

Chapter 4

In Pursuit of a Single Flame: Fanny Hensel's 'Musical Salon'

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The Biedermeier Years (1815–30)

Following the Napoleonic Wars and the Congress of Vienna 1814–15, the German Restoration (more popularly known as the *Vormärz*) was a period of vast political and social restraint. The alliance of individual monarchical states in Vienna by no means compensated for the failure to create the national states demanded by the liberal middle class. Such revolutionary calls for liberalism gave rise to a period of censorship internationally known as 'The Age of Metternich', and by the term for the cultural epoch, the 'Biedermeier'. The prescribed peace in Europe during these years, which was essentially a renewal of conditions before the French Revolution of 1789 and the Napoleonic era, could not prevent ideas of national independence from broadening the predominant values of middle-class life. Parallel to this social transformation, concert life began to be transformed and music making began to flourish in domestic circles in the larger German cities. Within this cultural milieu the musical salon developed rapidly. Such salons, maintained solely in private circles, were a symbiosis of readings, musical performance and cultured conversation. Not only did they embrace the German Lied in its many facets but they also provided a forum for discussion of political and social processes.

With regard to salon culture in early nineteenth-century Germany, Berlin was one of the most active and vibrant cities. It was here in 1810 that Wilhelm von Humboldt founded the first 'modern' university (to which women and Jews were not admitted) and it was against this cultural backdrop that a particular type of 'salon' was born in Berlin. For intellectually and artistically gifted women such institutions were of immense importance, providing them with a space in which to create their own 'universities', where they could exchange ideas and advance their own learning.¹ In a letter to Karl Gustav Brinkmann, a Swedish diplomat who had lived in Berlin before 1806, Rahel Levin von Varnhagen identified, while

¹ According to Deborah Hertz, two-thirds of the guests attending the salon were men, while all salons were led by women, 60 per cent of these being led by Jewish women; see Deborah Hertz, 'Salonnières and Literary Women in Late Eighteenth-Century Berlin', *New German Critique*, 14/1 (1978): 97–108, 99.

regretting its decline, the element of serious intention which had been central to most noble artistic salons of her day:

The whole constellation of beauty, gracefulness, coquetry, inclination, affair[s], wit, elegance, cordiality, aspiration to develop ideas, candid seriousness, uninhibited visits and encounters, witty jokes, is destroyed. All ground floors are shops, all meetings are dinners or assemblies, all discussions almost [next word crossed out] – in this striking-out, you can see my difficulty in finding a word: I mean a rendez-vous for a ... confusion of ideas. Everyone is clever; he has bought an opinion of all this from a ringleader. There are still some clever people here and a residual sociability, which is unique in Germany.²

Although Varnhagen's letter laments a change in society, a year later she revised her opinion, writing to Wilhelmine and Henriette von Reden in June 1820:

I must also give the city its due in winter: it is certainly the richest, most varied and manifold German city with regard to its social activity. One would never find anywhere more women who receive guests, with the exception of Paris: more striving for knowledge and [a meaningful] existence would also be difficult to find in spite of the general devastation and new restructuring of society which is encountered everywhere, and even here is not without effect.³

Such 'striving for knowledge' was blocked in contemporary educational institutions, the conservative nature of which Nietzsche so strongly criticized.⁴

² 'Die ganze Konstellation von Schönheit, Grazie, Koketterie, Neigung, Liebschaft, Witz, Eleganz, Kordialität, Drang die Ideen zu entwickeln, redlichem Ernst, unbefangenen Aufsuchen und Zusammentreffen, launigem Scherz, ist zerstört. Alle Rez-de-Chaussée's sind Laden, alle Zusammenkünfte Dynes oder Assembléen, alle Diskussionen beinahe – Sie sehen am Ausstreichen meine Verlegenheit um ein Wort: ich meine un rendez-vous für ... eine fade Begriffsverwirrung. Jeder ist klug; er hat sich alles dazu bei einem Anführer einer Meinung gekauft. Es sind noch einige gescheidte Leute hier: und ein Rest von Geselligkeit, die in Deutschland einzig ist.' Letter to Karl Gustav Brinkmann, in Rahel Varnhagen, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Konrad Feilchenfeld, Rahel E. Steiner and Uwe Schweikert (10 vols, Munich: Mathes & Seitz, 1983), vol. 2, p. 609.

³ 'Auch muß ich der Stadt im Winter ihre Gerechtigkeit widerfahren lassen: es ist gewiß die reichste, vielfältigste und vielhaltigste deutsche Stadt, in Rücksicht des geselligen Umgangs. Mehr Frauen, die häuslich empfangen, findet man wohl außer in Paris nirgend; mehr Streben zum Wissen und Sein wohl auch schwerlich, trotz der allgemeinen Zerstörung, und neuen Aufbauung der Gesellschaft, die allenthalben zu verspüren, und auch hier nicht ohne Wirkung ist.' Letter of 9 June 1820 to Wilhelmine and Henriette von Reden, in *ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 22.

⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Über die Zukunft unserer Bildungsanstalten', in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke. Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (8 vols, Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1988), vol. 4, p. 71.

That Varnhagen, like many of her female contemporaries, struggled under this oppression is evident when she writes in October 1829:

From my youth onwards much was happening in me and in accordance with the truth; nature had a strong effect on receptive organs; she had endowed me with a steadfast, sensitive heart which constantly and truly enlivened all other organs: the head was good for deep reflection and understanding; almost no grace externally. So I naturally had to drink all the bitter cups; no cudgel blow, no pinprick, no nail, no hook was spared me; nothing ill failed to reach me; doubly ill, because I didn't always know it to be such, and if I did recognize it, I did not always reject it. In short, I went through the master class of humiliation and these aphorisms, taken from an enormous number of letters, and from a few notebooks – collected by Varnh. – are the fruits of mute, years-long, suppressed pain, tears, suffering, thoughts; the joys of loneliness and boredom of disturbance. Pearls, which half a century has thrown from a stormy human soul, treasures contained in this soul as in an ocean; if she did not lock herself up in a garden pond of her feelings where her fate will stagnate ... And yet you give me now the joy while I am still alive of recognizing and saying: 'Here a human being has spoken and lived; I, as a human being, recognize that and gladly and joyfully say it to you'. That delights my soul; and I will gladly say it to you because I am grateful.⁵

This gradual unfolding of the self towards the holy grail of *Bildung*, which Varnhagen's letter so evidently describes, is a direct reflection of the Goethe cult in Berlin's Jewish salon culture (1780–1830), for which Varnhagen's

⁵ 'Von Jugend an, ging es reich, und der Wahrheit gemäß in mir her; Natur wirkte stark und richtig auf scharfe Organe; ein felsenfestes, empfindliches Herz hatte sie mir mitgegeben, das alle andre Organe immerzu, und redlich belebte; – der Kopf war für tieferes Bedenken und Auffassen gut; – beinah keine Grazie nach Außen. Da konnte es denn nicht fehlen, dass ich alle Kelchchen und Kelche, bitter und scharf gefüllt, austrinken mußte; kein Keulenschlag, kein Nadelstich, kein Nagel, kein Haken, wurde mir erspart; nichts Verkehrtes versäumt mir zu reichen; doppelt verkehrt, weil ich's nicht immer dafür nahm; und erkannt' ich es, nicht immer abwies. Kurz, ich machte die Universität durch, und diese Sprüche, aus einer Unzahl Briefen genommen, und aus wenig Merkbüchern – von Varnh. gesammelt – sind der Ertrag von stummen langjährigen, ignorirten Schmerzen, Thränen, Leiden, Denken; Freuden der Einsamkeit, und Langeweile der Störung. Perlen, die ein halbes Jahrhundert aus einer sturmbelegten Menschenseele warf, Schätze, die sie wie das große Meer enthält: wenn sie sich nicht zum affektirten Gartenteich einsperrt, wo ihr Schicksal Stagniren wird ... Und Sie geben mir nun noch das Glück, bei meinem Leben, zu erkennen, und zu sagen: "Hier hat ein Mensch gesprochen, und gelebt: ich Mensch erkenne das, und sage dir es gern, und freudig". Das freut meine Seele: und ich sage es Ihnen gerne, darum dankbar.' Letter of 11 October 1829 to Antoine von Horn, in Varnhagen, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 3, pp. 282–3.

salon was renowned.⁶ Goethe's concept of *Bildung* – as developed in Moses Mendelssohn's Enlightenment essay⁷ and by the *maskilim* (the Jewish Enlightenment) and refined in Goethe's educational novel, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*⁸ – was a central part of German-Jewish identity, if not an *Ersatzreligion* for a Jewish elite. *Bildung*, as the cultural historian George L. Mosse believes, 'transcended all differences of nationality and religion through the unfolding of the individual personality'.⁹ It was, therefore, 'an ideal', as Stephen Aschheim observes, 'perfectly suited to the requirements of Jewish integration and acculturation ... rendering it the animating ideal of modern German Jewry'.¹⁰ In one sense the prevailing tone of the salon organized by educated Jewish women mirrored this ethos directly and provided a unique forum for the development of the self. The women who presided over the salons opened up cultural discourse away from conservative learned institutions, creating a private place where progressive ideas were entertained, and where women were able to escape from social, gender and, to some extent, religious prejudice.¹¹ In another sense the salon is a fascinating inscription of religious, social and cultural history and subversively reflects how women and society were manipulated by hidden cultural codes for economic and socio-political ends.¹²

The cultural contributions of Jewish women within Berlin salon culture during the Biedermeier years have been richly traced by Emily D. Bilski and Emily Braun, together with Leon Botstein.¹³ While music played an important and integral role

⁶ Gerhart Hoffmeister, *Deutsche und europäische Romantik* (Stuttgart: Metzler Verlag, 1978), p. 182.

⁷ Moses Mendelssohn, 'Über die Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?', *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, September 1784, in *Was ist Aufklärung? Thesen und Definitionen*, ed. Ehrhard Bahr (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1996), pp. 9–11.

⁸ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795), in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Schings, vol. 5 (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1988). Goethe summed up this ideal in one phrase: 'mich selbst, ganz wie ich bin, auszubilden' ('the cultivation of my individual self just as I am').

⁹ George L. Mosse, *German Jews beyond Judaism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 14.

¹⁰ Steven E. Aschheim, *Culture and Catastrophe: German and Jewish Confrontation with National Socialism and Other Crises* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), p. 32.

¹¹ See Beatrix Borchard, in Beatrix Borchard and Cornelia Bartsch, 'Leipziger Straße Drei: Sites for Music', in FHC: 119–38; Part I, 'Sites for Music', 124–5. Borchard notes (*ibid.*, p. 120) that neither Fanny Hensel nor her mother or aunt employed the term 'salon' for the musical performances that took place in their homes, hence Borchard's preferred term 'sites for music'.

¹² Nicholas Saul, 'Goethe the writer and literary history', in *The Cambridge Companion to Goethe*, ed. Lesley Sharpe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 24.

¹³ Emily D. Bilski and Emily Braun (eds), with contributions by Leon Botstein et al., *Jewish Women and their Salons: The Power of Conversation* (New York: Jewish Museum New York and Yale University Press, 2005).

in many of these salons, it was not always an aesthetic end in itself but rather an integral part of gathering together. Typical of their time were the salons of the former Weimar poetess, Amalie von Helvig, née Imhoff (1776–1831) and Amalia Beer (1767–1854), who hosted the leading European musicians of the day. That Beer's salon showcased such artists as Carl Maria von Weber, Muzio Clementi, Johann Nepomuk Hummel, Ignaz Moscheles, Niccolò Paganini, Anna Milder-Hauptmann, Caroline Seidler, Henriette Sontag, Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient and Angelica Catalani¹⁴ is richly illustrative of the salon world as a world of economic privilege and sociability.¹⁵ Amalia Beer's salon allowed such visiting artists a rare opportunity to meet members of an elite audience and become acquainted with such local musical luminaries as Carl Friedrich Zelter (1758–1832), Director of the Singakademie, Johann Friedrich Reichardt (1752–1814), Royal Prussian Court Composer and Bernhard Anselm Weber (1764–1821), Director of the Royal Opera, who also regularly performed. In addition to this social importation, Beer also used her salon to advance the careers of three of her four sons, the eldest of whom, Jacob Meyer (1791–1864), Giacomo Meyerbeer, made his public debut in 1801 and quickly became accustomed to performing publicly 'for prestigious audiences in a sheltered environment'.¹⁶

More famous than Beer's musical gatherings were the salons of the Prussian Princess Luise Radziwill (1770–1836), which staged elaborate musical and theatrical productions and were illustrative of the sociability of amateur performance. Examples of this kind of elaborate sociability were the performances for the Prince Radziwill's *Faust* in collaboration with many friends of the Radziwill family and the Singakademie, in the years from 1816 to 1820. From February to May 1816 sections of Radziwill's *Faust* were rehearsed by members of the royal family and court society in the Radziwill Palace, culminating in a kind of premiere for the birthday of Princess Luise on 24 May 1816. In a letter to Goethe of May 1820 Carl Friedrich Zelter documented a later performance:

Just think of the circle in which all this goes on: a Prince as Mephisto, our first actor as Faust, our first actress as Gretchen, a Prince as the composer, a truly noble king as principal attender, with his youngest children and all his court about him, one of the finest orchestras that can be found, and finally a chorus of our best voices, the singers consisting of respectable ladies, beautiful girls (most of them) and men of high rank (among them a consistorial councillor, a clergyman, a consistorial councillor's daughter), state councillors and King's Counsel. And all this is managed by the royal artistic director of all the theatrical

¹⁴ See Leon Botstein, in *ibid.*, p. 40.

¹⁵ See, for example, Amalia Beer's correspondence with Meyerbeer, Berlin, 18 May 1816 in Giacomo Meyerbeer, *Briefwechsel und Tagebücher*, ed. Gudrun and Heinz Becker, 4 vols (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1960), vol. 1, p. 313; 2 July 1816, p. 317 and 31 August 1819, p. 380.

¹⁶ Leon Botstein, in Bilski and Braun, *Jewish Women and their Salons*, p. 41.

productions at the residence, acting as stage director, conductor and prompter ... so you cannot blame me for wishing we might have had you amongst us.¹⁷

Here in fact was transformed what Goethe, after the French model, constantly saw as a desideratum of 'geselliger Bildung' ('social education') for Germany, the interplay of different professions, circles and position in a common interest. This and other records of performances of Radziwill's *Faust* between 1816 and 1820 (whether in the Radziwill Palace or the royal palaces of Berlin) were experienced and cultivated most strongly by the participants in Berlin salon life. The piece itself bears testimony to the way in which many concert performances were born out of the spirit of the salon.

In a different way to the Radziwill salon, the salons of Sara Levy (1761–1854) and Elisabeth von Staegemann (1761–1835) were important forums for the dissemination of eighteenth-century musical culture. Elisabeth von Staegemann's close friendship with Johann Friedrich Reichardt set the prevailing tone of her salon, which provides a fascinating reflection of the development of the German Lied.¹⁸ Staegemann herself gave the premiere of Reichardt's Klopstock settings¹⁹ and her salon was frequented by composers of the 'second Berlin school', among them Ludwig Berger and Bernhard Klein. Interestingly, these musical gatherings, which were not held on Thursdays, the *jour fixe* of Staegemann's 'public' salon, are more fully documented through the written invitations (which acted as admission tickets) and printed programmes, thereby leaving a rare record of the music performed. Staegemann's distinction between public and private

¹⁷ 'Denkst du Dir nun den Kreis dazu in dem dies alles vorgeht: einen Prinzen [Karl von Mecklenburg-Strelitz] als Mephisto, unsern ersten Schauspieler [Pius Alexander Wolff] als Faust, unsere erste Schauspielerin [Auguste Stich] als Gretchen, einen Fürsten als Componisten, einen wirklich guten König als ersten Zuhörer mit seinen jüngsten Kindern und ganzem Hofe, eine Capelle der ersten Art wie man sie findet, und endlich einen Singchor von unsern besten Stimmen, der aus ehrbaren Frauen, mehrentheils schönen Mädchen und Männern von Range (worunter ein Consistorialrath, ein Prediger, eine Consistorialraths-Tochter), Staats- und Justizräthen besteht und dies alles angeführt vom königlichen General-Intendanten aller Schauspiele der Residenz, der den Maschinenmeister, den Dirigenten, den Souffleur macht, ... so sollst Du mir den Wunsch nicht schlimm heißen, Dich unter uns gewünscht zu haben.' Letter of Zelter to Goethe, 25 May 1820, in *Goethe Sämtliche Werke. Briefwechsel mit Zelter*, ed. Hans-Günter Ottenberg and Edith Zehm (20 vols, Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1991), vol. 20.1, p. 610. Translation adapted from Lorraine Byrne Bodley, *Goethe and Zelter: Musical Dialogues* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2013), p. 270.

¹⁸ See, for example, the memoirs of her daughter from her first marriage, Hedwig von Olfers (née von Staegemann), *Ein Lebenslauf*, vol. 1: *Elternhaus und Jugend (1799–1815)*; vol. 2: *Erbliht in der Romantik, gereift in selbstloser Liebe (1816–1891)*, ed. H. Abeken, 2 vols (Berlin: E. S. Mittler und Sohn, 1908–1914), p. 15.

¹⁹ Friedrich August von Staegemann, *Erinnerungen an Elisabeth* (Berlin: Akademische Schriften, 1835), p. 42. See also Petra Dollinger, 'Meta Moller und der Klopstock-Kult im 18. Jahrhundert', *Literatur in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, 37 (2004): 3–15, esp. 17–19.

salons immediately raises the question to what degree these gatherings were the 'open' forum mythologized in our understanding of the salon today. Such semi-public salons were also hosted by Sara Levy, a student of Johann Christoph and Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, and an important presence on the salon stage. Just as Staegemann's connections with the second Berlin school mirrored the tenor of her salon, so Levy's well-documented links with the Singakademie distinguished hers. It was here that E. T. A. Hoffmann met Carl Friedrich Zelter²⁰ and it is reasonable to suppose that Levy was also acquainted with its founder, Carl Friedrich Christian Fasch (1736–1800).²¹ The supposition that Beethoven once played at her salon is also credible.²²

Fanny Hensel's 'Sunday Concerts'

To what degree Fanny Hensel's 'Sonntagsmusiken' corresponded to this model of the contemporary Jewish salon and to the notion of *Bildung* is deeply controversial.²³ And while her reputation as a first-class musician was widespread within artistic and educated circles in Berlin, to what degree she used the salon to establish and reinforce her musical identity in the minds of Berlin's residents and visitors is also open to debate. Was the German-Jewish culture of the salon into which she was born part of Hensel's identity after Jewish emancipation in the early decades of the nineteenth century?²⁴ Did questions of assimilation affect the formation of her salon or influence her Goethe Lieder where the connection between *Bildung* and Jewishness was particularly strong? And, if so, how was this reflected in the music performed?

The starting point for exploring such questions could fruitfully be to consider the role the salon organized by Lea Mendelssohn Bartholdy, Sara Levy's niece, played in Fanny Hensel's musical development. Even at a very early stage, the Mendelssohn salon was distinguished by professional music making at an extraordinarily high level. Whereas Sebastian Hensel's memoirs present his

²⁰ E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Autobiographische, musikalische und vermischte Schriften*, ed. Martin Hürlimann (Zürich: Atlantis Verlag, 1946), p. 116.

²¹ Hinrich (Martin Heinrich) Lichtenstein, *Zur Geschichte der Sing-Akademie in Berlin* (Berlin: Trautwein, 1843), p. vii.

²² This would have been in June 1796 when he visited the Singakademie: see *ibid.*, p. xi; and see also S. Gumbinner, 'Zur Geschichte der jüdischen Gemeinde Berlins in 18. Jahrhundert', II, in *Vossische Zeitung*, 9 July 1876 (No. 158, Sonntags-Beilage, No. 28): xi; and Stephen M. Lowenstein, 'Jewish Upper Crust and Berlin Jewish Enlightenment: the family of Daniel Itzig', in *From East and West: Jews in a Changing Europe, 1750–1870*, ed. Frances Malino and David Sorkin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 182–201.

²³ See, for example, Hans-Günther Klein, *Die Musikveranstaltungen bei den Mendelssohns – Ein 'musikalischer Salon'?* (Leipzig: Mendelssohn-Haus, 2006).

²⁴ For a broad discussion of this 'dual legacy' see David Sorkin, *The Spirit of Prussian Jewry: The Dual Legacy of Berlin* (Ramat-Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University, 1993).

mother and his uncle as being granted performance experience, his admission that 'hier würden Felix Kompositionen aufgeführt' ('here Felix's compositions were performed') is immediately telling.²⁵ That the focus of these Sunday concerts was to promote Felix's development rather than Fanny's is evident as early as 1821,²⁶ when Lea reports with pride:

We hear these gentlemen [visiting virtuosi] at our Sunday practices every fortnight. Felix already has a proper musical calling, and whoever is not recommended by foreign virtuosi, comes of his own accord ... Some days ago for the birthday celebration of my niece Betty, he played an extremely brilliant concerto by Ries, and had the honour of seeing Boucher and Lipinski leading his ripienists [accompanying players] ... He calls Fanny his Minerva; he presents all his work to her and relentlessly takes out what she dismisses. If she were not the most ungrudging creature and did not adore her brother so much, she would have to resent him; because he overshadows her very fine talent for performance and composition more than is fair.²⁷

Time and again, accounts of Lea Mendelssohn's salon bear testimony to her words. Her account of the orchestral rehearsals for his Singspiel *Die Soldatenliebschaft*, which commenced on 3 February, Felix's 12th birthday – and for which a complete theatre with raised stage was assembled, with an orchestra comprising the best musicians of the Königlische Kapelle conducted by Felix from the piano – immediately endorses the tremendous sense of privilege.²⁸ Eduard Devrient acknowledges Abraham's generous support in hiring the Hofkapelle to

²⁵ Sebastian Hensel, *Die Familie Mendelssohn* (Frankfurt am Main and Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1995), p. 170.

²⁶ On this point specifically see also Borchard and Bartsch, 'Sites for Music', p. 121; and on Fanny's struggle for creative identity in the 1820s in the light of Felix's achievements see Chapter 5 below.

²⁷ 'Wir hören diese Herren bei unsern Sonntagsübungen alle 14 Tage, Felix hat schon einen ordentlichen musical. Ruf, und wer uns v. fremden Virtuosen auch nicht empfohlen wird, kömmt v. selbst ... Vor einigen Tagen spielte er zum Geburtsfeste meiner Nichte Betty ein äußerst brillantes Konzert v. Ries, und hatte die Ehre, Boucher und Lipinski an der Spitze seiner ripienisten zu sehen. ... Fanny nennt er seine Minerva; ihr legt er alle Arbeiten vor und streicht unbarmherzig, was sie verwirft. Wenn sie nicht das neidloseste Geschöpf wäre und ihren Bruder so adorirte, müßte sie ihm fast gram werden; denn er verdunkelt ihr recht hübsches Talent zum Spielen und Komponiren mehr als billig'. Lea Mendelssohn, Letters to her cousin Henriette von Pereira-Arnstein in Vienna, Staatsbibliothek, Berlin (Signatur: MA Nachl. 15), Berlin, 19 October 1821. 'Betty' is Rebekka Beer, née Meyer (1793–1850).

²⁸ Lea Mendelssohn, Letters (Signatur: MA Nachl. 15), Berlin, 26 February 1821. The premiere had taken place (in piano reduction) on 11 December 1820 for Abraham Mendelssohn's birthday.

enable Felix to test out his compositions.²⁹ Perhaps the most striking illustration of the semi-public nature of Lea's salon in Felix's formative years is found in Heinrich Dorn's accounts of Zelter's response to Felix's performance, which conjure up an image of a public master class. Although these performances took place in a domain traditionally (and pejoratively) associated with women, it was Felix's rather than Fanny's talent that was nurtured. Larry Todd notes that as 'his compositions and performances drew increasingly public attention ... her musicianship remained a guarded family secret while her musical aspirations were constrained within the domestic sphere'.³⁰ So too Zelter's public placing of his pupil Felix in a distinguished lineage of German composers, Mozart, Haydn and Bach, endorsed the professional distinction between the two siblings and the function of Lea's salon as nurturing ground for Felix's talent.³¹

With Felix's departure in the spring of 1829, the Sunday *musicales* at Leipzigerstrasse 3 were discontinued, yet Fanny's decision to revive the tradition was recorded in a family letter to Felix on 8 February 1831, to which he responded enthusiastically:

I cannot tell you, my dear Fanny, how pleased I am by your plan for the new Sunday music [series]. That's a brilliant idea and I implore you in God's name not to let it slip into oblivion; instead you must ask your touring brother to compose some new things for you.³²

Performances took place between 11 in the morning and 2 in the afternoon, with Saturday evening devoted to rehearsals. Whereas it is difficult to trace exact details for the early performances, their existence is evident from Fanny's diary where she notes on 7 October 1831, 'Meine Sonntagsmusiken prosperiren sehr, und machen mir große Freude' ('My Sunday concert series are really prospering and bring me great joy').³³

²⁹ Eduard Devrient, *Meine Erinnerungen an Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy und seine Briefe an mich* (Leipzig, 1869), p. 26. See also Lea Mendelssohn (Signatur: MA Nachl. 15), Berlin, 9 September 1826.

³⁰ R. Larry Todd, *Fanny Hensel: The Other Mendelssohn* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 56–7.

³¹ Heinrich Dorn, *Aus mein Leben* (2 vols, Berlin: B. Behrs Buchhandlung, 1870), vol. 1, p. 49.

³² 'Ich kann Dir gar nicht sagen, liebe Fanny, wie sehr mir der Plan mit den neuen Sonntagsmusiken gefällt; das ist ein brillanter Einfall, und ich bitte Dich um Gotteswillen, laß es nicht wieder einschlafen, sondern gib vielmehr Deinem reisenden Bruder Auftrag, für Euch einiges Neue zu schreiben'. Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Briefe aus den Jahren 1830 bis 1847*, ed. Paul and Karl Mendelssohn Bartholdy (2 vols, Leipzig: Hermann Mendelssohn, 1863), vol. 1, p. 124 (22 February 1831).

³³ Fanny Hensel, *Tagebücher*, ed. Hans-Günther Klein and Rudolf Elvers (Wiesbaden, Leipzig, Paris: Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2002), p. 35.

Fanny's diaries and letters from the ensuing years are an important source of information for the dates of the series and the music performed. Between 1833 and 1847, 53 concerts can be traced with fixed dates and definite programmes, and a further 20 concerts where either the dates are uncertain or programmes unknown.³⁴ Whereas in the winter of 1833–34 the concerts took place every fortnight, the series was never so regular in the ensuing years because of numerous interruptions: the Hensel family's travels to France and Belgium in the summer of 1835, the death of Abraham Mendelssohn on 19 November 1835, Fanny Hensel's miscarriage on 3 April 1837, Wilhelm Hensel's absence from Berlin in the summers of 1838 and 1843 and their Italian journeys in 1839–40 and 1845.³⁵ We also know from Fanny's diaries the unusual choice of repertoire that was programmed. With the small choir she conducted regularly on Sundays, she performed works ranging from Bach cantatas to choral sections from Felix's *St Paul* (25 June 1837), and including a selection of scenes from Beethoven's *Fidelio* (26 January 1834) and Mozart's *La Clemenza di Tito* (21 January 1838). For all these performances Hensel accompanied on the piano, with one exception where an orchestra was hired for the performance of her concert overture on 15 June 1834, the rehearsal for which she conducted on 7 June.³⁶

Although Hensel's 'Sonntagsmusiken' began as private performances – as with her parents' salon, there were no announcements in the Berlin newspapers – after the Italian journey in 1839–40 they took on a semi-public character. Hensel herself referred to the concert series in a letter to Julius Elsasser on 6 May 1846 as a 'wunderliches Mittelding zwischen Privat- und öffentlichem Wesen' (a 'happy medium between a private and public entity').³⁷ These semi-public concerts, seating up to 200 in the audience,³⁸ were free of charge and had a specific programme, very much contrasting with the spontaneity of private evening gatherings. Like the salon of her parents Abraham and Lea Mendelssohn in the 1820s, Hensel's 'Sonntagsmusiken' played a unique role in Berlin musical culture through their peculiar ability to mix private and public spheres. Although this musical dichotomy was unique to the Berlin salon, in another sense it was inherent in the tradition. Jürgen Habermas identifies this dialectic in ancient Greece, where morality and virtue were tested in a public as opposed to a private realm, which implied a lack of freedom. In tracing its development from the Middle Ages through to the nineteenth century, Habermas placed the literary Romantic salon between the *Privatbereich* (private realm) and the *Sphäre der öffentlichen Gewalt* (sphere of

³⁴ See Klein, 'Sonntagsmusiken bei Fanny Hensel', in *Die Musikveranstaltungen bei den Mendelssohns*, pp. 49–51.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

³⁶ *Ibid.* The conductor of the premiere is unknown.

³⁷ Hans-Günther Klein, 'Fanny und Wilhelm Hensel und die Maler Elsasser', *Mendelssohn-Studien*, 13 (2003), pp. 125–67, p. 157.

³⁸ Sebastian Hensel, *Die Familie Mendelssohn*, p. 177.

public power).³⁹ Hensel's 'Sonntagsmusiken' constituted a part of a public sphere in which individual experiences were expressed and exchanged for both personal and cultural reasons.

From a feminist perspective, Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo maintains that a sharp distinction between public and private spheres generally imposes limits upon women and that women are most active in those societies 'in which public and domestic spheres are only weakly differentiated'.⁴⁰ Applying Rosaldo's theoretical framework to Hensel's salon, a place where the private and public merged, one can propose that here Hensel was able to 'challenge ... claims to authority ... by establishing social ties, by creating a sense of rank, order and value in a world in which women prevail', in essence creating a 'public world of her own'.⁴¹ As Habermas points out, the institution of the salon and the private living room were one and the same, signifying a new intimacy between the two spheres: 'The public sphere emerges in the wider stratum of the bourgeoisie at first as an extension and at the same time a completion of the spheres of a nuclear family intimacy. Sitting room and salon exist under the same roof'.⁴² In her Sunday *musicales*, Hensel influenced her surroundings by voicing private and public concerns through a forum which readily synthesized these two spheres.

Viewed through another lens Fanny Hensel's 'Sonntagsmusiken' can be regarded as an elaboration of the Jewish salon tradition on which she was building a family legacy. On her father's side, Moses Mendelssohn's gatherings included Lessing, and the publisher Friedrich Nicolai; here they discussed philosophy, literature and the arts. Continuing the tradition of her mother, several of the Mendelssohn aunts – among them Fanny von Arnstein (1758–1818) and Cäcilie von Eskeles (1760–1836) – had organized important salons. The professional nature of Hensel's Sunday *musicales* were more along the lines of the salons of her famous great-aunt, Sara Levy, where the tension between amateur and professional is again at play. As with Felix, Fanny's abhorrence of dilettantism – especially in women – was bound up with her own identity and perception of herself as a professional musician although (on account of her family and convention) she was denied the opportunity to practise as such. Despite these restrictions, her 'salon' became one of the most important centres of music making in Berlin musical life,

³⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (3rd edition, Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1968).

⁴⁰ Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, 'Women, Culture and Society: A Theoretical Overview', in *Women, Culture and Society*, ed. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974), p. 36. For recent critiques of the notion of 'separate spheres' see the *Journal of Women's History*, which devoted special issues to the topic in 2003–04, and for an overview of recent work see Karen Offen, 'Surveying European Women's History since the Millennium: A Comparative Review', *Journal of Women's History*, 20/1 (2010): 154–77.

⁴¹ Rosaldo, 'Women, Culture and Society', p. 36.

⁴² Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, pp. 62–3.

for hearing unusual repertoire superbly performed, and bordering on professional concert life. Like Rahel von Varnhagen, Hensel viewed her role as salonnière as a professional one and her guest list gives ample evidence of the diversity and prominence of her salon.⁴³ As in Sara Levy's and Elisabeth Staegemann's salons, music was emancipated from its ornamental function and the practice of attentive listening reflects changing attitudes towards composers and musicians.

Although Hensel is traditionally portrayed within the confines of a domestic forum, in many ways she transcended the boundaries of gender, class and creed through the creation of a semi-public place in which her own works, together with those of her brother (and others) were performed. As heir of the Bach family (via Sara Levy's salon) and the Berlin school of song composition, she reflected in her songs not only the second and third Berlin school of composers – thereby continuing Zelter's influence – but also the distinct music-poetic genre known as the 'Weimar Lied'.⁴⁴ Goethe remained her favourite poet, the only poet to whom she returned throughout her lifetime, and her songs are richly illustrative of the interdependence of musical and literary spheres in Weimar. Although many of the texts she set were also set by her famous male contemporaries – 'Erster Verlust' (H-U 18); 'An den Mond' (H-U 19); 'Nähe des Geliebten' (H-U 36); 'Über allen Gipfeln' (H-U 285); 'Wandrer's Nachtlid I' (H-U 367); 'Auf dem See' (H-U 382); and 'Dämmerung senkte sich von oben' (H-U 397) – she also selected unusual texts such as inspired the duet 'Das holde Tal' (H-U 351) or the partsong for male-voice chorus, 'Laß fahren hin' (H-U 360), and the solo lied 'Hausgarten', H-U 355.

Goethe's words also found their way into other compositions as with the epigrams of *Das Jahr II*, and her piano piece, *Ponte moll* (H-U 352) – which carries the words above the melody 'Ach, wer bringt ...', the opening line from Goethe's 'Erster Verlust' which she had set twice, in 1820 and 1823. And she was the first composer to set the opening scene of Goethe's *Faust*, Part II. Hensel's penchant for seeking out unusual Goethe texts is also evident in her novel programming, which was part of the Goethean concept of *Bildung* as self-cultivation. Although she continued the family tradition of promoting Felix's work, her role as conductor, performer and patron of his music was a key dimension of her shaping of Berlin musical life. And although few visitors to her salon might have suspected that she had written over 400 compositions, within the confines of family and social conventions Hensel presided over a salon which actively contributed to her own sense of self. While, according to convention, invitations went out in her husband's name, Wilhelm Hensel was very much a key contributor to her Sunday *musicales* and part of an artistic collaboration with Fanny, whether illustrating her

⁴³ See Klein, 'Sonntagsmusiken bei Fanny Hensel', in *Die Musikveranstaltungen bei den Mendelssohns*, pp. 55–6. On Fanny's aspirations towards professionalism and high art see Borchard and Bartsch, 'Sites for Music', and Matthew Head, 'Genre, Romanticism and Female Authorship: Fanny Hensel's "Scottish" Sonata in G Minor (1843)', in *FHC*: 67–87.

⁴⁴ Ernst Hermann, 'Das Weimarer Lied in der 2. Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts' (PhD diss., University of Leipzig, 1929), pp. 109–12.

manuscripts or providing an artistic setting for musical scenes. As the composer Johanna Kinkel recalled:

During the warm seasons the glass doors were left open, and during the intermissions singers and guests wandered beneath the ... large trees, which stretched nearly to the city wall. Hensel's atelier was adjacent to one side of the music room, and through the French doors one could see several of his historical paintings.⁴⁵

During the performances Wilhelm sketched portraits of the musicians and guests, thereby bequeathing a rare visual record consisting of over 1000 drawings of Hensel's salon, many of which are co-signed by the sitter, such as Heinrich Heine's portrait on which the poet inscribed, 'Eh bien, cet homme, c'est moi!' ('Well, this man, 'tis I!'). As with Madame de Rambouillet's literary salon – which marked the advent of the European salon – the very function of Hensel's gathering was to practise and display her musical prowess. Her salon, therefore, reflected not only the synthesis of public and private realms but also the general tenor of the Romantic salon, where importance was placed on the belief that everyone should have equal opportunity for self-expression.

Whereas one could readily interpret Hensel's promotion of her brother's music before her own as reflective of gender and familial restrictions, it is also true to say that by their very nature Hensel's 'Sonntagsmusiken' transcended the bounds of individualism, and reflected the relationship between an individual and the community in contemporary Romantic thought. This dichotomy between individual freedom and community (*Gemeinschaft*) is identified by Schleiermacher: 'Whatever can be produced from human social intercourse shall all pass me by, stir me, and move me, only to be moved again by me, and in the manner in which I absorb and handle it I will always find my freedom and, in expression, form my individuality.'⁴⁶ Hensel's search for identity, like the Romantic search for freedom of the self, depended on this reciprocal interaction. Through her Sunday *musicales* she strove to realize a new form of productivity which required the elimination of the rifts that existed between the public and private, society and the individual.

Whereas cultural studies champion the marginalized and oppressed, Fanny Hensel's position was paradoxical in that she was marginalized as a Jewish woman

⁴⁵ Cited in Hans-Günther Klein, 'Das verborgene Band': *Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy und seine Schwester Fanny Hensel: Ausstellung der Musikabteilung der Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin-Preussischer Kulturbesitz zum 150. Todestag der beiden Geschwister*, Exhibition Catalogue (Wiesbaden: Ludw. Reichert, 1997), p. 193.

⁴⁶ 'Was aus der Menschen gemeinschaftlichem Handeln hervorgehen kann, soll alles an mir vorüber ziehn, mich regen und bewegen um von mir wieder bewegt zu werden, und in der Art wie ichs aufnehme und behandle will ich immer meine Freiheit finden, und äussernd bilden meine Eigenthümlichkeit.' Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Monologen: nebst den Vorarbeiten*, ed. Friedrich Michael Schiele (Leipzig: Verlag von Felix Meiner, 1914), p. 70.

and yet privileged as a member of the wealthy and cultured upper middle class. This tension between the public and private, between past and present is the key to understanding the inherent dualism between Hensel's 'Sonntagsmusiken' and her compositional identity. The Jewish salon culture into which she was born could be considered part of her identity, following Jewish emancipation in the early decades of the nineteenth century, in that she continued and expanded a tradition she inherited, but also in that it directly coloured her reception. However, as Todd rightly notes, unlike Felix, 'Fanny herself was spared [Wagner's] insult in print, though had she, like Felix, enjoyed a successful public career, her reception in mid-nineteenth-century Germany might well have been equally problematic'.⁴⁷

In another sense Hensel's reception was coloured by Wagner's influence, albeit indirectly via his perception of the salon. Wagner's criticism, first, of the linkage of music with *Bildung* in Fanny and Felix's parental home (which was later developed in Fanny's *Sonntagsmusik*), and, secondly, his pejorative linkage of the Jewish with the feminine in salon culture have both directly affected the reception of Hensel's music. As Leon Botstein notes:

By 1900, for many musicians influenced by Wagnerian ideology ... the traditions and repertoire of the salon and nineteenth-century domestic music-making reeked of a repugnant, feminized culture ... The greatness of Wagner, in the judgment of Friedrich Nietzsche ... lay in the composer's attempt to redeem music from the philistine, bourgeois, and superficial, understood as a species of the feminine ... A rift developed between the construct of the feminine and Jewish on one hand and true German culture and musicality on the other.⁴⁸

While the traditional placing of Fanny in Felix's shadow is reflective of history,⁴⁹ one must ask whether this was really so clear. While the same educational opportunities were not entirely awarded to the two siblings, in many ways Hensel's surpassing of the boundaries of gender, class and creed, and her transformation of the salon tradition which she inherited into a professional, semi-public forum questions the categories in which the musical activities of Fanny and Felix have been placed. Although Felix enjoyed an international career which was not open to Fanny, his anti-Semitic relocation in a feminized salon culture has deemed that he too is being recovered; and as with Felix, so Fanny's fate has also been reversed.

⁴⁷ Todd, *Hensel*, p. xi.

⁴⁸ Leon Botstein, 'Music, Femininity, and Jewish Identity: The Tradition and Legacy of the Salon', in *Jewish Women and their Salons*, ed. Bilski and Braun, p. 162.

⁴⁹ See for example, Françoise Tillard, 'Felix Mendelssohn and Fanny Hensel: The Search for Perfection in Opposing Private and Public Worlds', in *The Mendelssohns: Their Music in History*, ed. John Michael Cooper and Julie D. Prandi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 279, where Tillard refers to Cecile Lowenthal Hensel, 'F in Dur and F in Moll', in *Berlin in Dur und Moll*, ed. Felix Henseleit (Berlin: Alex Springer, 1970).

In her obituary in 1847 she was acknowledged as a composer and performer within the sphere of the ideals of *Bildung*:

Fanny Hensel was an artist in the most exalted sense of the word ... Just as she shone as a gifted and accomplished pianist, so do the works only recently published under her own name testify to that heartfelt depth of feeling ... fundamental to a lofty and noble creation.⁵⁰

So too the first review of her published works recognized her compositional voice as distinct from her brother's:

Mendelssohn's manner of expression is highly precise, he would rather say too little than too much, he always builds [his compositions] on one idea and rounds out the whole in a way that is readily apprehended. Frau Hensel's lieder are more complicated; here fantasy is permitted a freer reign, the form applied in broader strokes, and not infrequently a greater variety is achieved by means of a contrasting middle section.⁵¹

Here, as Todd notes, the reviewer 'laid the groundwork for developing a critique of her music' which is only now being recovered.⁵² This reversal of history is very much bound up with the reception of the cultural context for which her music was written and performed. By refusing to draw a line between the private and public, Fanny Hensel emphasized their symbiotic relationship. In her 'Sonntagsmusiken' she publicized the private and made the public private. And in her composition of Lieder in this context the romantic concept of *Geselligkeit* informed her ideal synthesis of art and life. Her contribution to the nineteenth-century Lied was part of her consistent attempt to define and practise the art of song in the light of that ideal.

⁵⁰ *Die preussische Zeitung*, cited in Nancy B. Reich, 'The Power of Class: Fanny Hensel', in Mendelssohn and his World, ed. R. Larry Todd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 86–99, p. 97.

⁵¹ *AmZ*, 49 (1847), col. 82. Translation cited from Todd, *Hensel*, p. 349.

⁵² *Ibid.*

