

Im Advent & Weihnachten

From Sechs sprüche (6 Motets) Opus 79

Jakob Ludwig Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy

Sechs sprüche (6 Motets) Opus 79

Most popularly known for his symphonic and large-scale orchestral and choral works, Mendelssohn's motets are often overlooked. Bach-inspired Romanticism with exuberant, rich, harmonic voicing and texture paint all six of his compiled Opus 79 compositions, first performed together in 1846 while *Chorleiter* at the Berlin Cathedral.

The motets represent a cycle around the church year, and Bel Canto has chosen two seasonal ones to present, with the *geschmack* their SSAATTBB deserves.

Im Advent

Advent is a time for hope and optimism:

Let us rejoice! The redeemer is coming, whom the Lord has promised. The name of the Lord be praised for ever. Halleluja!

But there is just something inherently more Christmas-y about singing in German:

Lasset uns frohlocken, es nahet der Heiland, den Gott uns verheissen. Der Name des Herrn sei gelobet in Ewigkeit. Halleluja!

Weihnachten

*Frohlocket, ihr Völker auf Erden und preiset Gott!
Der Heiland ist erschienen, den der Herr verheissen.
Er hat seine Gerechtigkeit der Welt offenbaret, Halleluja!
Frohlocket, ihr Völker auf Erden, Halleluja!*

*Rejoice, give praise to the heavens and give thanks to God!
The Savior has been sent, as was promised by the Lord!
He has revealed his righteousness to the world. Alleluia!*

“His fugues planted beautiful flowers, in the same forests where Bach had planted mighty oaks!

Robert Schumann

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

It's difficult to talk about Felix Mendelssohn without having someone interrupt you with an air of mild disdain. It's **been argued** that this is the fault of an (at the time) overshadowed Richard Wagner, whose own, arguably revolutionary, output needed a villain. Referring to Mendelssohn's composition in his infamous, and overtly Judaeophobic article *Das Judenthum in der Musik* (*Jewishness in Music*) he called it “sweet and tinkling with no depth” and that “So long as the separate art of music had a real organic life-need in it there was nowhere to be found a Jewish composer...”



This is, of course, bunk. Mendelssohn was a staggering talent, and a rock star in his own time as a composer, conductor, and pianist. And what would Christmas

be without *Hark The Herald Angels Sing*? To presume that populism is necessarily allied with conservatism and stagnancy is to ignore most of humanity's musical library.

Finding balance between the expressiveness of Romanticism and more structured classical forms, Mendelssohn, although stylistically conservative, produced some of the most memorable and timeless music of the era.

Further Reading

The Youngest Master: Mendelssohn at Two Hundred
Alex Ross, for The New Yorker

Clash of the composers
Tom Service, for The Guardian 2009

Mendelssohn: A Life in Music
R. Larry Todd

Watch & Listen

Im Advent: Choir of Trinity College, Cambridge

Weihnachten: Vokalensemble Stimmen

Some Mendelssohn to Make Your Day
The Auner Quartet, Vienna