATEGY 3:

- Singing of familiar rounds: Ding, Dong. Which phrases would sound better marcato and which would sound better legato? Why? Sing the round. Do something less obvious and arbitrarily choose which phrases to sing marcato vs. legato: All Praise to Thee.

STRATEGY 4:

- Working with current repertoire review voiced and unvoiced consonants. Remind and have them listen for problems that occur with the different sounds.

STRATEGY 5:

- Incorporate the body kinesthetic motions with the lines when working section 2 of the piece. Visually represents and physically reminds to change the articulation.

ASSESSMENTS:

- On-going classroom and recorded examples/observations of the sound produced.
- Paper check quiz: voiced and unvoiced consonants have students connect the pairs or generate lists.
- In new repertoire circle voiced, box unvoiced consonants.
- Can students use that information to anticipate problem spots?

KNOWLEDGE OUTCOME:

- *Students will recognize and analyze how melodic theme is used to unify a composition.*

STRATEGY 1:

- Use the composed melodic themes from above during sight singing in warm-ups.
- Do these sound related? What makes them sound familiar even when they are brand new to us?
- Add to the sight reading both the opening of the chorale (?) and the main melodic theme. Do not reveal the mystery that they are from the piece we will be doing!
- Question: If this were the main idea of a piece of music what could we do to it to keep it familiar yet evolving? Brainstorm a list.

STRATEGY 2:

- Official first sight reading of the piece. Teach the opening use of the melodic theme.
- Students will be told that they are to look for only the main melodic theme and label it MT. Discussion will ensue. What about m. 10? Why do we ignore the scepter part?
- After getting more specific information: must have the rhythm up to “Jacob” go through and label MT correctly.

STRATEGY 3:

- Sing only the main theme through the opening section A:1 of the piece. (Teaches the rest of the choir which vocal line is the golden thread.) Question: What mood is created and how was that done?
- Sing only the main theme in A:2. Question: What mood is created here and how?
- Sing only the main theme in A:3. Question: What mood is created here and how?
- Pull out the brainstormed list. Compare our list to what Mendelssohn did.

STRATEGY 4:

- Sing A:2 with only the accompaniment voices. How does this change the experience of this section?

ASSESSMENTS:

- Take composed melodic theme and modify it in two different ways.
- Listen to “Rage Over a Lost Penny” students write first then discuss what they hear. Focus them on melody of the A section. The “A” section evolves throughout the piece. They may not have the language to describe it, but they can talk and then we can get to the correct terminology from there.

AFFECTIVE OUTCOME:

- *Students will explore the challenge of maintaining personal integrity when the world around them demands action that goes against their principles.*

STRATEGY 1:

- During warm-ups pose the question: Why do we do warm-ups anyway? Listen to answers and then generalize to the idea of developing habits that become our musical identity. Seed planted that “choices become actions etc.” When we are faced with new challenges, we have some background of how to deal with them.

STRATEGY 2:

- After successfully performing the melodic theme run through, discussion about the mood that is created as we move through the piece. What is happening to the melodic theme emotionally? Why is it still recognizable? (Work the notes so they can sing successfully-ish from the opening to the chorale.)
- A:2: Have you ever had that moment? You hear everyone else around you and you let yourself be changed to fit in? James Hoefling story.
- Follow up questions as learning the piece: I always feel that section 2 is a conversation between the main theme and the harmony. Do you think that is internal or external? Why?

STRATEGY 3:

- Why are the four entrances of the melodic theme so satisfying? Why deceptive cadence in measure 73?

STRATEGY 4:

- Sharing of the stories of Mendelssohn’s last year of life. Sharing of Nicolai’s story. What do you use or do to help you persevere and maintain your personal beliefs and identity during the toughest of times?

STRATEGY 5:

- When piece is almost note ready, begin at the chorale as sight singing practice.
- What do you notice about the chorale in comparison to the rest of the piece?
- What effect do the rhythmic and texture choices have on the piece as a whole?

ASSESSMENTS: Class discussions and/or written responses to these questions. These will be either in portfolio or small note card assignments.

RELATED ACTIVITIES:

- WIN period composition enhancement
- Beethoven 5th play by play PDQ Bach
- If an opera lines up with this during teaching cycle, focus on the leit motifs?