

David Brodbeck

Eine kleine Kirchenmusik

A New Canon, a Revised Cadence and an Obscure «Coda» by Mendelssohn

In a message dated 12 July 1845 the Berlin publishers Bote & Bock warmly greeted a proposal that Felix Mendelssohn had made to publish some music for the Protestant liturgy: «Das uns letzt beehrende Schreiben enthält die gültige Zusage einer Sonntags Musik, bestehend in Psalm, Gloria und Spruch.»¹ Among the composer's autographs from that year, which are preserved in vol. 40 of the so-called Nachlaß autographs (Biblioteca Jagiellon'ska, Kraków), are two sets of compositions matching this description. The first comprises music for Christmas: *Psalm 2* («Warum toben die Heiden»), a companion setting of the *Gloria patri* (the Lesser Doxology *Ehre sei dem Vater*), and the Spruch *Frohlocket, ihr Völker*; the second, for Passiontide: *Psalm 43* («Richte mich, Gott»), a second *Ehre sei dem Vater*, and the Spruch *Herr, gedenke nicht unsrer Übeltaten*. Most of these pieces were derived from earlier settings, which Mendelssohn had written during the winter of 1843/44 while serving in Berlin as director of Prussian church music (Mendelssohn Nachlaß, vols. 38² and 39).² The *Gloria patri* for *Psalm 2*, by contrast, was a new work — or, rather, a pair of works: that this piece exists in two distinct versions has until now apparently gone unnoticed.

Publication History of the Psalm and Gloria Patri settings

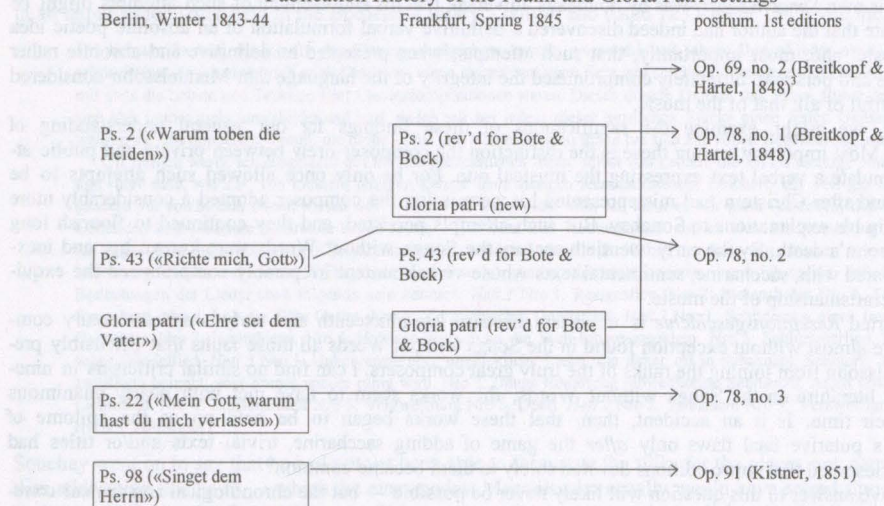


Table 1

Mendelssohn never followed through with his plan to publish these liturgies, nor did he make good on his subsequent offer to Bote & Bock to publish the two verses, together with four others, in a set of «6 Sprüche [...] beim Gottesdienst zu singen».⁴ Within a year following the composer's untimely death in November 1847, however, Breitkopf & Härtel had issued all the pieces in question. Only the *Sechs Sprüche*, published as op. 79, kept fully with the composer's last known intentions. As shown in table 1, the simultaneously released *Drei Psalmen* op. 78 was an inauthentic gathering consisting of the revised version of *Psalm 2*, the original version of *Psalm 43*, and the sole version of *Psalm 22* («Mein Gott, warum hast du mich verlassen»), a work from the same Berlin period but one which Mendelssohn never thought to publish. Moreover, *Psalm 43* appeared in this print without its companion doxology — which, confusingly enough, Breitkopf had already appropriated for use in another posthumous compilation, the *Drei Motetten* op. 69. In this paper we shall focus our attention on the

1 Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, *Briefe an deutsche Verleger*, ed. by Rudolf Elvers, Berlin 1968, p. 341.

2 For an account of Mendelssohn's activity in this role, see David Brodbeck, «A Winter of Discontent: Mendelssohn and the Berliner Domchor», in: *Mendelssohn Studies*, ed. by R. Larry Todd, Cambridge 1992, pp. 1-32.

3 See *Briefe an deutsche Verleger*, p. 342.

4 Joined to the *Jubilata Deo* (1847), which first appeared with a different *Gloria patri* in an English print of November 1847 (Ewer & Co.).

tangled history of the two doxologies; but that, in turn, will require us finally to examine also a beautiful English-language setting of the same liturgical text.

According to the rubrics of the Prussian liturgy as revised in 1843 for use at the Berlin Cathedral, the service was to begin in imitation of the Roman Mass, with an Introit psalm followed by the Gloria patri. Nevertheless, when on Christmas 1843 Mendelssohn first led the Cathedral music — including his own setting of *Psalm 2* — he omitted the traditional Lesser Doxology, performing instead from Handel's *Messias* the festive chorus *Dem ist uns ein Kind geboren*. Thus when he returned to his Christmas music in connection with the planned publication with Bote & Bock, he had still to compose the required Gloria.

On 2 March 1845 he set down his first draft (Mendelssohn Nachlaß, vol. 40, p. 24). Responding to the Trinitarian imagery in the text — God as three Persons but one Divinity — Mendelssohn worked out a strict canon for the words «Ehre sei dem Vater und dem Sohne und dem heiligen Geist». His first attempt, however, included some contrapuntal infelicities (ex. 1a). Whereas in m. 5 the major second between the soprano and alto works nicely as the dissonance in a 4–3 suspension, in m. 6 the same sonority, sounding within a ii^{\sharp} chord is less apt: a proper resolution would have necessitated breaking off the canon and allowing the alto to repeat its *A* on the next downbeat. Yet instead of giving up the canon Mendelssohn simply provided the soprano with a free continuation through m. 7, bringing about a full cadence in the tonic.

Ex. 1: *Gloria patri* (Mendelssohn Nachlaß, vol. 40, p. 24), mm. 1-10 (text omitted)
(a) first version; (b) second version

Ex. 2: *Gloria patri* (Mendelssohn Nachlaß, vol. 40, p. 24), mm. 16-23 (text omitted)
(a) original version; (b) second version

Of greatest interest in the beginning of the draft, however, are not matters of counterpoint but of tonality. As indicated by the original key signature and the tonal pattern of the voice entries (*G–D–G–D*), Mendelssohn intended to set the text in G major — the key in which *Psalm 2* ends, and one reinforced by the perfect cadence in m. 7. But already in the second point of imitation (mm. 8ff.) an emphasis on the subdominant emerges, and in a second layer of writing (ex. 1b) Mendelssohn reversed direction altogether, crossing out the key signature, and treating of C as the tonic, with a $vii^{\sharp}-I^6$ progression in mm. 5-6; thereafter the piece remains in this key.

Mendelssohn initially worked out the second point of imitation strictly for sixteen bars. This process almost allowed for a strong perfect cadence in the tonic (ex. 2a). All that was needed in order to bring about a suitable close was to alter the last note of the bass from *A* to *C* (ex. 2b), though the composer tinkered also with the inner voices and meanwhile introduced a beautiful additional dissonance (the 9–8 suspension in m. 17), and then, in mm. 19ff., created a new approach to the cadence in the upper three voices. Yet after all this effort Mendelssohn finally reconsidered the premise of the entire piece: the hard-won cadence was abandoned and the soprano and alto made to initiate a *circular canon*, a strategy which nicely invokes the text's central theme of unending praise (Ex. 3).

Eh-re sei dem Va - - ter und dem Soh - ne und dem hei - li - gen
Eh - re sei dem

Geist. Wie es war von An - fang, jetzt und
Va - - ter und dem Soh - ne und dem Geist.

im - mer - dar und von E - wig - keit zu E - - - wig - keit.
Wie es war von An - fang, jetzt und im - mer - dar und von

A - men. Eh-re sei dem Va - - ter und dem Geist.
E - wig - keit zu E - - - wig - keit. A - men. - - - men.

Ex. 3: *Gloria patri* (Mendelssohn Nachlaß, vol. 40, p. 24), final version
(text omitted in alto and tenor)

overs on the verso (ex. 4a) — this passage offered a four-part canon, with increasingly lower entries on *F*, *C*, *G*, and, in augmentation, low *F*. At some later date, however — most likely in the spring of 1845, when the piece was prepared for Bote & Bock — the composer completely reworked this setting, and in its place crafted an elegant plagal cadence (ex. 4b). Beginning with a solitary reiterated *F* in the second basses, the harmony gradually builds up, ascending triadically through *IV* and finally, after the first sopranos have entered with a high *F* and the second basses dropped to their low *F*, returning back to the tonic.

Mendelssohn remained dissatisfied with this composition for some reason and three days later worked it over once more. In a draft dated 5 March 1845, he preserved the first point of imitation but recomposed the rest (Mendelssohn Nachlaß, vol. 40, p. 50). Although here he gave up the *Kreiskanon*, he did not dispense with the textually appropriate idea of circularity. On the contrary, whereas before the words «Wie es war von Anfang» had been set to a new canonic subject, now, by quoting the first two and a half bars, they literally unfold «as it was in the beginning». Moreover, by introducing a sequential exploration of a single gesture — the stepwise pentachord, directed upward toward the heavens, marked by crescendos and expressive dynamic swells, and led through a variety of chromatic permutations — Mendelssohn reflects the sense of eternity implied by the final lines of the text. A number of subtle changes then were incorporated into the fair copy, which the composer proudly headed *Gloria patri* (in *Canone*) and joined to the revised version of *Psalm 2* (Mendelssohn Nachlaß, vol. 40, p. 34).

The «Amen» of the beautiful doxology for *Psalm 43*, which is preserved in an autograph dated 17 January 1844, likewise exists in more than one fully realized version (Mendelssohn Nachlaß, vol. 40, pp. 45–46). As originally composed — the reading is easily discernible beneath Mendelssohn's cross-

Ex. 4: (a) «Amen» from *Ehre sei dem Vater* (Mendelssohn Nachlaß, vol. 40, p. 46), mm. 29-39 (original version, text omitted)
 (b) «Amen» from *Ehre sei dem Vater* (Mendelssohn Nachlaß, vol. 40, p. 46), mm. 29-38 (second version, text omitted)
 (c) «Amen» from *Ehre sei dem Vater* (Mendelssohn Nachlaß, vol. 40, p. 106), mm. 29-38 (text omitted)

Of particular interest is the entrance of the first tenors (m. 32). Standing here originally was the note *D*, which forms with the three lower parts the striking sonority of a tonic triad with added sixth; in a later pass through the score this note was cancelled and replaced by *E-flat*, thereby producing the far more conventional (and, to my ears, saccharine) harmonization V^7/IV . We have good reason to doubt the authenticity of this change, which was entered in pencil in a hand that cannot positively be identified. Significantly, the original passage appears also in the *Ehre sei dem Vater* of the *Deutsche Liturgie*, which Mendelssohn wrote on a royal commission in 1846 (Mendelssohn Nachlaß, vol. 41, pp. 105-106); in this later work, the composer simply appropriated the old *Gloria patri* of *Psalm 43*, which he had by then decided to withhold from the press, transposing it downward from *F* to *E* and making a few other alterations and yet leaving unchanged the distinctive chord of the added sixth (ex. 4c). But before we can resolve this important question of authenticity, we shall have to proceed to our «codas», which involves a Lesser Doxology composed not for the Prussian but for the Anglican rite.

In 1832 the English publisher Vincent Novello requested from Mendelssohn settings of the Morning and Evening Services (consisting of the *Te Deum* and *Jubilate Deo*, and *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis*, respectively). Although the composer responded immediately by drafting a *Te Deum* for four-part chorus with organ accompaniment, he pursued the project no further, neither publishing the one piece nor drafting the others.⁵ Only many years later did he take an interest in reviving the old *Te Deum*, which in 1846 he offered to the English publishing firm of Ewer & Co. And only during the last months of his life, some fifteen years after receiving Novello's original request, did Mendelssohn finally set the three other pieces for the Morning and Evening Services (whose working drafts are preserved in Mendelssohn Nachlaß, vol. 44). On 26 March 1847 he completed an A-Major draft of the *Jubilate Deo*, and ten days later, on 5 April, added a companion *Gloria patri* (in A Minor). Then in the summer he set the *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis*, along with their required doxologies. Like the *Te Deum*, each of the later pieces was set for four-part choir with organ accompaniment.

⁵ See Mendelssohn's letter to Novello of 22 August 1832, «Unpublished Letters of Mendelssohn», in: *Musical Times* 51 (1910), p. 366. I am most grateful to Peter Ward Jones (Oxford) for clarifying a number of details in the following discussion.

GLORIA PATRI

and to the Ho - ly Ghost:

and to the Ho - ly Ghost:

Glo - ry be to the Fa - ther, and to the Son,

Glo - ry be to the Fa - ther, and to the Son,

and e - ver shall be,

and e - ver shall be, world with-out

As it was in the be - gin - ning, is now,

As it was in the be - gin - ning, is now, world with-out

world with - out end, A - - - men.

end, A - - - men world with-out end, A - - - men.

world with-out end, A - - - men, world with-out end, A - - - men.

end, world with-out end, A - - - men, A - - - men.

EX. 5: *Glory be to the Father* from *Jubilate Deo* (as published in *Te Deum et Jubilate, for the Morning Service, for Soli and Chorus, with Organ accompaniment* [London: Ewer, 1847])

The *Gloria patri* for the *Jubilate Deo* requires special consideration (ex. 5). This composition appeared only in the English print of the work (*Te Deum et Jubilate, for the Morning Service, for Soli and Chorus, with Organ accompaniment*, which was released without opus number by Ewer just days before Mendelssohn's death on 4 November 1847). In Breitkopf & Härtel's posthumous German edition of the *Jubilate Deo* («Jauchzet dem Herrn alle Welt»), which included also the *Nunc Dimittis* («Herr, nun lässest du deinen Diener in Frieden fahren») and *Magnificat* («Mein Herz erhebet Gott den Herrn») and appeared under the title *Drei Motetten* op. 69, the original doxology was replaced by the unrelated F-Major *Ehre sei dem Vater* whose first incarnation dates from January 1844.⁶

Did the composer sanction this change? Of course the earlier reappearance of the *Ehre sei dem Vater* in the *Deutsche Liturgie* establishes an authorial precedent for such a substitution. Moreover, the bracing tonal juxtaposition in Breitkopf's edition of A major (*Jubilate Deo*) and F Major (*Gloria patri*) cannot unquestionably be presumed to show the hand of a thoughtless editor; after all, Mendelssohn himself had originally grouped the same doxology with *Psalm 43*, which ends in D Major. Nevertheless, since the version of the *Ehre sei dem Vater* included in Breitkopf's print carries the carries the (saccharine) V^7/IV that has no place in the *Ehre sei dem Vater* of the *Deutsche Liturgie*, we may safely assume that it was the publisher who made the substitution.

The exigencies of the German marketplace in fact demanded that the switch be made. According to the historicist view of «die wahre Kirchenmusik» prevailing in Germany at the time, ecclesiastical music ought to be sung *a cappella*. That restriction would have offered little hindrance to an acceptance of Mendelssohn's Anglican pieces, since the organ mostly doubles the vocal parts and therefore could easily be dispensed with; thus the Breitkopf edition, though providing a keyboard reduction of the vocal parts for rehearsal use, included no part for organ. In the original *Gloria patri* of the *Jubilate Deo*, however, such an omission would have come at an artistic cost too great to pay, as the organ provides the solemn, largely monophonic vocal lines with a gorgeous, unsuspected harmonic definition. For entirely practical purposes, therefore, a new *a cappella* setting of the dox-

6 Breitkopf announced its impending edition in the 17 November 1847 issue of the *AMZ* («In unserem Verlage erscheinen nächstens mit Eigenthumsrecht folgende, von dem verewigten Componisten uns im October d. J. übergebene Werke: Chöre beim Gottesdienst zu singen, componirt von Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy. Op. 69») but — for reasons to be discussed below — made no further reference to it until the issues of 12 and 26 January 1848, in which the set — now called *Drei Motetten* — is described, respectively, as «erschienen» and «so eben erschienen.» Earlier, in December 1847, Ewer & Co. had released, also as op. 69, the *Magnificat & Nunc Dimittis, for the Evening Service, with Organ Accompaniment*.

ology had to be found. And in view of this unauthorized act, we can reasonably assign blame to Breitkopf as well for the significant chordal change that was made in the music that it did choose to print.⁷

R. Larry Todd has recently reminded us that, contrary to popular wisdom, «composition was not a matter of facility for Mendelssohn»; the painstakingly written manuscripts frequently show signs «of intense self-doubt, unrelenting scrutiny, and exacting revision».⁸ This judgment not only applies to large, concerted works but extends even to the «little church music» examined here. As we have seen, Mendelssohn carefully crafted one doxology for *Psalm 2* only to put it aside in favor of another — and then dropped the plan for publication that had stimulated the music in the first place. Similarly, in the «Amen» of the doxology that was initially written for *Psalm 43* he replaced his original contrapuntal ending with a chordal, plagal cadence and then transposed the revised version for use in the otherwise unrelated *Deutsche Liturgie*.

In the case of *Jubilate Deo* and its *Gloria patri*, however, Mendelssohn apparently did not have the second thoughts implied by the reading in Breitkopf's edition. The decision to replace the original doxology there seems to have been the publisher's, not the composer's, and the motivation concerned matters of commerce, not art. It is doubly unfortunate that Breitkopf's version of the *Jubilate Deo*, by virtue of its being the only version later included in the Gesamtausgabe, has always held a kind of «official» status: not only has the propagation of this bastard form of the piece effectively suppressed one of Mendelssohn's boldest and freshest harmonic progressions, but it has obscured from wider notice one of his most beautiful settings of the Lesser Doxology, which is scarcely known even in English-speaking lands.⁹ Which is not to say that Mendelssohn himself had not had some significant changes of mind concerning the authentic doxology for the piece. In the working draft of April 1847 (the only surviving autograph source), the A-Minor *Gloria* unfolds in *alla breve* and the final cadence carries the *terce de Picardie*, thus matching the bright key of the A-Major *Jubilate*. By contrast, as subsequently revised for publication with Ewer, the meter is the «archaic» $\frac{4}{2}$ and the minor mode maintained through the end. These alterations were made only after Mendelssohn's return from England in May, when he was greeted by the horrifying news of his sister Fanny's tragic death; and their effect, certainly, is to cloud the hopeful sentiments of the *Jubilate* with understandably more somber feelings. All this is forfeited in the German edition, of course, with its tonally remote doxology in F Major. But by restoring the authentic grave ending, we might do more than make good on that loss. For in its original form the work seems not only to reflect the death of Fanny but perhaps even to offer a premonition of Mendelssohn's own.

(University of Pittsburgh)

7 Breitkopf published op. 69, not as *Chöre beim Gottesdienst zu singen*, as originally planned, but — presumably hoping for the widest possible distribution — as *Drei Motetten*. The long relatively long interval between the November 1847 announcement in the *AMZ* that publication was imminent («nächstens») and the January 1848 announcement that the set had actually appeared («erschienen») can be explained as being the time necessary to find a suitable replacement for the doxology from among the pieces left in the composer's Nachlaß. Indeed, it was probably during this search that Breitkopf turned up the psalms and Sprüche that it published later in the year as opp. 78 and 79.

8 R. Larry Todd, «The Unfinished Mendelssohn», in: *Mendelssohn and His World*, ed. by R. Larry Todd, Princeton 1991, p. 159.

9 Thus Annemarie Clostermann, *Mendelssohn Bartholdys kirchenmusikalisches Schaffen: Neue Untersuchungen zu Geschichte, Form und Inhalt*, Mainz 1989, pp. 132-34, not only treats the German version as being authentic but makes no mention of the version printed by Ewer.