

larger questions of musical style and coherence could be and were explored' (p. 434). Perhaps we might also consider the collected works of Fehn, Hallmark, Seelig, and Thym in similar terms, as a 'terrain' upon which we might explore the theory and practice of lieder analysis. At a time when fewer avenues of inquiry were available, these four scholars led to new and creative ways of thinking about texts and their varied settings in song. And despite their traditional structuralist approach, their work reflects in greater and lesser degrees the nascent beginnings of a changing aesthetic in lieder analysis: these models offer us a standard by which we can now measure our own efforts and explore the connective links between their work and ours. For this we owe them a debt of gratitude.

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R. Larry Todd, *Fanny Hensel: The Other Mendelssohn* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). xviii +426 pp. £30.00

This is a marvellous, significant book, which will surely long remain the authoritative biographical source for Fanny Hensel. (As will become clear from what follows, it is in fact a web of interlocking biographies.) The work is suffused with the author's deep-rooted love of his subject. Larry Todd's magisterial biography of Felix Mendelssohn<sup>1</sup> already gave considerable prominence to Fanny Hensel in her own right, rather than merely as a shadowy adjunct to her brother's life and work. Now he has given her a dedicated space of her own, in which Felix appears alongside his sister in a supporting role of a complicated kind, whose fluctuations and contradictions Todd skilfully documents. The book has been produced to a high standard. It features a 15-page bibliography, broadly interdisciplinary in its range (and bearing testimony to the explosion of literature and editions apropos of Fanny Hensel that has occurred in recent years) and a series of extensive indexes. The illustrations (showcasing the work of Fanny's husband, the artist Wilhelm Hensel) are exceptionally attractive; these are listed, but there seems unfortunately to be no list of the many music examples provided in the book (which are supplemented by further examples available in score and audio format on the special website linked with the book).<sup>2</sup> Nor does the index to the works use any system to distinguish among the page references those that contain music examples. There are very few perceptible slips in the text and endnotes, hardly worth mentioning (I was unable to find 'Klein: 1987', referred to in Chapter 5, note 108, in the Bibliography, and Chapter 6, note 47 should probably read 'Huber 1997a'; the *Andante espressivo*, op. 6 no. 3 exemplified on p. 313 as 'in F Major' appears in the index to the works, p. 412 as 'in F-sharp Major').

Todd's twelve central chapters are complemented by a short preface introducing the subject (pp. ix–xvi) and an Epilogue tracing the aftermath of Fanny's death (pp. 350–58). The choice of chapter titles is marked by an elegance and wit very much in keeping with the sharp intellectual qualities of his subject: 'The Joys of

<sup>1</sup> *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music*, rev. edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.oup.com/us/catalog/general/subject/Music/MusicHistoryWestern/NineteenthCentury/?view=usa&ci=9780195180800>

Dilettantism (1843–1845)', for instance (Chapter 11, pp. 289–309), refers to Fanny's wry comment of herself that 'a dilettante is already an alarming being, a female author even more so, but when the two entities are combined in a single person, she becomes the most frightening creature imaginable'.<sup>3</sup> Again there is a complex background to this remark, which was made at a time when she was becoming increasingly intent on developing her professional ambitions as a composer, in spite of the opposition voiced by both her late father and her brother. The title of the following chapter, 'Engraver's Ink and Heavenly Songs (1845–1847)' (Chapter 12, pp. 310–49), takes up the ambivalent wording with which Felix greeted her decision to publish (she had previously explained that she had proceeded completely on her own, 'to spare you any possible unpleasant moment, and I hope you won't think badly of me'<sup>4</sup>). Felix replied:

Only today, just before leaving, do I, hard-hearted brother, get round to answering your kind letter and give you my professional blessing ... May you obtain satisfaction and joy from providing delight and enjoyment to others; may you know only the pleasures of being a composer, and none of the miseries; may the public only shower you with roses and never sand; may the printer's ink never seem black or oppressive to you.<sup>5</sup>

With similar appropriateness the titles of the first two chapters, which document Fanny's childhood when she was strongly under her parents' influence, draw on the words of Lea and Abraham Mendelssohn respectively. 'Fugal Fingers' (Chapter 1, pp. 3–27) was Lea's delighted (and prophetic) description of her newborn daughter, while 'Musical Ornaments' (Chapter 2, pp. 28–55) draws on Abraham's famous advice to the fourteen-year old Fanny that whereas for Felix, music might well become his profession, for her it must remain 'only an ornament' (quoted on p. 28).<sup>6</sup> The majority of the chapters cover periods of two to three years, so that, for instance, the Italian journey of 1839–40 that was so enriching an experience for Fanny's creative development has a chapter to itself. The book begins – again appropriately in view of the fact that Fanny was to take a lively interest in political matters – with the shadows cast by Napoleon and the 1805 threat of the invasion of England. The political climate with all its upheavals

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<sup>3</sup> Fanny Hensel, Letter to Franz Hauser, 24 November 1843 (quoted in Matthew Head, 'Genre, Romanticism and Female Authorship: Fanny Hensel's "Scottish" Sonata in G Minor (1843)', in *Nineteenth Century Music Review* 4/2 (2007): 68, citing Eva Weissweiler, *Fanny Mendelssohn: Ein Portrait in Briefen* (Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1985): 154; and in a different translation in Todd, p. 294). Volume 4/2 of *Nineteenth Century Music Review* is a composer-themed issue devoted to Fanny Hensel.

<sup>4</sup> Fanny Hensel, Letter to Felix Mendelssohn, 9 July 1846, in Marcia J. Citron, *The Letters of Fanny Hensel to Felix Mendelssohn, Collected, Edited and Translated with Introductory Essays and Notes* (Stuyvesant, New York: Pendragon Press, 1987): 351.

<sup>5</sup> Felix Mendelssohn, Letter to Fanny Hensel, 12 August 1846 (Sebastian Hensel, *Die Familie Mendelssohn (1729–1847)*, 3rd ed., 2 vols. (Berlin: B. Behr, 1882): II: 366–7), quoted in slightly different translations in Citron, *The Letters of Fanny Hensel to Felix Mendelssohn*, 356, and in Todd, 316.

<sup>6</sup> The context in which this passage occurs repays close attention: Abraham's ambivalence about Felix's career prospects emerges from his choice of words. See Susan Wollenberg, "'Master of Her Art': Fanny Hensel (née Mendelssohn Bartholdy), 1805–1847", *Ad Parnassum: A Journal of Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Instrumental Music* 3/6 (October 2005): 33–44, esp. 40.

continues to form the backdrop to Todd's account, deftly balanced with his focus on the intimate sphere of the family, whose remarkable cultural ethos in particular he evokes vividly. Fanny's son, Sebastian Hensel, drew on the reminiscences of a family friend when he described how Lea 'was acquainted with every branch of fashionable information ... played and sang with expression and grace, but seldom, and only for her friends; she drew exquisitely; she spoke and read French, English, and Italian, and – secretly – Homer in the original language' (quoted on p. 7). Lea was also known, according to A.B. Marx, as having 'made the acquaintance of Sebastian Bach's music, and in her home she perpetuated his tradition by continually playing the *Well-Tempered Clavier*' (*ibid.*) This remark forms just one strand in the richly-textured account of the family's cultivation of Bach that runs through the volume.

The book features a whole series of biographical vignettes of a multitude of characters both within and beyond the family circle. These constantly enliven the accounts of day-to-day happenings, travels, and musical events. Almost no one is mentioned without receiving a character sketch, typically in a few brief but revealing sentences. To pick just a few choice samples from among the many: apropos of the Hensels' visit to Brussels in 1835, describing the company they moved in, Todd comments on the 'notorious' figure of the Marquis Giuseppe Arconati Visconti (1797–1873), who 'lived stylishly in a *palais* after being condemned to death *in absentia* in northern Italy, on account of his involvement with the revolutionary *carbonari*' (p. 199). The 'conservative views' of Pope Gregory XVI (1765–1846), whom the Hensels saw just after their arrival in Rome in 1839 when they watched the papal procession into the Sistine Chapel, are characterized thus (pp. 242–3): 'Not just suspicious of liberal reforms, he banned railroads in the Papal States and applied a French pun to dismiss them as *chemins d'enfer* (infernal roads), not *chemins de fer* (iron roads)'.

Of obvious advantage to the biographer is the copious quantity of documentation extant concerning the Mendelssohns and their large circle of friends and acquaintances: these letters, diaries, memoirs and other similar sources provide a rich opportunity to reconstruct in detail the life of Fanny, in all the fullness of its context. The sources can evoke a whole scene in a few lines, as when Felix described his sister's "'comfortable" new married life' in the Gartenhaus at Leipzigerstraße 3, the room scattered with the paraphernalia of Wilhelm's art, and Fanny composing at her piano and 'presid[ing] over the "lovely, harmonic disorder"' (p. 142) (did he mean harmonious?). Fanny herself was an uncommonly acute (and often extremely humorous) observer of characters and scenes: Todd draws extensively on her letters, expressive documents which not only convey her artistic aspirations but also, as Marcia Citron has remarked, show her as having 'both feet [planted] in the real world as she manages a household and raises a child'.<sup>7</sup> His work also benefits from access to her diaries in the numerous recent editions. Here too she impresses as, among other things, a down-to-earth character: Todd quotes Fanny confiding to her diary, when Wilhelm presented her with the diamond ring he had been given by Queen Victoria in 1843, that it was 'too lovely and valuable to wear: "really, to carry seven or eight hundred thalers on one's finger is nonsense"' (p. 293). Importantly, as Todd documents, she expressed her life through her music: he describes her compositions in such terms as 'autobiographical' and as constituting a 'musical diary' (pp. 230–1).

<sup>7</sup> Citron, *The Letters of Fanny Hensel to Felix Mendelssohn*, xxxv.

Fanny's activities are portrayed by Todd as part of what he terms the 'familial counterpoint'. He builds through his chronological narrative the evidence for the intensity of the sibling relationship and the remarkable creative exchange between Fanny and Felix, while simultaneously keeping in play the crucial question of the gender (and class) expectations that governed their respective careers. For instance, apropos of Felix's 12 *Lieder* op. 9, which contained three songs by his sister, Todd notes that 'once again Fanny's authorship was suppressed in order to "protect" her privacy', then reveals how in fact she 'may have had a voice in shaping the opus and seeing it through the press, only to remain concealed behind her brother's official, public voice' (p. 143). Elsewhere in the book he reflects more widely on the reasons for her 'suppression' as a composer, ascribing it to her status as a 'lady of leisure and member of an assimilated, upper-class Jewish family that guarded its privacy' (p. 200).

The enabling effect of the marriage to Wilhelm (almost thwarted by Lea's objections) on Fanny's creativity is constantly brought out. (Wilhelm's own artistic career is also carefully traced through the book, benefiting inter alia from the recent publication on the subject by Cécile Lowenthal-Hensel and Jutta Arnold.<sup>8</sup>) Clearly it must have been a great stimulus to her to compose, 'something', as she herself observed, 'I've always needed in order to create' (quoted on p. 315), to have Wilhelm preparing her manuscript paper so that she would begin writing immediately after breakfast, with her husband ready and eager to illustrate her work: Todd refers (p. 234) to their 'double counterpoint of music and art'. This idea resurfaces later in connection with their jointly-produced record of the Italian journey, the *Reise-Album 1839–40*, with its 'consonant blending of the arts' (p. 265). Wilhelm was a keen poet as well as an artist, and Fanny set his texts in a significant number of her *Lieder*. Todd is particularly receptive to her sensitive approach to the union of words and music, devoting much space throughout the book to this aspect. He discusses her works as they arise during the course of the chronological narrative, judiciously selecting their highlights and allowing space for more extended commentary on her larger-scale compositions, in a variety of genres: choral, orchestral, chamber and solo piano.

It is noticeable that in his discussions of the music Todd seems concerned to steer a course between crafting commentary of a technical nature that assumes a musically educated reader, and providing explanations of certain basic technical points for the reader without this background. Whether or not this was the author's own idea, that of the publishers, or perhaps their advisers, the negotiation between what is on the one hand superfluous explication for the purposes of the first category, and on the other hand for the second category might constitute unfathomable technical detail, may jar with some readers. This is the only respect, though, in which the 'tone' of the book wavers from the remarkable elegance and consistency it displays overall, and I would emphasize that in general the provision of detail on so many of the works is a welcome feature.

Amongst the many strands he weaves into his narrative Todd highlights the history of the house that was the Mendelssohn's Berlin residence for the larger part of Fanny's life, Leipzigerstrasse no. 3. This was the setting for the celebrated Sunday concerts, and Todd traces the impressive development of these as outlets

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<sup>8</sup> Cécile Lowenthal-Hensel and Jutta Arnold, *Wilhelm Hensel 1794–1861: Porträtist und Maler, Werke und Dokumente* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2004).

for Fanny's musical talents, repeatedly showing implicitly how inappropriate in many respects the term 'salon' is, as Beatrix Borchard has observed, when used to denote such occasions.<sup>9</sup> Todd describes, for example, Fanny's efforts to 'reinvigorate her Sunday concerts' in 1837, with performances of *Paulus* to large audiences (a hundred attended the first performance in January) and a large choral contingent (comprising fifty singers at the second performance in June), commenting that 'what originated as a private event thus assumed trappings of a public music festival, as total strangers mingled in the residence, filled to capacity so that the singers had difficulty finding standing room' (p. 217). And apropos of the winter season in 1838 he quotes Fanny's aunt, Hinni Mendelssohn, according to whom the concerts 'assumed more and more "epic" proportions, so that the "entire [Berlin] musical world, along with the privileged and elegant, pressed for admission"' (p. 224). This may be set against the recollections of the novelist Fanny Lewald, who 'in a short account made a point of confirming that Fanny's concerts brought together Berliners from dissimilar economic backgrounds' (p. 302).

Among the participants in the concerts was the pianist and composer Johanna Kinkel (née Mathieux), who recorded her impressions of her friend's performances: 'When one saw Fanny Hensel perform a masterpiece ... her forehead shone, her features were ennobled ... No common feeling could have possessed her'. Kinkel went on to delineate Fanny's character: 'Even her sharp critical judgments shared with close acquaintances were founded on ideals she demanded from art and human character alike – not on impure motives of exclusion, arrogance and resentment. Whoever knew her was convinced that she was as ungrudging as she was unpretentious' (p. 219). It was to be during a rehearsal for one of her Sunday performances that Fanny suffered the stroke that led to her untimely death.

Todd's possibly unrivalled knowledge of the music of both Fanny and Felix informs his nuanced account of their creative interdependence. As with Robert and Clara Schumann, so with Fanny and Felix, their compositions were layered with references to one another's works. This process perhaps became more pronounced as the paths of their lives drove them further apart, and it lasted throughout Fanny's creative life. Thus, to choose one among the many examples discussed by Todd, in 1845 Felix's birthday presentation to her of the autograph manuscript of 'a weighty new chamber work – the Piano Trio in C Minor, op. 66' seems to have sparked her own 'turbulent piano piece in the same key, the *Allegro molto* in C Minor (H-U 413), reminiscent of Felix's dark, brooding first movement' (pp. 310–11).

During the 1840s her progress towards professionalism moved significantly further. Here too the evidence of her growing ambition and the expansion of her horizons builds steadily through Todd's narrative. He notes for instance (p. 269) that while Goethe remained her favourite poet, in the 1840s she 'broadened her reading' in various directions and found 'a new wellspring of inspiration in several contemporary German poets she set for the first time'. The account of these last seven years of her life (Chapters 10–12) is imbued with the poignant sense that she was finally on the cusp of a significant new phase in her career. By 1845 the question of publishing her compositions had become for Fanny, in Todd's words, the 'most pressing, unresolved issue in her life' (p. 309). He ties up the threads of her progression from the early absorption of Abraham's exhortations to her in

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<sup>9</sup> See Beatrix Borchard and Cornelia Bartsch, 'Leipzigerstraße Drei: Sites for Music', *Nineteenth Century Music Review* 4/2 (2007): 119–25.

1820 to keep music in her life as an 'ornament' (an idea echoed by some of Felix's pronouncements) to the final setting aside of this 'old judgment' in 1846 as she 'prepared to remove the veil of anonymity she had worn during her life and to reveal her compositional identity before the broader musical public' (p. 316). Todd also emphasizes that she found her own compositional voice, separate from that of Felix, even while the late works at times 'suggest stylistic rapprochements with Felix's music'; he concludes that 'more often than not, Fanny stamps her own personality on the music, encouraging the critical ear to perceive growing evidence of her stylistic independence' (p. 319). Most poignantly, in February 1847 – only some three months before her sudden death on 14 May – she wrote in her diary: 'I cannot deny that the joy in publishing my music has ... elevated my positive mood' (p. 334).

Writing in 2005 on the occasion of Fanny Hensel's bicentenary, Marcia Citron recalled how in the early days 'Your colleagues had never heard of your figure, so how important could she be? Or you might be suspected of special pleading because you were a woman doing research on a woman'.<sup>10</sup> She concluded that from those early beginnings, 'a core of scholars – a Hensel "tradition," if you will – has emerged'.<sup>11</sup> Thanks to the efforts of Citron and those who followed her, in publishing studies, catalogues and editions of the composer, Fanny Hensel herself has emerged from the shadows to take her place in the history of nineteenth-century music. Todd's account of her major piano cycle, *Das Jahr* (pp. 275–84) is emblematic of this process; he sees the cycle as enhancing 'substantially our understanding not only of her music, and its layering of musical, visual, and literary elements, but of nineteenth-century piano music in general. Nearly 150 years of neglect came to an end in 1989 with the publication of the composition'. This was not an exceptional case: as he observes, a similar fate befell another of her major piano works, the Sonata in G minor (p. 297). Larry Todd's publications on her life and music over the past decade, crowned by this new biography, must assure him of a place among the major figures in Hensel scholarship who have done so much to repair the long neglect of this important composer.

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<sup>10</sup> Marcia J. Citron, 'A Bicentennial Reflection: Twenty-five Years with Fanny Hensel', *Nineteenth Century Music Review* 4/2 (2007): 15.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, 19.