Zelter, Goethe and the Emergence of a German Choral Canon

by

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This thesis examines the dialogue between Carl Friedrich Zelter (1758-1832) and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) on choral music and the role they envisioned for it within a national German repertory. The primary source for this examination is the voluminous correspondence between the two men, which spans almost 900 letters and over thirty years. In the correspondence, they discuss choral music both as an abstract and practical art. In addition, Zelter’s descriptions of concerts that he performed in and attended form a valuable record of musical life in Berlin in the early nineteenth-century.

To show the importance of choral music within the correspondence, this thesis is divided into three parts: an examination of Zelter and Goethe’s engagement with (choral) music; their respective choral organizations; and two musical case studies that show the application of their discussions. The first segment allows for a fuller understanding of how choral music fit in Zelter and Goethe’s larger artistic endeavours. This context is especially important given their marginal musical legacies, which have contributed to the scholarly neglect of their discourse on choral music. The second segment examines Zelter’s work with the Berlin Sing-Akademie in detail, focussing on its performance practice, membership, and audience. This examination shows that contrary to the oft-repeated claim that the Sing-Akademie did not regularly perform in public until 1829, the chorus in fact sang for a wide audience on a regular basis from the early 1800s on. The third segment provides case studies on the music of J.S. Bach and G.F. Handel. Goethe and Zelter’s dialogue about the two composers is considered, along with
their practical engagement with the repertoire. Further, the Sing-Akademie’s performance history of both composers is examined.

In sum, this thesis demonstrates the central role of historical choral music in the correspondence of Goethe and Zelter; their interest in older German choral music is shown to have had a profound impact on the music performed by similar organizations across Germany.
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Preface

This thesis grew out of a deep interest in nineteenth-century culture in Germany; through my undergraduate and graduate degrees I have enjoyed gaining ever more insight into a period that in many ways continues to define our musical landscape. My engagement with Zelter, which developed first as an interest in the Berlin Lieder school, has allowed me to examine music and cultural practices that were previously unknown to me and I am grateful for the opportunity.

There are some consistent abbreviations and spellings that deserve mention. First, in this dissertation the Sing-Akademie zu Berlin will be called the Sing-Akademie. Although German articles often use “Singakademie” I have chosen to follow the model of Lorraine Byrne Bodley’s recent Zelter and Goethe: Musical Dialogues. Second, when citing the correspondence of Zelter and Goethe, I will provide only an abbreviation. The abbreviation consists of Z (Zelter) and G (Goethe), an indication of to whom the letter is addressed, and the date. For example: Z to G, 14 September 1812, indicates that the letter is from Zelter to Goethe and that it was dated 14 September 1812. All German letter quotations are drawn from: Hans-Günter Ottenberg, Sabine Schäfer and Edith Zehm, eds, “Briefwechsel mit Zelter” vols 20.1; 20.2; 20.3 in Karl Richter, ed., Goethe Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens (Munich: Hanser Verlag, 1985-1998). Third, the German and English passages will appear side by side wherever possible. Further, the translations are my own, unless otherwise cited. Finally, I would like to remind the reader that many of the German spellings reflect period variations.
Introduction

You also deserve gratitude for explaining the important musical principles in your last letter. Resolve to do the same from time to time and you yourself will be storing up a treasure in my books. I am happy with my table as a naked but well-structured skeleton to which a genuine artist might add the necessary flesh, skin and entrails and bring it to life through practice and thought. By this means I look across in a wonderful way to a region in which I was not supposed to find enjoyment, let alone find joy in reflecting on it [...]¹

Carl Friedrich Zelter (1758-1832) and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s (1749-1832) voluminous correspondence, which spans almost 900 letters, has long been the subject of academic interest. Since the initial publication of the correspondence only two years after their deaths, scholars have studied their unlikely friendship, their musical criticism, and their attempts at collaboration. ² These studies have, however, failed to examine Zelter and Goethe’s many discussions of choral music as an art form. Their other musical exchanges have received scholarly attention, with articles on their discussions of composers such as Beethoven and Mozart, but oddly their views on the music they discussed most often have remained largely unstudied. This poses an obvious question: given the number of scholarly texts devoted to Goethe and Zelter, why have their conversations on choral music been ignored? The most likely explanation for the oversight is the status of choral music itself; unlike other genres,

choral music is still perceived as largely the domain of dedicated amateurs. While studies on the sociology of choral music have begun to appear, there remain large gaps in the scholarship. This dissertation attempts to fill in one such gap. Over the course of five chapters, this dissertation will show that within Zelter and Goethe’s correspondence lies a wealth of information about choral music in the first half of the nineteenth-century. Their letters shed light on the repertoire and performance practice of the period, with details on specific concerts attended and directed. Amid the details of these performances, their desire for choral music to play an integral role in education and their drive towards the creation of a national history of choral music also become apparent. Zelter and Goethe stood at the forefront of the amateur choral movement in Germany; their thoughtful dialogue reveals an attempt to shape choral music’s role in German society and to create a common repertoire that would be performed across their imagined community, as a shared musical heritage.

While most readers are likely familiar with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Carl Friedrich Zelter does not enjoy the same immediate recognition. This is due, in part, to the dearth of information on Zelter currently available in English; to date, not a single monograph on Zelter has been published in English. This gap may be partly explained by the misconceptions surrounding Zelter’s influence over Goethe and also by Nazi scholars’ appropriation of Zelter as a model of “Germanness.” The suspect agendas of Nazi scholars combined with the disappearance of documents after the Second World War means that modern scholars have to be careful when considering monographs published during the war years. Luckily, in the past

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twenty years, several new studies of Zelter have been published. Bettina Hey’ls *Der Briefwechsel zwischen Goethe und Zelter: Lebenskunst und literarisches Projekt* and the recent collection *Der Singemeister Carl Friedrich Zelter* stand out as sterling works which invite their readers to reconsider Zelter and his legacy.4 Several recent articles offer readers a contextualized portrait of Zelter’s musical endeavours, such as essays by Andreas Glöckner and Byrne.5 Byrne Bodley’s recently published translation of Goethe and Zelter’s musical letters also provides an invaluable resource for scholars.6 Despite these recent publications, it seems safe to assume that few scholars are familiar with Zelter’s biography and for that reason, a short version of it will be provided here.7

Zelter was born in 1758, into a family of masons; his father had moved his masonry practice to Berlin in 1745 and as skilled tradesmen the Zelters were in an enviable position.8 As Berlin expanded, their business thrived and by the time Carl Friedrich joined the firm his family employed over 250 people.9 As the only son to survive childhood, Zelter was expected to take on the family business; this did not, however, limit his education as his parents thoroughly

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6 Byrne Bodley, *Musical Dialogues*.

7 For a more complete biography please see chapter 1.


educated him both with private tutors and at a Gymnasium.\(^\text{10}\) At sixteen Zelter began his apprenticeship, as was expected, and on 1 December 1783 he was named a master mason. With professional independence came freedom, and Zelter began to pursue music at a more advanced level; in 1783 he began to study with Johann Philipp Kirnberger and Carl Friedrich Christian Fasch, both of whom worked as court composers for Frederick the Great and Frederick William II. Zelter’s own accounts of his musical education differ substantially, as we shall see in chapter 1. Thankfully, some parts of Zelter’s music training are inarguable; in 1791 he joined Fasch’s informal mass-singing group as a tenor and by 1796 he was named vice-director of the group (which was officially named the Berlin Sing-Akademie in 1793). His membership in the Sing-Akademie was important to him personally and professionally; he met his second, much-loved, wife Julie Pappritz through the Sing-Akademie and his initial appointment as vice-director marked his first music position in a long line that would eventually culminate in his appointment as the first professor of music in Germany.\(^\text{11}\)

The turn of the century marked a time of great change in Zelter’s life; in 1799 he exchanged his first letter with Goethe, the beginning of a dialogue that inspired him during his life and that immortalized him thereafter. While the first letters are predictably formal, especially on Zelter’s part, the pair soon developed a strong rapport and deep mutual respect. In the letters, Zelter and Goethe discuss everything from the daily musical happenings in their towns to their own musical projects to their personal lives. Their personal bond grew over time and after Zelter’s step-son, Carl Flöricke, committed suicide in 1812 Zelter was granted the familiar “du,”

\(^{10}\) Fischer-Dieskau, 10. A Gymnasium is a secondary school which is designed to prepare advanced students for entry to University.

\(^{11}\) Byrne Bodley, 17.
an intimacy that Goethe rarely bestowed after 1800.\textsuperscript{12} Goethe’s friendship was vitally important to Zelter, both personally and professionally. While Zelter took comfort in his friend’s advice and support, he also relied on Goethe’s ability to advocate on his behalf. Zelter regularly asks Goethe to send notes and letters of support to endorse his projects, which Goethe does not hesitate to do.\textsuperscript{13} Goethe’s friendship allowed Zelter to converse with other artists and scholars as an equal, a privilege he would likely not have enjoyed otherwise.

Likewise, Goethe’s letters reveal that he valued Zelter’s friendship and professional expertise. Goethe’s biography, which has been the subject of many fine scholarly works, does not need to be repeated here.\textsuperscript{14} However, his relationship with music and Zelter’s role in his musical education require some introduction. Goethe’s musical expertise has long been questioned in scholarly works; Byrne Bodley argues that it is this “pervasive image of Goethe as a musically conservative poet [that has] engendered the scholarly neglect of Goethe’s correspondence with Zelter.”\textsuperscript{15} Goethe’s conservative musical taste and his preference for the “melismatic melodies” of Handel and J.S. Bach, along with his apparent dismissal of “modern” settings of his work, has led scholars to decry Zelter’s undue influence.\textsuperscript{16} What such scholars have overlooked is Goethe’s own musical expertise; although he did not consider himself musically gifted, Goethe was thoroughly educated in music and was knowledgeable enough to engage Zelter in many

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{13} See for example: Z to G 11 to 23 October 1809, wherein Zelter thanks Goethe for recommending him to Humboldt and 11 to 13 September 1831 wherein Zelter requests an audience for one of his students.
\textsuperscript{15} Byrne Bodley, 3.
debates on music history and theory. Indeed it is clear from their correspondence that Goethe valued Zelter’s opinion but enjoyed challenging his assumptions. In their dialogues on the minor mode in particular, Goethe enjoys putting forward ideas that contrast with Zelter’s. Their lively exchanges show a level of trust and mutual respect, along with good senses of humour. This spark of humour and curiosity runs throughout their correspondence and makes the letters engaging reading. It is worth noting that despite the personal element of the correspondence, both Goethe and Zelter planned for the letters to become public after their deaths. Indeed, Goethe began to catalogue the correspondence several years before his death and would periodically remind Zelter that a particular year was going to be “thin” if Zelter did not send more letters and asked that certain letters be saved or re-sent. Goethe and his secretary, Friedrich Wilhelm Riemer, actively curated the letters, grouping them by year and ensuring that they were preserved; this planning is what allowed them to be published so quickly after Zelter and Goethe’s deaths. This intent to preserve correspondence for posterity was hardly unique to Goethe; indeed letters were considered a literary art form and were passed among friends as a means of sharing news and ideas. Goethe’s perception of letters as a literary form is confirmed by the following quotation:

Letters are among the most important monuments that an individual can leave. Lively people sometimes imagine an absent friend even in their monologues, pretending

Briefe gehören unter die wichtigsten Denkmäler, die der einzelne Mensch hinterlassen kann. Lebhafe Personen stellen sich schon bei ihren Selbstgesprächen

17 Some modern studies, such as Musik in Goethes Werk: Goethes Werk in der Musik, offer a more complete picture of Goethe’s musical background and acknowledge his scholarly engagement with issues of tonality and historiography. Andreas Ballstaedt, “Einführung,” in Musik in Goethes Werk: Goethes Werk in der Musik, eds. Andreas Ballstaedt, Ulrike Kienzle, and Adolf Nowak (Schliengen: Argus, 2003): 7.

18 See, for example, G to Z, 24 January 1828: “Cast a glance around you once again and report some things so that the year 1828 will not turn out to be too thin. Send me my letters from 1827 so that I can lay out the codices.” Byrne Bodley, Musical Dialogues, 394.
that the friend is present, with whom they share their sentiments; so the letter is also a form of monologue.

Goethe concludes by noting that often the friend is the foil for the letter (and writing) rather than the arguments’ principal audience. Their expectation of an eventual public consumption partly explains some of Goethe and Zelter’s more profound theoretical and aesthetic exchanges; it is not always clear, however, how the pair imagined the very detailed accounts of their daily musical activities fit within the public forum. Whatever the reason, these accounts offer invaluable insight into their respective musical endeavours. Indeed few of Zelter’s letters do not make at least a passing reference to his beloved Sing-Akademie, and Goethe often questioned him about its activities and Zelter’s plans for the group. In his letters to Goethe, Zelter reveals his ambitions for the Sing-Akademie, relates his frustrations over the financial situation of the group, and offers self-evaluation of performances that shed light on both Zelter’s expectations of the chorus and his perception of their role in Berlin’s cultural life.

Along with the everyday and abstract, Goethe and Zelter show a keen interest in historical models of music. This interest is hardly surprising, as their dialogue begins around the same time that the concept of musical works began to gain prominence. Lydia Goehr dates the shift away from music as a practical product to an artistic work, which might be expected to endure, to around 1800. Certainly, Zelter and Goethe’s interest in older music assumes that these pieces have meaning outside the context in which they originated. However, unlike many early scholars interested in historical models of music, Zelter and Goethe are not primarily interested

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in orchestral or symphonic works. In fact, symphonic works figure in their dialogue in a very limited way; it was choral music and its educational potential that interested Zelter (and by extension Goethe). Zelter encouraged Goethe’s interest in older German vocal music in several ways: essays on its history, descriptions of performances, and scores. The sharing of scores, encouraged by Goethe who frequently requested material for his Hauskapelle, meant that Zelter had a direct practical impact on the choral music Goethe listened to, despite their physical distance. Zelter also sent scores for Goethe’s friend Johann Heinrich Friedrich Schütz, the organist and spa inspector in Berka on the Ilm, who then played selections of the works in historical order.  

This “order” helped Goethe establish links between styles and composers that he would otherwise not have made.

Goethe’s interest in listening to music in chronological order and his appetite for older music, both instrumental and choral, have contributed to scholarly misconceptions about his musicality. Lorraine Byrne Bodley argues that: “the portrayal of Goethe’s musical historicism as an excessive veneration of past musical styles, rather than the desire to challenge contemporary norms in art by asserting the validity of the art of a plurality of people and periods,” has contributed to scholarly neglect of Goethe’s musical engagement. Of course, this is not to suggest that there are no scholarly works on Goethe and music; the limited number of scholarly texts and their evident bias must, however, be emphasised. Among the more dismissive accounts of Goethe’s interest in music are those published in the first half of the twentieth-century, such as: Wilhelm Bode’s Goethe und die Tonkunst, Hermann J. Abert’s

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22 Byrne Bodley, Musical Dialogues, 3.
Goethe und die Musik, and Romain Rolland’s “Goethe’s Interest in Music.” Bode’s two-volume monograph is typical; despite detailing Goethe’s encounters with music, he assumes that Goethe relied on Zelter’s judgement alone and blames Zelter for Goethe’s interest in older music. Other nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholars often follow the same pattern and it is only recently that a more balanced approach to Goethe’s musicality has emerged. Recent studies such as Gerhard von Hofe’s “Gedanke über einer ‘Art Symbolik fürs Ohr’ und seine Begründung im musikästhetischen Dialog mit Zelter,” and Claus Canisius’s “Stranger in a foreign land: Goethe as a scholar in music” offer a fuller understanding by placing Goethe’s musical experience in context and evaluating his expertise based on contemporaneous standards, rather than a modern appreciation of Romantic Lieder. This reassessment of Goethe’s musical knowledge is only the beginning; it has been many years since a monograph on the topic was published and the recent spate of conferences and articles suggests that such a work would be most welcome.

Likewise, scholarly work on the choral canon (and indeed choral music in general) is limited. As mentioned, choral music has long been viewed as the domain of dedicated amateurs, and musicological research on either choral repertoire or choral organizations has been scarce. Recent publications by scholars such as James Garratt and Celia Applegate have introduced the

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framework for a discussion of a German choral canon. While their works focus on Renaissance Italian masters and Bach as a cultural icon respectively, it is unquestionable that they have opened a wider scholarly discussion of the role choral music played in *Volksbildung* in the nineteenth-century. This discussion is long overdue. The stigma of amateurism has relegated investigations of choral music, almost exclusively, to music-education journals, where authors address issues of performance practice and programming suitability. Questions of identity, social purpose, and historicism have, until recently, been ignored.

Of course, this is not to say that specific choral groups do not have monographs devoted to them. As we shall see in chapter 3, the Berlin Sing-Akademie has commissioned a number of histories of itself, which provide varying levels of detail about the organization and its early years. In fact, the earliest such work, Lichtenstein’s *Zur Geschichte der Sing-Akademie in Berlin*, is an invaluable source for membership and rehearsal information. More recent works, such as Eberle’s *200 Jahre Sing-Akademie zu Berlin: “ein Kunstverein für die heilige Musik,”* also offer histories of the association along with chapters on its importance to choral music generally. Valuable as these works are, their bias is notable and they cannot be considered a substitute for wider scholarly research on choral music and choral groups in the period.

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26 It should be noted that eighteenth-century song has also long been plagued by the stigma of amateurism and it is only recently that it has become a subject for serious study. This double bias has made studied of Zelter even more limited.
Research on choral groups and their repertory in the early nineteenth-century is especially important given the larger trend for “historicism” in this period. In a period where music of the past was, for the first time, valued and performed on a regular basis, it is important to contextualize this new fascination with all things past. James Garratt notes that:

Both contemporary and modern commentators have frequently approached the development of this new historical consciousness -- the rise of historicism -- by dividing it into two interacting strands, a method that provides a useful provisional strategy for interpreting the complex and often seemingly contradictory configurations present in the revival of early church music.\(^\text{29}\)

However, dividing early scholars into two camps, most commonly articulated as those who sought to preserve works and those who sought to use those works as models, limits the ways in which historicism can be viewed. Certainly Zelter and Goethe do not fit easily into either of the broad categories. Their historical interest was both antiquarian and pedagogical, and they did not limit their inquiry to works they were familiar with. Their correspondence shows an eager interest in historical music models but does not limit the models to that which can be emulated. Zelter, in particular, shows a curiosity that is often ignored by scholars eager to belittle him as the man “responsible” for Goethe’s dismissal of Schubert.\(^\text{30}\) This curiosity drove Goethe and Zelter to examine choral works well outside the common practice and to introduce these works to their own singing groups for study and performance. An examination of Goethe and Zelter’s choral music activities demonstrates that they were at the leading edge of the creation of a choral music canon; their discussions and repertoire choices represent the conscious creation of a German choral music tradition.


\(^{30}\) Byrne Bodley offers a succinct summary of Goethe’s “rejection” of Schubert: Byrne Bodley, *Musical Dialogues*, 4-5.
Zelter and Goethe’s desire to create a choral repertoire, based on historical models of German vocal music, will be established over five chapters. The first chapter, “Carl Friedrich Zelter: Constructions of his life and work,” will explore the difficulties in establishing a clear portrait of Zelter. Zelter’s three divergent autobiographies will be addressed, with the aim of showing the differences and offering potential explanations for them. The autobiographies will also be compared with two biographies, one published by Georg Schünemann, who worked during the Nazi era, and the other by a modern performer-scholar, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. The authors’ varying agendas will be considered, as will the works’ implications for future scholarship. In sum, the chapter will provide as balanced a biography of Zelter as possible, while acknowledging the difficulties in constructing an unbiased record of his life and achievements.

The second chapter, “Zelter and Goethe’s correspondence: a closer examination,” will examine the theme of “nation” within Zelter and Goethe’s correspondence. To that end, the history of their correspondence will be considered as will both men’s aims for the letters. This examination will clarify Goethe and Zelter’s aim for choral music and its potential within their imagined nation.

The third chapter, “Zelter’s Sing-Akademie: a labour of love,” will offer a history of the Sing-Akademie during Zelter’s tenure. Along with a discussion of repertoire, the chorus’ membership, dues, and rehearsal practices will be examined. Further, the chapter will ask readers to reconsider the performance practice of the Sing-Akademie; the oft-repeated assertion that their performances were private events will be challenged.
The fourth chapter, “Zelter’s Bach: ‘Ich habe dich wieder ans Licht gebracht’,” will detail Zelter and the Sing-Akademie’s Bach repertoire. The group’s library collection, which was returned to Berlin from Kiev in 2001, will be considered, before an examination of Zelter’s personal Bach collection. Further, Zelter’s editing of Bach manuscripts will be considered, with examples of his changes to selected works in the Pölchau collection and the St. Matthew Passion.

The fifth chapter, “The Sing-Akademie’s use of Handel: public and for profit,” examines the role of Handel in the Sing-Akademie’s repertoire. Its almost exclusive use of Handel for fundraising concerts will be considered, as will the audience and aim of the concerts themselves. This chapter will offer a fuller understanding of the public appetite for choral music in Berlin during the period.

Out of these examinations a clear image of Goethe and Zelter’s engagement with choral music will emerge. Their lively discussions about repertoire and performance practice will show their genuine enthusiasm for works both old and new, and their desire for the works to reach a larger audience. Goethe and Zelter’s belief that choral music should act as a cornerstone for education and could shape national consciousness will emerge as one of the strongest themes in their letters. This thesis will provide the first thorough examination of choral music in their correspondence and should offer a starting point for future research into individual works and their reception in the period.
Chapter One

Carl Friedrich Zelter: Constructions of his life and work

He is a man of impeccable character and a skilful and proper composer. At the Sing-Akademie, an institute which, outside of Berlin, does not exist to such a degree of perfection in all of Europe, he has proved that he has the talent to educate and to conduct.\(^1\)

Diplomat and educational reformer Wilhelm von Humboldt endorsed Carl Friedrich Zelter (1758-1832) to the Prussian King, stressing Zelter’s unimpeachable character and his important contributions to the choral community in Europe; however, such contemporaneous acclaim has not translated into widespread modern recognition. Indeed, Zelter remains largely unstudied and underappreciated owing in part to the way that his legacy has been constructed, and in some cases appropriated, in scholarship. In this chapter I will address these various constructions and examine what the authors sought to emphasise or downplay.\(^2\)

This chapter will compare the representations of Zelter by examining three monographs written in three different time periods. The first monograph will be Zelter’s Selbstbiographie, which includes three variant autobiographies which are published as a single unit, where Zelter puts

\(^1\) “Er ist ein Mann von unbescholtenem Charakter und ein geschickter und gründlicher Tonkünstler, und hat an der Sing-Akademie, einem ausser Berlin in ganz Europa in dieser Vollkommenheit nicht existirendem Institute, bewiesen, dass ihn die Gabe zu bilden und zu dirigieren eigen ist.” Slg. Darmst. 2b 1816 (7): Wilhelm Humboldt

forward the version of his life that he hopes posterity will remember.\(^3\) Zelter’s three autobiographies were written over a period of at least 27 years; the first, a short Lebenslauf, is dated 1 November 1793. The second, a much more detailed Selbstbiographie, was finished 1 August 1820 and the third is unfortunately undated, but is generally assumed to have been written last based on its content. All three were transcribed and published in 1931 as part of the Goethe Gesellschaft’s Schriften series; the original documents do not survive, and therefore it is impossible to confirm the series editor’s assertion that the documents were not edited.\(^4\)

The three versions, which offer distinctly different accounts of his childhood and early musical education, are problematic as they put forward three versions of Zelter’s life that must all be considered at least partly factual. The contradictions between the three versions and the reasons Zelter might have altered his account will be explored in detail.

The next will be Georg Schünemann’s Carl Friedrich Zelter, der Begründer der preussischen Musikpflege, published in 1932, which offers a construction of Zelter that emphasises his “German” virtues.\(^5\) Schünemann (1884-1945), a student of Lieder scholar Max Friedländer, completed his doctorate in 1907 and, starting in 1920, taught at the Berlin Hochschule für Musik. His writings focus on Prussian music and music education; he wrote a total of three works about Zelter: Carl Friedrich Zelter, der Begründer der preussischen Musikpflege (1932), Carl Friedrich Zelter, der Mensch und sein Werk (1937), and Die Sing-Akademie zu Berlin 1791–

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\(^4\) The versions presented do, however, have correspondences with versions published in other collections, notably: Wilhelm Rintel, Carl Friedrich Zelter: eine Lebensbeschreibung (Berlin: Janke, 1861). In his introduction, the editor Schottländer notes that Rintel melded together several different autobiographies and cautions his reader that, as a result, the Rintel is incomplete.

\(^5\) Georg Schünemann, Carl Friedrich Zelter der Begründer der Preussischen Musikpflege (Berlin: Max Hesses Verlag, 1932).
1941 (1941). Schünemann was fired in 1933 by the Nazis for potential Marxist leanings but returned to favour shortly thereafter, and from 1934 on acted as the head of the Prussian Library’s music section. Whether or not he was as committed as some other National Socialists, he clearly shows a tendency towards nationalism that is immediately obvious in his 1932 Zelter monograph.

Carl Friedrich Zelter, der Begründer der preussischen Musikpflege, was only the second published biography of Zelter (the first, by G.R. Kruse, appeared in 1915 and was republished in 1931) and although it is not widely available, it remains a source that all later Zelter biographies have drawn from, in part because Schünemann had access to documents which have since been lost, many of which are fully transcribed in his book. The timing of the book is interesting; it seems likely that Schünemann picked his topic at least in part due to the political climate and the anniversary of Zelter’s death. Zelter often wrote about the need for a German voice and stressed that choral singing offered a good education in German musical models, and he also discussed German music in contrast to Italian or French music in his letters to Goethe. His tendency to draw attention to “national” ideas in his letters made him an ideal subject for a biography at a time when the “Germanness” of the subject was crucial. Schünemann’s book focuses largely on Zelter’s role as an innovator and educator, and ignores less-than-flattering

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6 In Pamela Potter’s Most German of the Arts, Schünemann is mentioned as one of the musicologists that followed the Nazi party line closely. He served on numerous committees and actively took part in the exclusion of other musicologists who did not serve the party’s agenda. Pamela Potter, Most German of the Arts (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). See also: Lothar Hoffmann-Erbrecht and Pamela M. Potter. “Schünemann, Georg,” in Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/30917 (accessed October 25, 2008.)

7 G.R. Kruse, Zelter (Leipzig: Philipp Reclam, 1915, 2/1931). The Kruse biography is not examined in this chapter, as it is not widely available and is very limited in terms of content. Kruse includes short sections on several aspects of Zelter’s life and work, including the Sing-Akademie and the Liedertafel. Fully one third of the book (pp. 60-80) is a catalogue of Zelter’s musical works.
descriptions by Zelter’s contemporaries. Schünemann’s characterization of Zelter within the Nationalist framework will be examined in detail.

Finally, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau’s (b. 1925) *Carl Friedrich Zelter und das Berliner Musikleben seiner Zeit: eine Biographie*, published in 1997, will be considered. Fischer-Dieskau is an atypical author for a musicology monograph, in that he is known primarily as a baritone who specialises in Lieder. Since his retirement from singing in 1992 Fischer-Dieskau has remained active as a clinician, conductor and author of many books focusing on Lieder composers in particular. Fischer-Dieskau offers a more balanced assessment then Schünemann and attempts to move past Nazi-era scholarship to offer a “clean” biography. In his attempt to steer away from methodological and ideological minefields, Fischer-Dieskau is thoroughly uncritical and as a result the monograph is characterized by an emphasis on narrative detail.⁸ The analysis of the Zelter, Schünemann, and Fischer-Dieskau monographs will show how Zelter’s biography has been fashioned to suit changing agendas.

In order to facilitate the comparisons between these very different versions, Zelter’s life will be divided into five sections: his early childhood and musical education, his lessons with Fasch, his abrupt career change in the early 1800s from masonry to music, his friendship with Goethe, and his later career in music. In each section, the three principal monographs will be compared to demonstrate how and why their authors accommodated Zelter’s biography to suit their own needs. The Zelter, Schünemann, and Fischer-Dieskau monographs accentuate different parts of Zelter’s career, and as such not every section will include information from all three. Instead,

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the comparisons will be weighted to reflect the individual works’ own biases. Furthermore, the beginning of each section will offer a brief factual account of Zelter’s life in that period, as no English language biography of Zelter exists. This factual account will act as framework for the discussion of the variant sources’ versions. Before jumping into the comparison of the Zelter, Schünemann, and Fischer-Dieskau works, a portrait of Berlin in the late 1700s will be included to show where Zelter and his family fit within Berlin society.

Berlin in the late 1700s was large in terms of geographic area, but remained a comparatively small centre thanks to its population of only approximately 150,000. Although most of Berlin was built after 1685 with the help of civic planners, it still had infrastructure problems. Indeed, as late as 1785 there were reports of overfull sewers even near the Royal Palace. Johann Kaspar Riesbeck, who published a series of letters detailing his travels across Germany in 1783, saw Berlin as provincial despite its size. About Berlin he says:

> It is as big as Paris and Vienna. It is almost one and a half hours from side to side and a good hour top to bottom. Even within this vast circumference there are a lot of gardens and on one side even fields are enclosed. There are not many more than 6,000 houses whereas Paris has nearly 30,000. The drabness of many areas contrasts to the resplendence of the buildings in a strange way. The contrast of the pomp is even more outstanding in view of the state of the townfolk. You stand full of admiration in front of a building built in the ionic style, nicely plastered, with a splendid facade and looking like the residence of a tax farmer or at least one of a duc. Suddenly a window opens on a lower floor, and there a shoemaker sets a newly resoled boot in front of your nose on the window sill to let the polish dry.

Riesbeck’s travelogue offers interesting insights into Berlin during the second half of the eighteenth-century. The Berlin he describes, although physically big, lacks the population density of Paris and still has large tracts of land that have not been developed. His inclusion

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10 Ibid., 242.
of the anecdote about the shoemaker is also revealing; despite the beauty of the buildings, the townspeople are still fairly rugged in his estimation. The shoemaker’s pragmatic approach to his trade reflects the makeup of Berlin in this period, which was dominated by middle-class tradespeople. It was into this trade and commerce-centred provincial city that Carl Friedrich Zelter’s father moved his masonry practice in 1745.\textsuperscript{11}

The Zelters, and other skilled guild members like them, were in an especially favourable position in Berlin in the eighteenth-century. With the expansion of the city came a rise in projects that required their services, which enabled them to become wealthy and to elevate their status. This higher status created a different set of expectations for their children. Rather than simply training for their fathers’ trades, members of the new Weltbürgertum wanted their children to obtain an education outside of their own fields by attending Gymnasium and possibly even university.\textsuperscript{12} Their increasingly cosmopolitan approach encouraged them to found reading societies and publish moralistic newspapers, which carried their worldview to larger audiences.\textsuperscript{13} Salons were also increasingly popular venues for academic discussion. In Berlin, many prominent Jewish women, including two of Felix Mendelssohn’s aunts, held weekly salons where new ideas were debated and new music was performed. Guests with a range of backgrounds were admitted, allowing the upper-middle and mercantile classes to meet with the upper levels of society. The salon of Sara Levy in particular will be discussed in chapter 4, as it had a direct impact on the repertoire Zelter had access to.

\textsuperscript{11} Fischer-Dieskau, 13.
\textsuperscript{13} Roeck, 154.
It was into this rapidly changing society that Carl Friedrich Zelter was born on 11 December 1758 at Münzstrasse 1. He was the fourth and final child and the only son who survived childhood.\textsuperscript{14} Zelter’s childhood and education reveal him to be fairly typical of the increasingly prominent middle-class in Berlin. Despite their background in a trade, which went back at least two generations, his parents extended their children’s education beyond masonry. They had the financial resources to attend concerts and buy instruments for all of their children. The Zelters educated their daughters in the social arts, especially music, with no expectation that they would work outside the home. They hired tutors for their sons and sought to offer an education beyond the trade for which they were destined. Within Berlin society they were part of a mobile group, whose aspirations went beyond their commercial backgrounds.

The Zelters did not educate their children as thoroughly as the children of truly wealthy citizens, such as the Mendelssohns. The tutors hired by the Zelters focused on specific subjects that would serve the Zelter children in their future careers rather than offering a more complete range of subjects. Before the death of his elder brother, the heir apparent to the Zelter masonry company, his mother had hoped Carl would join the clergy. To that end, she hired a series of tutors and focused his home-based education on the Bible and Latin.\textsuperscript{15} However, after the death of his elder brother, it became clear that Carl would have to join the family masonry business in his brother’s place. With his new career in mind, he began to study the sciences and mathematics with the help of a tutor. When the tutor quit in 1762, his parents sent Zelter

\textsuperscript{14} Zelter, 8.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 10.
to study at the Joachimsthaler Gymnasium until he was sixteen. His adjustment to the Gymnasium curriculum was not smooth given the narrow focus of his private tutoring. Indeed, when Zelter went to Gymnasium at fourteen he was so far behind in Latin that he needed remedial lessons. However, his exposure to the more complete curriculum of the Gymnasium allowed Zelter entry into social venues that would otherwise have excluded him, such as Madame Levy’s salon. Carl, unfortunately, did not have the opportunity to attend university. The expectation still existed that at least one son would work in his father’s trade, and at sixteen his father withdrew him from school to begin his apprenticeship. This career decision is recounted in three very different ways in his Autobiographien and it is unclear exactly how Carl felt about the decision at the time.

Zelter’s musical education also began at home. In his early childhood he taught himself to play various instruments, including the piano and violin, and later took violin lessons from his elder sisters’ teachers. At sixteen he began flute lessons, and in that same year he also began to help with the performance of music in church services.\(^{16}\) Interestingly, Zelter, Schünemann, and Fischer-Dieskau offer very different versions of this apparently straight-forward childhood. Most revealing are the three autobiographies, which contradict each other on everything from Zelter’s favourite instrument to the year he began to consider studying music seriously.

In the two later autobiographies, Zelter emphasises his early relationship with music over his more general education with his tutors, narrating at length his childhood experiences with the art and how he came to become a musician. This deliberate emphasis demonstrates how Zelter

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 18.
sought to construct, or adjust, his image through these works, away from masonry and towards music. In his Kurzer Lebenslauf, Zelter describes how he came to be passionate about music:

Up to now I had no great passion for music and at my lessons, in which I was taught by a local organist to play the piano and organ, I showed little concentration or predisposition for the art. In my eighteenth year after recovering from a severe illness, that almost put me in the grave, a great love of music awoke in me. Bisher hatte ich wenig Lust zur Musik, und bei dem Unterricht, den ich durch einen hiesigen Organisten im Klavier und Orgelspielen erhielt, wenig Aufmerksamkeit und Anlage zu dieser Kunst beweisen. Nach einer im achtzehnten Jahre überstandenen schweren Krankheit, die mich beinahe ins Grab legte, erwachte eine grosse Liebe zur Musik in mir...  

This rather touching account, which seems to imply a spiritual redirection towards music while recovering from an illness, is the only mention Zelter makes of music in his youth.

This “oversight” is corrected by degree in the next two autobiographies. In the first, Zelter moves the discussion of music forward from the age of eighteen to ten, when, according to him, he began to show an aptitude for violin and organ:

Regarding music in this dull period, I can only recall that a small violin, which I received for Christmas when I was eight, brought me much joy and occupied me longer than my other toys; I made up my own sort of musical notation and pretended to sight-read it. In Absicht auf Musik kann ich mir aus dieser stumpfen Periode nur erinnern, dass eine kleine Violine welche mir etwa im achten Jahre der Weihnachten brachte, viel Freude gemacht und mich anhaltender beschäftigt hat als andere Kindereien; ich machte mir selber Noten nach meiner Art und tat, als wenn ich darnach spielte.  

While admitting that he recalls little about music from this early period, Zelter does take care to note that his violin was a source of joy, even if he did not play it in an entirely conventional

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17 Zelter, 3.
18 Ibid., 9.
manner. It would not appear from this passage that he received any formal music instruction on the violin during this period, and his readers have to admire Zelter’s industry and independence in his early learning. Further, the additional ten-year period allows Zelter to narrate more detail about his music lessons and his self-directed study.

In the second autobiography, Zelter also narrates his first Italian opera experience at length, providing vivid detail on the 1770 production of Graun’s Phaëton at the Royal Opera in Potsdam, which he attended with his father.\footnote{Rintel notes that Graun’s Phaëton or Fetone was performed in January, 1770, which matches Zelter’s statement that he was eleven or twelve at the time.} The opera apparently made a profound impact on him. What is especially interesting is that it is not the singers who receive the majority of the attention in his account, rather it is the orchestra. Indeed, Zelter states he heard only the orchestra and organ, and that his first exposure to theatre caused him to “schwimm in einem Meere von Freuden” (swim in a sea of joy).\footnote{Zelter., 16.} Here too then Zelter, who was only about twelve at the time, is portrayed as a gifted musician, hearing parts of the performance that would be beyond the average listener. By filling in the details of his early musical experience, Zelter seeks to alter his image; music is no longer an incidental part of his education, but rather something that he long valued and that he was exposed to from an early age.

The second full-length autobiography goes even further in elevating Zelter’s early musical experiences, with Zelter drawing attention to the professional musical endeavours of his youth, specifically the times when he played organ in church, most notably at his eldest sister Luise’s wedding.\footnote{Ibid., 223.} The amount of space dedicated to early experiences with music is also increased.
While music receives only a cursory mention in the *Kurzer Lebenslauf*, the two autobiographies spend a large portion of the first chapters discussing Zelter’s various lessons and his feelings about music. Both set Zelter up as a man with serious training in music, in contrast to the earlier *Kurzer Lebenslauf*. It is difficult to determine which of the accounts is the most truthful. Indeed, the variations create doubt that any one of the versions offers a completely accurate portrait of Zelter’s early education. To some extent, the intended audience of the autobiographies could explain the discrepancies. The *Kurzer Lebenslauf* seems to have been written almost as an introductory text, or in modern terms a program note biography, while the two full-length biographies seem to have been intended for publication.

Despite the problems with the variations in the three accounts, they offer a clearer picture of Zelter’s early education than either of the later two monographs. Georg Schünemann’s *Carl Friedrich Zelter, der Begründer der preussischen Musikpflege* does not even include a section on Zelter’s early education. This omission is curious, given the staggering detail Schünemann provides on other subjects, such as Zelter’s writings on educational reform, or his repertoire choices. It is likely that Schünemann had access to the three autobiographies, since they were published in the same period and he had access to the archives in Berlin. The gap then cannot be from lack of information. Perhaps Schünemann preferred to begin his monograph with a more concrete account of Zelter’s musical education, since he begins his biography with Zelter’s lessons with Fasch. Unlike the earlier lessons, Zelter’s association with Fasch can be substantiated with outside sources and forms the basis of Zelter’s serious music education; the association will be covered at length in the next section.
The final monograph by Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau does include some passing mention of Zelter’s early education. Indeed, Fischer-Dieskau devotes a chapter to the question of Zelter’s dual career. The chapter, titled “Musiker oder Handwerker,” is largely a biographical account of Zelter’s childhood and adolescence. However, his version of events is extremely incomplete. Fischer-Dieskau does not mention the three variants of Zelter’s autobiography; instead he appears to have chosen to merge the second and third autobiographies without reference to how or why he is combining them. He includes stories of Zelter sneaking off to music lessons and beginning to love music at the age of eight as part of his version of Zelter’s musical education. He does not make it clear that three different versions of events exist; rather he presents his “condensed” version as factual truth.

Some of the anecdotes he includes are easy to identify, notably Zelter’s account of the end of the Seven Years War, which is taken from the third autobiography:

‘The new hope of the Hubertusburger peace,’ writes Zelter in his Lebensrückblick ‘especially animated our house, in that the city of Berlin distinguished itself through devotion to the person of the King [...]. The unexpected peace, through which the King appeared strangely justified, was also a triumph for my father.’

‘Die neue Hoffnung des Hubertusburger Friedens’ schrieb Zelter in seinem Lebensrückblick, ‘beförderte besonders unser Haus, indes die Stadt Berlin sich auszeichnete durch Anhänglichkeit an die Person des Königs [...]. Der unerwartete Friede, wodurch der König, sonderbar gerechtfertigt erschien, war zugleich ein Triumph für meinen Vater...’

This account, which in Zelter’s autobiography serves to show Zelter’s family as ardent loyalists and supporters of the Prussian king, seems an odd choice for Fischer-Dieskau. Its inclusion in Zelter’s autobiography is odd in and of itself, as it is unlikely that Zelter remembered the outcome of the war or his parents’ opinions on it in any detail, given that he was five when it

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22 Fischer-Dieskau, 17.
23 Ibid., 14.
ended. While for Zelter showing his family as Prussian patriots may have served a purpose, given his reliance on the continued patronage of the royal family when the autobiography was written, Fischer-Dieskau’s motives are more obscure. Given that there has never been a question of Zelter’s loyalty to the Prussian monarchy, the reader is left to assume that Fischer-Dieskau included the passage only so that he could mention Goethe’s views on war, which he does at the end of the paragraph. That Zelter and Goethe were not communicating when the anecdote occurred does not deter Fischer-Dieskau from creating the link, tangential as it is. Here as elsewhere, Fischer-Dieskau has included a rather sentimental excerpt that does little besides give him an opportunity to draw Goethe back into his narrative.

Fischer-Dieskau’s description of Zelter’s discovery of a love for music is equally sentimental, if less obscure within the narrative:

His love of music awoke when, as an eight year old, he received a small violin for Christmas, which he sawed away at intently. He invented his own form of musical notation and pretended to sight-read.

Die Liebe zur Musik erwachte, als der Achtjährige zu Weihnachten eine kleine Geige bekam, auf der er intensive kratzte. Nach seiner Art erfand er sich selbst Noten und tat so, als spielte er danach.  

This account is drawn almost literally from the second autobiography (notably without a citation). Again, Fischer-Dieskau does not point out the differences between this and the versions in the other autobiographies, rather he picks and chooses the narrative that appeals most to his constructed image of Zelter.

None of the three principal monographs offers a complete version of Zelter’s early education. The three autobiographies vary too widely for any one to be understood as completely truthful. Schünemann chooses to avoid the problem of determining which of the autobiographies is

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24 Ibid.
most accurate by not mentioning the early lessons at all. Worse still is Fischer-Dieskau, who
picks and chooses parts of the autobiographies to suit his needs with not so much as a citation.
A similar pattern will emerge in the analysis of the representations of Zelter’s studies with
Fasch.

Before he began his studies with Fasch, however, Zelter had to achieve professional
independence. While Zelter continued to explore music in an amateur capacity, his masonry
education was progressing quickly. On 1 December 1783 Zelter was named a master mason,
having completed his work on the Schlesisches Tor of Berlin. His father made him a partner in
the family business, which was large, prosperous, and employed approximately 250 labourers.
As a professional man, Zelter was now free to pursue more of his own interests, and he began
to take lessons with court musicians Johann Philipp Kirnberger and Carl Friedrich Christian
Fasch in 1783. Zelter spent much of his free time analyzing scores, composing, and
performing, both in church and with a small orchestra. The compositional models he mentions
studying in his Kurzer Lebenslauf are important, because they serve to reinforce his later
expertise:

My models, Bach and Hasse, were my gods; to them I prayed, for them I worked...

Meine Modelle, Bach und Hasse, waren meine Gottheit; zu diesen betete ich, für diese arbeitete ich...

25 Ibid., 30.
27 Kirnberger also instructed Princess Anna Amalia and members of the Mendelssohn family, including Sara Levy. This is relevant, as Kirnberger is believed to have studied with J.S. Bach and was responsible for the Anna Amalia library collection. Howard Serwer, "Kirnberger, Johann Philipp," in Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/subscriber/article/grove/music/15061 (accessed February 20, 2011).
28 Ibid., 4. For more on Hasse, see pp.83-84 below.
This passage takes on more meaning given Zelter’s later reputation as an expert on both composers; indeed he presented lectures on them and was given the responsibility of authenticating scores, as we shall see in chapter 4.\textsuperscript{29} Zelter also participated in orchestra concerts. The orchestra, Sebaldts Liebhaberorchester, which was based in Potsdam, was a group of amateurs whose repertoire ranged from contemporary masters such as Mozart to their own compositions.\textsuperscript{30}

The three autobiographies all dedicate a (proportionately) large amount of space to Zelter’s later musical education, particularly his studies with Carl Friedrich Christian Fasch (1736-1800). Fasch, who was a harpsichordist at the Royal Court, took on pupils to supplement his income, which had been reduced during the Seven Years’ War and the Bavarian War of Succession.\textsuperscript{31} Fasch is primarily remembered for stimulating the revival of choral singing in Germany, through the foundation of the Berlin Sing-Akademie in 1791. Zelter, who was one of Fasch’s last pupils, had a very close relationship with his mentor, and published his biography in 1801.\textsuperscript{32}

It is understandable then that Zelter gives Fasch a prominent place in his autobiographies. In the first account, Fasch is given a fatherly role:

\begin{quote}
His refined critical spirit, his very experienced sharp eyes, his honest, candid, and proper Sein feiner kritischer Geist, sein scharfes, durch vieljährigen Unterricht geübtes Auge, sein
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{29} A copy of one of the lectures can be found appended to Mus ms Bach P124 (which is a score of BWV 161, \textit{Komm du süsse Todesstunde}.) Zelter drew his material for these lectures from his close study of Bach scores, many of which were part of his private collection. Zelter’s private Bach collection and the Sing-Akademie’s Bach collection will be discussed at length in chapter 4. The collections are large and have complicated histories. As they directly reflect the repertoire choices Zelter made as director of the Sing-Akademie, the discussion of them is best suited to the later chapter.
\textsuperscript{30} Zelter, 105.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
criticism, his rare and temperate praise and the fatherly love I received from this noble man, which was of unspeakable value to me...

redlicher, freimütiger und anständiger Tadel, sein seltenes und mässiges Lob und die mir unaussprechlich werte väterliche Liebe, die dieser edle Mann mir geschenkt hat...  

This version, which was written while Zelter was still a student of Fasch, emphasises his teacher’s encouragement and points towards his improvement under Fasch’s tutelage, by describing the change in Zelter’s compositional output from small variations and keyboard sonatas, to the cantata he composed for the death of King Frederick II.  

The cantata, which takes on a mythical quality in the larger autobiographies as the work which partly reconciled Zelter’s father to his pursuit of music, is mentioned here in a more concrete way, as the first example of the impact of Fasch’s emphasis of chorales and fugues on Zelter’s composition.

In the 1820 autobiography Zelter begins his extended section on Fasch with a description of his audition to study with Fasch. At the audition Fasch examined two of Zelter’s works to determine if he would be willing to teach him. The mention of “auditioning” both shows that Zelter had already acquired some degree of compositional skill, and makes it clear that Fasch was a teacher who was selective in his students. In this version, Zelter also highlights his dedication to music (and Fasch) by recounting his walks to Potsdam to study with Fasch during the summer months. Zelter describes leaving his home at three in the morning to arrive at Fasch’s between eight and nine, where he would study until just before noon.  

Zelter also reveals that he hid his “other” profession from Fasch:

Fasch, who did not know of my other...  

Fasch, der von meinem jessigen Berufe nichts

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33 Zelter, 5.
34 Ibid., 6.
35 Ibid., 128.
36 Ibid., 143.
profession, thought that I was doing business in Potsdam; I never said anything to the contrary, when it came up, and [he] liked seeing me because I made progress and he had more leisure there than in Berlin. [...] He did not know that I made the trip there and back on foot in a single day and that at night I was back at my construction site.

In fact, Zelter was deceiving all sides, since he also hid his arduous journeys to Potsdam from his parents. The detailed account of his treks to Fasch’s home in Potsdam serves to remind the reader of Zelter’s passion for music and the lengths to which he went to acquire expertise despite his family’s objections.

The final autobiography is slightly less glowing about Fasch, this time saying that despite accepting Zelter based on merit, Fasch did not see him as a real student, but rather as a “Dilettant.” Zelter later clarifies that Fasch changed his mind after seeing how sincere, serious, and hard-working Zelter was. This passage allows Zelter to address his critics indirectly; upon learning that Fasch became convinced of Zelter’s seriousness, the reader may also be convinced to re-evaluate Zelter. Overall, the version of Fasch as a powerful influence and important teacher that Zelter puts forward in his autobiographies is reflected in his correspondence. In 1819 Zelter marked the anniversary of Fasch’s death in his letter to Goethe:

Today – 3 August is the anniversary of the death of my noble Fasch. Having been of one mind with him for many years in life, I am delighted to be able to say, after a period of 19 years, ‘Look, old friend and master, your work still lives! It is encouraged, it encourages others, they


37 Ibid.
38 Zelter, 242.
This passage, which reinforces Zelter’s continued admiration and appreciation for Fasch, further supports Zelter’s loving descriptions of Fasch (and his teaching) in his autobiographies. Overall, the three versions, which each strive to put forward a music-focused account of Zelter, offer three different descriptions of his musical education, with each offering more remembered detail than the last. This escalating of musical experience is indicative of a larger trend in the three accounts; Zelter is redirecting attention towards the parts of his childhood that he thinks best support his eventual career shift.

Schünemann, at least, agreed with Zelter that his studies with Fasch were important. Indeed, as already discussed, Schünemann makes no reference to Zelter having any musical education prior to his lessons with Fasch. What he does say about Fasch does not, however, include any specifics about Zelter’s musical training. Schünemann makes interesting use of Fasch in his introduction:

Moving, how Zelter’s loyalty [to Fasch] continued after his death; how Zelter celebrated him; how he remembered him; how he clung to his works, as with his enthusiasm for the 16-voice mass, how he presented [Fasch’s] life and works in a masterly fashion; how [Zelter] always steadied himself with the help of his old teacher’s example...

Rührend, wie Zelter ihm die Treue übers Grab hinaus hält, wie er ihn feiert, an ihn erinnert, von seiner 16 stimmigen Messe schwärmt, an seinen Arbeiten festhält, sein Leben und Schaffen in meisterhafter Form darstellt, wie er sich immer wieder an seinem alten Lehrer aufrichtet...

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39 Lorraine Byrne Bodley, Goethe and Zelter: Musical Dialogues (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 260.
40 Z to G, 20 July – 9 August 1819.
41 Schünemann, 6.
Despite declaring Zelter a tireless advocate of his old teacher, and suggesting that Zelter drew on Fasch’s memory as a constant source of inspiration and guidance, Schünemann does not give any details about Zelter’s lessons with Fasch. Instead, he focuses on the friendship that Zelter had with Fasch, quoting from Zelter’s Fasch biography at length. Beyond making it clear that the two had a close relationship that continued to influence Zelter throughout his career, Schünemann does not tell his readers either how long Zelter studied with Fasch, or how their student-teacher relationship began. It seems that Fasch is only mentioned to legitimize Zelter’s leadership of the Sing-Akademie and possibly to show off Zelter’s only published monograph. Unlike Zelter’s own accounts, where Fasch is used to show his formal music credentials, Schünemann’s biography assumes that the reader does not require any reassurance of Zelter’s mastery of music.

Fischer-Dieskau, on the other hand, offers his readers a (seemingly) complete summary of Zelter’s studies with Fasch, including a description of his journeys to Potsdam:

... he left home at three in the morning, arrived at Fasch’s between eight and nine o’clock, received his lesson, and hiked back home, in order to be back at the construction site in the evening.

... brach er morgens um drei Uhr auf, kam zwischen acht und neun Uhr bei Fasch an, erhielt seine Stunde und wanderte wieder zurück, um abends wieder am Bau sein.

Fischer-Dieskau’s account of Zelter’s travels to Potsdam do not use the same sentimental language as Zelter’s own, but his inclusion of these details does draw his reader’s attention to how serious Zelter was about his studies. After all, a student with less devotion would surely not have walked so far, at such great inconvenience.

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42 Ibid., 9.
43 Fischer-Dieskau, 28
Fischer-Dieskau also offers his readers details about what Fasch included in his curriculum:

He reminded his students all the more emphatically to study the old masters, to make an effort on counterpoint and thorough bass, in short, to become good musical craftsmen.

Um so eindringlicher ermahnte er seinen Schüler, alte Meister zu studieren, sich um Kontrapunkt und Generalbass zu bemühen, eben ein guter Musikhandwerker zu werden.\(^{44}\)

As usual, Fischer-Dieskau does not offer any citations, making it unclear which (if any) of the autobiographies he is drawing from. Further, given Fischer-Dieskau’s tendency to include tangential details, it seems odd that he does not list which old masters Fasch included in his curriculum, especially as Zelter himself mentions them by name in his second autobiography.

After comparing the Zelter, Schünemann, and Fischer-Dieskau accounts it is clear that they value Fasch’s role in Zelter’s musical training to different degrees. Zelter himself includes an astounding amount of ever-increasing detail in his two full-length autobiographies, taking care to demonstrate to his audience that he is professionally trained as a musician. Schünemann chooses to gloss over Zelter’s lessons with Fasch and Zelter’s musical education in general, with the assumption that his readers are already convinced of Zelter’s competence. Fischer-Dieskau includes some details about Zelter’s studies with Fasch, but not nearly as many as might be expected, given his eager inclusion of other (seemingly trivial) details. In the end, it is only Zelter who sees his lessons with Fasch as central to his life. This is revealing; even though the specifics are augmented over the three accounts, it is clear that for Zelter Fasch’s mentoring was incredibly important and served as a turning point in his life.

\(^{44}\) Ibid., 29.
As Zelter began to pursue music more seriously his professional and personal lives were progressing rapidly. Zelter continued to live at home, caring for his sick mother after the death of his father in January, 1787. In 1787, Zelter married his first wife, widow Sophie Eleonora, and began his family, which included three of her children and, eventually, another seven that she bore Zelter. Little is known about Sophie, other than that she died in childbirth 24 October 1795. One year later he married Julie Pappritz (1767-1808), who was an alto soloist and founding member of the Sing-Akademie. Julie was formerly a lady-in-waiting at court, and as such came from a different class than Zelter. Despite their differences, the marriage seems to have been a love match. Zelter commissioned paintings of Julie and spoke of her often in his correspondence, while Sophie received little attention. Part of their compatibility came from shared interests, particularly Bach’s choral settings. Zelter especially admired Julie for her renditions of Bach and used her as a point of contrast for other singers in his correspondence with Goethe. Certainly she was a talented musician in her own right, and was likely more thoroughly educated in music than Zelter. She added another two children to Zelter’s large family. Zelter continued to remember her fondly throughout his life, often referring to her in speeches, particularly those about Bach.

Zelter first joined Fasch’s Sing-Akademie, where he met Julie Pappritz, in 1791 as a tenor; the group, which was at that time meeting only in the spring and summer, was still organized fairly

\[\text{Sigrid Holtzmann, } \text{Carl Friedrich Zelter im Spiegel seines Briefwechsels mit Goethe (Weimar: Gustav Kiepenheuer Verlag, 1957), 265.}\]
\[\text{Zelter had a marble bust of Julie sculpted and placed in the Sing-Akademie room on 13 October 1807. Byrne Bodley, 99. As late as 1823 Zelter recalled Julie fondly in his letters: “Since [her arrival] I have taken out old arias, which I once composed in joy and in sorrow for my heavenly Julia...” Byrne Bodley, 300.}\]
informally.\(^\text{47}\) Indeed, it was not until two years later that the group was formally named the Sing-Akademie and began to hold more regular rehearsals at the Akademie der Künste. Zelter began to act as assistant director in 1794, when he took over rehearsals that Fasch was too ill to direct.\(^\text{48}\) In the same year, the Sing-Akademie presented its first “public” Auditorium, which reportedly featured Bach motets, an excerpt from *Judas Maccabäus*, and selections by the Graun brothers.\(^\text{49}\) Zelter’s life began to be increasingly dominated by music around the same time. When Fasch died on 4 August 1800, Zelter, who was leading most rehearsals, was his obvious successor. From 1800 on, Zelter programmed progressively larger excerpts, notably many of the choruses from Handel’s *Messiah* and *Alexanderfest*. By 1808 Zelter had founded the *Ripienschule*, to act as an orchestra when the Sing-Akademie was performing large works.\(^\text{50}\)

The membership of the Sing-Akademie continued to grow and in March of 1804 Zelter wrote to Goethe:

The Sing-Akademie is now two hundred members strong and is at the same time becoming an infinitely heavy burden, as I have to work for it day and night.  

Diese Sing-Akademie ist jetzt zwey hundert Personen stark und wird mir nebenher zu einer unendlich schweren Last, weil ich Tag und Nacht dafür arbeiten muss.\(^\text{51}\)

Zelter’s schedule was increasingly dominated by the group’s many rehearsals, along with the demands of his other musical groups and private students. As we shall see in chapter 3, by the end of Zelter’s tenure the Sing-Akademie boasted so many members that it had a training choir,

\(^{47}\) Georg Schünemann, *Die Sing-Akademie zu Berlin 1791-1941* (Regensburg: Gustav Bosse Verlag, 1941), 16.

\(^{48}\) Ibid.

\(^{49}\) Ibid., 19. For more information on the first Auditorium, see chapter 3.

\(^{50}\) The Ripienschule was an amateur instrumental ensemble that rehearsed once each week. In addition to learning and performing the orchestral parts for the Sing-Akademie’s repertoire, they also studied chamber music and older orchestral works for their own enjoyment. For more information, see chapter 3.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 32
where prospective “full” members often spent years waiting for a berth in the more advanced choir.

Part of the appeal of the Sing-Akademie was likely Zelter’s reputation as a close friend of Goethe. Zelter and Goethe’s correspondence began on 11 August 1799 at the instigation of composer Johann Friedrich Reichardt, who brought some of Zelter’s settings of Goethe to the poet’s attention. The first letters are very formal, but as the pair began to exchange ideas the dialogue became increasingly familiar. Zelter first visited Goethe in Weimar in February of 1802 and although Goethe was never able to visit Berlin, Zelter continued to visit Goethe regularly, eventually corresponding with several of Goethe’s friends, notably Schiller. In 1812, after the suicide of Zelter’s stepson, with whom Goethe was acquainted, Goethe began to address Zelter with the personal pronoun “du”, making Zelter one of the few people for whom Goethe reserved this familiarity after his university days. The friendship between Goethe and Zelter deserves a great deal more analysis and will be addressed more completely in chapter 2.

None of Zelter’s three autobiographies mentions his relationship with Goethe, which is hardly surprising given that the final version only narrates up to his second marriage. Schünemann, however, does make reference to Zelter’s friendship with Goethe regularly throughout his book. Oddly, he does not make any mention of how Zelter and Goethe’s friendship developed, but chooses instead to drop Goethe’s name periodically when referring to letters exchanged or ideas the pair shared. For example, Schünemann uses Goethe to bolster Zelter’s own opinions:

\[
\text{Goethe is also of the opinion “that” Auch Goethe ist der Meinung, ‘dass}
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52 Goethe’s published, Unger, also brought Zelter’s settings to Goethe’s attention.
53 Byrne Bodley includes an appendix which lists the dates and locations of each of their visits. Byrne Bodley, *Musical Dialogues*, Appendix.
music can be improved first and foremost through church singing, and that in every sense there cannot be anything more desirable for a government itself than simultaneously fostering an art form and more sublime feelings, and purifying the sources of a religion that is appropriate for the educated and uneducated alike.”

der Musik zuerst und allein durch den Kirchengesang zu helfen sei und dass für ein Gouvernement selbst in jedem Sinne nichts wünschenswerter sein müsste, als zugleich eine Kunst und höhere Gefühle zu nähren und die Quellen einer Religion zu reinigen, die dem Gebildeten und Ungebildeten gleich gemäss ist.54

This passage, which follows directly after Schünemann’s transcription of Zelter’s second (lost) Denkschrift on church music reform, reminds Schünemann’s reader that Zelter was not alone in his quest. In fact, Schünemann includes many excerpts of exchanges between Goethe and Zelter in his analysis of Zelter’s writings. By showing Goethe’s support for Zelter, Schünemann increases Zelter’s profile. Goethe, after all, enjoyed enormous popularity in Nazi Germany, where he was championed as a cultural icon. By actively seeking to remind his readers of Zelter and Goethe’s close friendship, Schünemann extends Goethe’s cultural status to Zelter.

Fischer-Dieskau also devotes a significant portion of his monograph to the Zelter/Goethe relationship, although he does it much differently than Schünemann. Rather than spreading out the references to their correspondence, he dedicates a chapter to Goethe and Zelter’s relationship. The chapter focuses on their mutual concerns, including the many suggested projects that, sadly, never came to completion. The chapter outlines the plans for their Reformation cantata, as well as a cantata to commemorate Schiller’s death. Here, as elsewhere, Fischer-Dieskau uses the source evidence uncritically, assuming that none of his informants have their own agendas. For example, he relates the initial communication

54 Schünemann, 21
between Goethe and Zelter and includes examples of the character references Goethe solicited for Zelter from other acquaintances. Fischer-Dieskau does not consider, however, the motivations of these informants, nor does he indicate how they knew Zelter.\textsuperscript{55} Also frustrating for his readers is his continued lack of citations, which makes it very difficult to determine from where he is drawing his material, and nearly impossible to check the accuracy of his sources.

Also unlike Schünemann, Fischer-Dieskau provides details on Zelter’s settings of Goethe’s poems:

Goethe’s “Um Mitternacht” from 1818, which had just been published, was inserted in a letter to Zelter dated 16 February 1818 with the note: “And so now only a few quick prayers, as branches of my paradise! I hope you want to infuse them with your passionate element....” Zelter began to compose right away and created something outstanding.

Goethes ‘Um Mitternacht’ von 1818, das gerade zum Druck gelangt war, lag einem Brief vom 16. Februar 1818 an Zelter bei: ‘Daher nun einige Stossgebete, als Zweige meines Paradieses! Magst Du sie mit Deinem heissen Elemente infundieren....’ Zelter wartete keinen Moment mit der Komposition und brachte etwas Besonderes zustande.\textsuperscript{56}

This passage serves to show the creative exchange between Goethe and Zelter; poems are sent as quickly as possible, with the hope that Zelter will set them to music, and Zelter, in turn, is eager to exercise his musical gift. Of course, this passage is selected not only to show the pair’s shared enthusiasm, but also to allow Fischer-Dieskau to offer critical commentary on the Lied itself. Fischer-Dieskau also provides, uncited, details about Zelter’s reception of Goethe settings by other composers. Were he to give his sources, this would be a very helpful chapter, given that much of this information is difficult to find. In addition, Fischer-Dieskau includes a helpful catalogue of Zelter’s Lieder.

\textsuperscript{55} Fischer-Dieskau, 50.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 81.
Here again, the three principal monographs make very different use of the information they include. Zelter offers us no details, as his autobiographies do not extend past his second marriage; it seems likely that Zelter did not include information about his relationship with Goethe because he considered it to be so well documented in the correspondence itself. Schünemann takes care to highlight Goethe’s endorsement of Zelter’s ideas, thereby bolstering Zelter’s reputation, without offering any specifics about their friendship. Fischer-Dieskau attempts to include a complete history of Zelter and Goethe’s relationship, including their shared artistic endeavours. Here, as elsewhere, he does not provide enough evidence to make his points convincing.

The next section of Zelter’s biography is perhaps the most interesting. All three monographs approach Zelter’s career change from masonry to music differently. The autobiographies in particular offer three wildly contrasting accounts. Zelter’s career shift receives a great deal of attention in the three autobiographical accounts; all feature long explanations of why Zelter became a mason in the first place, given his (newly clarified) early aptitude for music. Zelter’s father, as the person responsible for his career choice, plays an interesting role in the three versions. In the first, Zelter explains that he chose to become a mason, since he did not have any specific passion and it made sense for him to follow in his father’s footsteps. This explanation, which is likely closest to the truth, makes Zelter’s career choice a practical rather than a personal decision. Since the Kurzer Lebenslauf was written in 1793, Zelter does not rail against his profession, which he is still practicing.

\[57\] Zelter, 3.
The 1820 autobiography has a much less straightforward account of Zelter’s decision to join his father’s company. In this version, Zelter fights against parental opposition to continue his pursuit of music; his father is portrayed as adamantly opposed to music as a profession:

My father spoke to me very earnestly: he wanted to have me learn music to give me a constructive outlet for my leisure hours. To be constantly playing music, and thinking of nothing else, would be just as strange as wanting to constantly rest or sleep.

Mein Vater sprach mir sehr ernsthaft zu: Er habe mich die Musik lernen lassen wollen, um mir ein bildendes Medium in Stunden der Ruhe zu geben. Immer zu musizieren und an alles andere gar nicht zu denken würde ebenso sonderbar sein, als wenn ich immer ruhen, immer schlafen wolle.  

This passage reinforces the image of Georg Zelter from earlier in the autobiography; while he did not support music as a profession, or see the merit in Zelter pursuing a higher level of education in it, he considered music a pleasurable pastime. Indeed, it is Georg who took young Zelter to his first music performances. Carl Zelter is demonstrating his father’s emphatic disapproval of music as a profession. Earlier in the autobiography, Zelter describes his parents’ reactions to his desire to continue to study music:

My father set himself very seriously against me and my mother dissolved into tears.

Mein Vater zeigte sich sehr ernsthaft gegen mich, und meine Mutter schwamm in Tränen.

Here then, the normally staid Zelter is acting rebellious, hiding his journeys to Potsdam to study with Fasch and studying scores in secret. Eventually a compromise is reached, wherein Zelter may continue to study music provided it is only for an hour a day and it does not disrupt his

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58 Ibid., 45.
60 Ibid., 23.
masonry apprenticeship.\textsuperscript{61} In this passage Zelter is, again, seeking to make music a central part of his life story, and showing the reader that it is something to which he has a passionate attachment. This passion realigns for his audience the image of Zelter as a traditional and conservative man, which developed in part because of A.B. Marx’s repeated attacks on Zelter for his perceived rejection of Beethoven.\textsuperscript{62}

Zelter’s own attitude towards masonry is also spelled out:

I became a mason, as I was supposed to, although it did not please me. \textit{doch zu einem Maurer, der ich doch werden sollte, hatte ich wenig Lust.} \textsuperscript{63}

Here then, Zelter is not ambivalent as in the first \textit{Lebenslauf}; instead he stresses that the choice of masonry was made for him, despite his own wishes. By showing his youth as somewhat reckless, Zelter urges his readers to see him as an artist in the Romantic model something he furthers by discussing his \textit{Sehnsucht} for Italy at length.\textsuperscript{64}

The third version includes a longer account of Zelter’s masonry training, including the kindness of his teacher in making corrections.\textsuperscript{65} The primary difference in this autobiography is that Zelter does not pit masonry and music against one another. Rather, he seeks to show how they have enhanced his understanding of each other. He even has kind words about his masonry teacher:

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 46.
\textsuperscript{62} In fact, Zelter was acquainted with Beethoven, who visited the Sing-Akademie twice in June of 1796. Music journalist and theorist A.B. Marx criticised Zelter for rejecting Beethoven’s choral works. Despite this supposed rejection, Zelter and Beethoven corresponded quite cordially. Zelter, however, did not take up Beethoven’s offer to subscribe to the publication of the \textit{Missa Solemnis}, which Beethoven claimed could be sung \textit{a capella}. Instead he suggested Beethoven compose something on a smaller scale which would accommodate amateurs and a small chorus of professional singers. Martin Blummer, \textit{Geschichte der Sing-Akademie zu Berlin} (Berlin: Horn und Raasch, 1891), 57.
\textsuperscript{63} Zelter, 10.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 71.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 223.
Lehmer [Zelter’s masonry teacher] was, however, also a musician and knew something about it... Building and music were for him inseparable things.

Lehmer war aber auch ein Musikus und wusste sich etwas damit... Bauen und Musik waren ihm unzertrennliche Dinge.  

This passage, which suggests that his teacher was likewise interested in music, reinforces the links between Zelter’s two arts. The shift towards mutual appreciation may be partly accounted for by Goethe’s outspoken support of Zelter’s dual professions, which he believed made Zelter a better musician. Gone too, from this account, is the overbearing father, who is replaced with a bemused, but largely supportive one.

That the three versions offer such different perspectives on masonry is interesting, as they reveal how Zelter felt at the time each was written. When he is still largely a musical amateur, masonry is simply a practical choice; when he is in the prime of his musical career and constantly striving for more recognition, he portrays masonry as a choice that was thrust upon him against his will; later in life, when it is clear, at least to him, that his status as a professional musician is assured, he is more sanguine about masonry, looking at the way it has enhanced his appreciation of music. These variant constructions show just how fluid Zelter’s self-image was during the composition of the three autobiographies and remind his (modern) readers that all the elements of his life might have been likewise emphasised to suit a mood.

While Zelter includes masonry and his relationship to it in each of his autobiographies, Schünemann avoids the subject all together. In fact, he does not mention Zelter’s earlier

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66 Ibid., 224.
67 Kippenberg, 5.
profession once in the length of the monograph. Even when he recounts Zelter’s acceptance of Humboldt’s professorship of music, he does not make it clear that Zelter had been working in another field prior to the appointment. Schünemann’s exclusion of masonry is puzzling, given that Zelter’s dual career is one of the things most often mentioned by his other biographers. Surely his readers would have known that his portrait of Zelter was incomplete and questioned his agenda. Perhaps Schünemann hoped that by avoiding the topic of Zelter’s “other” profession, he would be able to focus on Zelter’s musical accomplishments in more detail. Certainly, he includes far more transcriptions of documents (including Tagebücher, Protokole Bücher, and Denkschriften) than any other biographer.

Fischer-Dieskau who, as has already been mentioned, includes a chapter dedicated to the question of Zelter’s dual career, also skirts the issue. Indeed, despite the title of the chapter “Musician or Mason?”, little is said about Zelter’s masonry training other than a final paragraph that suggests that Zelter’s father was overly eager for Zelter to become a mason.

In the spring of 1783 George Zelter presented his son, as a grand gesture, a splendidly wrought yardstick: on the next day Carl was supposed to appear before the board and confirm his intention to become a master mason. Although he was of the opinion that his father was overrating his talent, Carl obeyed.

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68 This omission might be partly due to the Nazi party’s position on freemasonry; although masons and freemasons were (and are) entirely different groups, it is possible that Schünemann was concerned his readers would confuse the two. This would have been detrimental to Zelter as the freemasons were persecuted under the Nazis and Hitler, who knew little about freemasonry, condemned them as intellectuals who sought to destroy Germany’s “Germanness.” Albert G. Mackey and H.L. Haywood, The Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry vol. 3 (New York: Kessinger Publishing, reprinted 2003), 1402.

69 Schünemann, 33.

70 Fischer-Dieskau, 30.
This version of events, which shows that Zelter had reservations about this career path but chose to obey his father’s wishes, is clearly drawn from Zelter’s autobiographies. Fischer-Dieskau effectively melds the three versions and chooses to show both Zelter’s natural reluctance and his sense of familial responsibility. Unfortunately, Fischer-Dieskau does not question the role of Zelter’s father or the veracity of Zelter’s statements. Again, he does not address the contradictions of the three versions of the autobiographies and, as a result, he makes his reader believe that Zelter’s life was far more straightforward than the autobiographies (and the questions they raise) reveal. By omitting the majority of Zelter’s life outside of music, Fischer-Dieskau reconstructs Zelter’s image as a man divided between two professional worlds into that of a musician.

It was the grant of an honorarium in 1809 that allowed him to formally change careers. The honorarium, which he informed his sister paid 600 thalers a year, enabled Zelter to give up masonry and his eldest son took over the family business.\(^1\) Ten years later Zelter was appointed to oversee all school and church music in the Prussian empire. As part of this appointment Zelter was required to adjudicate all music exams and to review the qualifications of all church and school music directors. While he had little real control over repertoire or membership, Zelter did write several articles and essays that were intended to provide guidelines for the choirs.\(^2\) It is unclear what the salary increase for such a large appointment

\(^1\) Zelter also received 400 thalers a year from the Sing-Akademie after Easter 1809. Byrne Bodley, 128.
\(^2\) These Denkschriften are transcribed in Claudia Schröder, Carl Friedrich Zelter und die Akademie: Dokumente und Briefe zur Entstehung der Musik-Selection in der Preussischen Akademie der Kunst, with the exception of the second Denkschrift which only appears in Schünemann’s Carl Friedrich Zelter: der Begründer der Deutschen Musikpflege. Claudia Schröder, Carl Friedrich Zelter und die Akademie: Dokumente und Briefe zur Entstehung der Musik-Selection in der Preussischen Akademie der Kunst (Berlin: Deutschen Akademie der Künste, 1959).
might have been.\textsuperscript{73} However, Zelter embraced his expanded role and founded church music institutes in Königsberg (1814), Breslau (1815), and Berlin (1822). In 1829 he was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Berlin for his work and in 1831 was named a professor at the University (where he had long taught).

None of the three autobiographies mention the Sing-Akademie or Zelter’s later professorships. This is explained in the first purely by the year it was written, but their omission in the two longer versions makes them seem incomplete. The likely explanation is that Zelter sought to put forward, in the two works, the part of his life that was less well-known, and for which there were no alternate sources. The later portion of his life is recounted in detail in his letters with Goethe, which, by 1827, were intended for publication (and indeed they were first gathered for publication by Goethe’s daughter-in-law within a month of Zelter’s death.) Schottländer also notes in his edition that Zelter’s \textit{Tagebuchaufzeichnungen} also provide a record of Zelter’s day to day life and includes transcriptions of the years extant in 1931.\textsuperscript{74} We can assume then that Zelter felt there was no need to cover the parts of his life that were already so vividly described elsewhere; this approach helps explain the enormous detail Zelter provides for his childhood and early adulthood, since they are the focus of the works.

Schünemann, by contrast, focuses almost exclusively on Zelter’s later career, beginning in 1800 when Zelter succeeded Fasch as the director of the Sing-Akademie. While Schünemann’s other monograph on the Sing-Akademie (published in 1941) focuses on the repertoire of the Sing-Akademie and specific performances, here he deals mainly with the administrative side of the

\textsuperscript{73} Zelter had, however, finally received a salary increase of 400 thalers from the State Chancellor in December 1816. Byrnee Bodley, 182.

\textsuperscript{74} Zelter, VI. The years listed are: 1816, 1824, 1828, 1829, and 1831.
group. Schünemann also shows how Zelter used the Sing-Akademie as a platform for reform of school and church music. He includes many examples of Zelter’s involvement with education reform, quoting at length the passages of his *Denkschriften* that compare Italian and German music. The choice of these passages in particular is revealing, as they show Zelter’s attempts at reform in a distinctly nationalistic light. While Zelter certainly wrote often about the contrasts between German and other music, Schünemann is distorting Zelter’s works by overemphasising the patriotic elements. Schünemann takes a similar approach when describing the foundation of the *Liedertafel*:

His motives are first of all always the same: he wants to promote music and the joy of singing.... In any case the deeper and certainly also the driving forces behind the founding were patriotic convictions and loyalty to the monarchy.

Here again his analysis puts forward a version of Zelter’s actions that is driven by politics. While there is no denying that one of the primary purposes of the *Liedertafel* was the performance of patriotic songs, Schünemann stresses the importance of the group beyond what is warranted, given the space he dedicates to Zelter’s other offshoot of the Sing-Akademie, the *Ripienschule*.

Much of the rest of the book is dedicated to Zelter’s attempts at sacred music reform.

Schünemann includes transcriptions of numerous documents that detail Zelter’s various travels to other north German cities, along with his perception of the music establishments there.\(^76\)

The monograph ends with a list of Zelter’s many bureaucratic appointments, roles that include

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\(^75\) Schünemann, 34.

\(^76\) See for example Schünemann, 47-48 which discusses his trip to Königsberg.
head of the music library and director of the church and school music across the Prussian empire. Here again, Schünemann highlights the parts of Zelter’s career that are most in tune with Schünemann’s contemporary values: hard work, efficiency, and dedication. Zelter acts in Schünemann’s works as a model of the best of German musicians; although he was not a prodigy, his hard work and dedication contributed to the advancement of German music.

Fischer-Dieskau, as might be expected, is similar to Schünemann in that he weighs the later part of Zelter’s career very heavily. Also like Schünemann, Fischer-Dieskau does not mention that Zelter was actively practising masonry until his appointment to the music faculty in 1809. Indeed even in the early portion of his monograph when Fischer-Dieskau mentions Zelter’s masonry apprenticeship, he notes that Zelter used his free time to study an oratorio by Hasse and compose a cantata.\textsuperscript{77} The omission of masonry in the section which describes his musical appointment gives the illusion that Zelter worked as a professional musician longer than is actually the case. Again, Fischer-Dieskau is choosing to edit the image he puts forward of Zelter by setting aside the doubts that Zelter himself expresses about his career choices. Neither Schünemann nor Fischer-Dieskau take into account how Zelter saw himself or how his contemporaries viewed him.

Zelter’s life ended in a somewhat dramatic fashion. He died 15 May 1832, just weeks after Goethe. The timing of Zelter’s death led many of his friends to suggest that his death was related to Goethe’s. Lea Mendelssohn, Felix Mendelssohn’s mother, commented in a letter

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 30.
that four doctors were unable to determine what was wrong with Zelter, which made her think that he died of a broken heart over Goethe’s death.\footnote{Sigrid Holtzmann, \textit{Carl Friedrich Zelter im Spiegel seines Briefwechsels mit Goethe} (Weimar: Gustav Kiepenheuer Verlag, 1957), 271.}

While the contrasts in specific sections of the biographies are interesting, perhaps it is the three authors’ general characterisations that say the most about their portrayal of Zelter. Certainly, Zelter himself seems to have a shifting agenda over the course of the three autobiographies. His embellishments and contradictions do not seem to worry him, and modern readers must wonder how he justified the variations to himself. Perhaps the best explanation is that each autobiography was written after a transition in Zelter’s life and therefore reflects his new self-image. The shift across the three versions is extreme, moving from amateur musician to respected professor of music, and the change in Zelter’s tone might be accounted for by his increased status.

Schünemann’s monograph is more difficult to address. Due to the political climate in which he was working, readers must assume that Schünemann had a particular agenda. Certainly, his choice of Zelter as a subject shows that he was sensitive to the new political reality. Perhaps the most compelling evidence of the political agenda is in the passage where he includes contemporary endorsements of Zelter, as a teacher and a conductor. Notably absent from the countless character endorsements are the Mendelssohns. Despite Felix’s conversion to Protestantism, he remained far too Jewish by Nazi standards, and as such, he was gradually expunged from all musicological accounts. This was obviously a problem for scholars working on Zelter, since the Mendelssohns, and Felix in particular, were some of Zelter’s most vocal
advocates, and their patronage was something he valued throughout his life. Felix’s removal from musicological studies meant that Zelter’s most famous and admired pupil could not do him credit. To further complicate matters, Felix Mendelssohn had previously been credited with the Wiederentdeckung of J.S. Bach, thanks to his 1829 performance of the St Matthew Passion. With Felix out of the picture, historians had to reconstruct that fateful performance, and most often that was done by stressing Zelter’s role in the concert. Indeed, in Schünemann’s Die Sing-Akademie zu Berlin 1791-1941 he addresses the “problem” by first discrediting baritone soloist Eduard Devrient’s memories of the event, “Diese ‘Erinnerungen’ von Devrient werden kaum wörtlich zu nehmen sein,” (these memories can scarcely be credited) and then stressing that anything that Felix might have known about Bach was learned from Zelter, and, as such, the credit for the re-awakening should go to Zelter. He also takes away any agency Felix had to make his own creative decisions, arguing that Felix was acting under Zelter’s direction and therefore simply enacting Zelter’s artistic vision. Schünemann ends the monograph by admonishing his readers to thank Zelter for the renaissance of J.S. Bach.

In his history of the Sing-Akademie, Schünemann also devotes long passages to praising Zelter, whom he calls an “eigentlichen Organisator und den Vorkämpfer für eine neue deutsche Chorkultur.” (True organizer and pioneer for a new German choir culture) While the praise is certainly not unexpected, given Schünemann’s earlier work, it does take on a new tone in this monograph, with Schünemann using militaristic language throughout his descriptions of both the organization and Zelter. The allusions are largely passing, such as “Streng hält er sein

79 Georg Schünemann, Die Sing-Akademie zu Berlin 1791-1941 (Regensburg: Gustav Bosse Verlag, 1941), 53.
80 Schünemann, Sing-Akademie, 64.
81 Ibid.
Regiment\textsuperscript{82} (He ran his regiment strictly). Schünemann also suggests a military precision to Zelter’s musical administration:

He was really a director as they should be, a leader [...] nothing seemed too unimportant to him for it not to be dealt with in a thoughtful way according to the interests of the Institute. Er war wirklich ein Direktor, wie er sein soll, ein Führer [...] dem nichts zu unbedeutend erschien, um es nicht mit Überlegung im Interesse des Instituts zu regeln.\textsuperscript{83}

Both aim to change the way that Zelter is viewed by his audience, recasting him as a man of military discipline whose love of order propelled him to excel. While Zelter’s love of detail is undeniable, given his careful, almost compulsive, editing of the Tagebücher of the Liedertafel, Schünemann does not point out how Zelter himself viewed this habit.\textsuperscript{84} In many letters to Goethe, Zelter alludes to feeling exhausted and overwhelmed, which paints a much more human picture. Schünemann, on the other hand, depicts a man moved to champion German choral music as a calling; his Zelter is never tired or questioning, rather he works for the greater good of his countrymen.

Fischer-Dieskau’s agenda is perhaps the most subtle. His approach to the source material, while uncritical, is comparatively complete. He includes a plethora of (uncited) details in each chapter and tries to put forward a version of Zelter that shows him in a good light; however, he does not address the criticisms made by A.B. Marx or mention any dissenting voices. Fischer-Dieskau’s Zelter is a man of strong values, who works hard at his chosen career and seeks to

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 60.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 32.
\textsuperscript{84} Zelter’s Liedertafel entered long accounts of each rehearsal in their Tagebücher; the accounts were written by the secretary of the group, but Zelter still took the time to go through each entry and add notes along the margin to correct or expand the points made by the writer. For examples see N Mus SA 281.
improve the quality of music in churches and school across Germany. Despite the problems with Fischer-Dieskau’s uncritical approach, his monograph remains a much needed modern biography of Zelter. Fischer-Dieskau’s focus on Zelter’s compositions and his one-sided approach is unfortunate, as this is one of the few recent works to cover Zelter in any detail.

Something then could be taken from each of these monographs: Zelter’s autobiographies allow his modern audience to hear his own version of events for a part of his life that has few other sources; Schünemann’s biography provides many transcriptions that would otherwise have been lost; and Fischer-Dieskau synthesises the many smaller works on Zelter into a more substantial work. That all the monographs offer a different perspective on Zelter’s life and career is, in part, explained through their author’s own agendas and the periods in which they were written. Zelter’s own autobiographies are especially revealing, as the variations between the versions give his audience a clear idea how he sought to construct himself at different points in his life. In general, a stronger attempt to contextualise Zelter in the framework of his time and place would allow for a more complete understanding of his goals and accomplishments.
Chapter Two

Zelter and Goethe’s correspondence: a closer examination

In the brief two weeks that followed Goethe met with Zelter almost daily. Goethe sought him out in the guesthouse, went walking with him or saw him at lunch. [...] And they spoke about the two masters, “Sebastian Bach” and “Hendel” (sic). Goethe also took to Zelter personally. He took an interest in Zelter’s newest Lied compositions and concerned himself with his biography.¹

Zelter and Goethe’s correspondence, which is at the centre of this thesis, is so large and filled with such minutia that very few scholars have chosen to examine it in any detail.² With over eight hundred letters that span over thirty years (1799-1832), it is easy to see why most scholars choose to address it in a cursory manner, with passing reference to the same five or six letters that are well known. However, to some extent, it is the minutia of the letters, the constant references to both parties’ everyday lives, which make the correspondence invaluable. This chapter will deal with the correspondence in detail, by focusing on one of the central themes of the letters: nation. An examination of Goethe and Zelter’s construction of nation, and the way it permeates the large span of letters, will make it clear that Goethe and Zelter actively chose to promote a choral repertoire based on their construction of “German” music.

In order to make their patriotic agenda clear, this chapter will begin by addressing Goethe’s musical expertise and how Zelter and Goethe’s relationship began and grew. This will be

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² For an overview of some recent scholarly articles on the topic, please see the final section of this chapter.
followed by a discussion of the breadth of the letters, which cover everything from the pair’s attempted collaborations to fundamental discussions on the nature of tonality. Rather than attempt to fully cover such wide-ranging topics, which would have limited relevance to this thesis, the chapter will discuss in detail how nation is constructed within the correspondence and how Zelter and Goethe’s own self-construction impacted the German identity that they were creating. The chapter will end with an examination of how scholars have used the correspondence and to what ends.

Unlike Zelter, for whom there are very few modern scholarly sources, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s (1749-1832) life has been exceptionally well documented. Indeed, the first scholarly editions of Goethe’s works began to appear in Germany in 1800, and even before his death in 1832 there were several published monographs on both individual works and on his importance as an author and scholar. While many authors’ fame fades after their death, Goethe’s has only continued to grow, as evidenced by the impossibly large number of catalogue records a search on his name elicits. Despite the apparent saturation of Goethe research, there remains a large gap in the scholarly discussion. Goethe’s interest in music has been largely ignored in the works published to date, and although many musicology articles do address how Goethe’s poetry served in the early Romantic Lieder movement, there has been little discussion of how Goethe

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5 In WorldCat a basic search for Goethe draws more than 7000 discrete records. A search in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin draws a further almost 10,000 records, although that number does include original manuscripts.
viewed settings of his poetry or what he thought about music as a discipline in general. Since 2000, this situation has begun to slowly change with the publication of articles such as Gerhard vom Hofe’s “Gedanke über einer ‘Art Symbolik fürs Ohr’ und seine Begründung im musikästhetischen Dialog mit Zelter.” However, even as scholars move past a basic summary of Goethe and his musical practice, they continue the tired tradition of refuting the common misconception of Goethe’s lack of musical expertise. Sadly, in most cases the authors’ attempts to bolster Goethe’s musical reputation has the opposite effect, leaving their readers wondering why the authors felt compelled to recount Goethe’s standard musical education in so much detail. Despite the obvious pitfalls of this approach, this introduction would be incomplete without a brief overview of Goethe’s musical background; this background will serve as a reference point later in the chapter when the details of his correspondence with Zelter are discussed.

Goethe received the same musical education as most men of his class; he studied piano, music theory, and was musically literate. Unlike many of his generation, Goethe continued to expand his musical horizons throughout his life; his constant drive for more knowledge led him to embark on cello and flute lessons later in life. While he became a proficient instrumentalist, it was not proficiency that Goethe sought. Rather, Goethe seems to have been working towards

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6 The notable exception to this is Claus Canisius’s 1998 Goethe und die Musik, which offers an examination of Goethe’s engagement with music, both as a scholar and as a theatre director. Although Canisius’ treatment of Goethe is balanced, his portrait of Zelter is incomplete. Claus Canisius, Goethe und die Musik (Munich: Piper, 1998).
7 Gerhard von Hofe, “Gedanke über einer ‘Art Symbolik fürs Ohr’ und seine Begründung im musikästhetischen Dialog mit Zelter.” In Eine Art Symbolik fürs Ohr: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe--Lyrik und Musik ed. Hermann Jung (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2002).
a mastery of music in its more theoretical form. Byrne points out that Goethe had a pronounced interest in music that was largely unpopular among his contemporaries; as others were moving towards an early Romantic musical model, Goethe preferred the “melismatic melodies” of Bach and Handel.\(^{10}\) Some scholars have used his unconventional taste to suggest that Goethe was not musical himself, explaining his “odd” choices by pointing towards Zelter’s influence and suggesting that Goethe was unable to make educated choices for himself.\(^{11}\) Andreas Ballstaedt argues against this in his article “Musik in Goethes Werk: Goethes Werk in der Musik” wherein he emphasises Goethe’s knowledgeable debate with Zelter over a wide range of current topics in music theory and history.\(^{12}\)

Despite much evidence to the contrary, there remain many scholars who see Goethe’s interest in music as cursory at best. In fact, the *Cambridge Companion to Goethe*, intended as an introductory scholarly text, does not include a chapter on “Goethe and Music,” although it does include one on “Goethe and the Visual Arts.”\(^{13}\) Part of the reason for this lingering idea is that Goethe himself wrote contradictory statements about music’s importance.\(^{14}\) Certainly, some of Goethe’s comments about music are difficult to explain: “You will find no word about music here, because that did not figure among my interests.”\(^{15}\) Goethe’s autobiography can also be used to argue that Goethe’s interest in music was limited. The autobiography includes little

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\(^{10}\) Ibid.

\(^{11}\) For example see: Jeffrey Pulver, “Beethoven in the Goethe-Zelter Correspondence,” *Music and Letters* vol. 17 (April 1936): 124-130. In this article Pulver follows A.B. Marx’s model and claims that Zelter was unintuitive and pedantic, which made it impossible for either him or Goethe to appreciate Beethoven's genius.


\(^{14}\) Leppman, 90.

\(^{15}\) Ibid.
mention of music beyond opera, and the comments on opera largely pertain to the
performance of operas whose composers and librettists he was acquainted with.\textsuperscript{16} However, both the quotation and the lack of musical discussion in his autobiography can be explained by the time in which they were written. The autobiography, which was written starting in the first decade of the nineteenth-century, and which was published in sections from 1811-1832, only covers his life up to 1775 when Goethe chose to accept a post at Weimar.\textsuperscript{17} The limited time-span means that Goethe did not include details of his friendship with Zelter or his own later musical experiments. The quotation above is similarly from an earlier part of Goethe’s life (1797) and although it may well have been true for Goethe then, it is clear that his tastes and experience changed (as one might expect) as he aged.

One of the primary reasons that Goethe’s experience of music changed was his deep friendship with Zelter. Different sources offer different starting points for their relationship; some authors refer to Goethe’s musical correspondent Reichardt and his endorsement of Zelter as a Lieder composer, while others point towards a private performance of a Zelter Lied setting that Goethe seems to have especially enjoyed. Boyle’s version of events is the most authoritative; he notes that in early 1795 Latrobe performed Zelter’s setting of Friederike Brun’s “Ich denke dein” for Goethe, who was so moved by the sentimental piece and its unusual strophic form that Goethe created his own poem to set to the same music (“Nähe des Geliebten”).\textsuperscript{18} Zelter,

\textsuperscript{17} Goethe, xxii.
\textsuperscript{18} Boyle, 270.
encouraged by Latrobe’s account of his success, then sent Goethe a collection of his settings in 1796.19

This tentative beginning blossomed into a deep friendship that eventually spanned thirty-three years and included 891 letters. The first letters are, as expected, very formal on the part of both Goethe and Zelter. Zelter, who wrote the first letter of the collection on 11 August 1799, introduces himself to Goethe by way of a mutual friend, Herr Unger, who apparently suggested to Zelter that Goethe might be interested in seeing more of his Lieder.20 Zelter concludes the letter with a list of his Schiller settings and notes that:

As soon as you give me the nod, they will be in your hands as quickly as possible.21 Ein Wink von Ihnen und sie sind in Ihren Händen, sobald es sein kann.22

Goethe’s response, although formal, is warm. He encourages Zelter, noting

...for if my poems called forth your melodies, I can say that your melodies have stirred me to many a song, and doubtless if we lived nearer to one another, I should more frequently than at present feel myself inspired by a lyric mood.23 ...denn wenn meine Lieder Sie zu Melodien veranlassten, so kann ich wohl sagen dass Ihre Melodien mich zu manchem Liede aufgeweckt haben und ich würde gewiss wenn wir näher zusammen lebten öfter als jetzt mich zur lyrischen Stimmung erhoben fühlen.24

Goethe’s acknowledgement that Zelter’s music inspired him to “a lyric mood” shows that despite Zelter’s comparatively low stature, Goethe both enjoyed his music and saw the potential for an artistic convergence. Goethe appears to have been excited about the

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19 Ibid., 271.
21 Ibid., 30.
22 Z to G, 11 August 1799.
23 Byrne Bodley, 30.
24 G to Z, 26 August 1799.
possibility of engaging with Zelter as a musical correspondent; indeed he wrote to Herr Unger
to ask him to pass on his encouragement to Zelter.

Please offer Mr. Zelter many thanks for the songs he sent me. I hope that he will want to occasionally send me pieces as he mentioned. I would like to discuss a few theoretical points about music with him, if I only knew how to phrase my questions properly.

Danken Sie Herrn Zelter vielmals für die mir überschickten Lieder. Ich hoffe dass er mir gelegentliche auch das übrige schicken möge wozu er mir Hoffnung gemacht hat. Ich wünschte über einige theoretische Puncte der Musik durch ihn Aufschlüsse zu erhalten wenn ich nur erst meine Fragen recht zu stellen wüsste. ²⁵

Luckily for Goethe, Unger passed along his comments to Zelter and in January of 1800, Zelter offered to answer Goethe’s questions about music, promising that:

As far as it goes my knowledge is at your service and what I don’t know, my fatherly friend, Fasch, a very thorough and fine theorist, will supplement with pleasure. ²⁶

Meine Wissenschaft stehet Ihnen ganz zu Dienst so weit es reichts ich nicht weisst wird mein väterlicher Freund Fasch, ein gründlicher und feiner Theorist mit Vergnügen ergänzen. ²⁷

From this quotation, it seems that Zelter was eager to be of use to Goethe and that he hoped that they might form a closer bond. The passage is also revealing; despite offering his services Zelter is careful to mention his limitations and his esteemed teacher, who still acts as his guide. Fasch’s death later that year meant that Zelter did not have the theoretical assistance he had hoped for; despite the loss Zelter endeavoured to meet Goethe’s musical needs. Thus began the dialogue on music that would push both men to evaluate and re-evaluate both their musical aesthetics and how they thought music fit into an emerging German nation.

²⁵ Canisius, 128.
²⁶ Byrne Bodley, 34.
²⁷ Z to G, 30 January 1800.
The pair continued to correspond regularly, with Goethe often posing specific questions about operas he was familiar with.²⁸ It was Zelter’s first visit to Goethe’s home in Weimar that marked a change in the tone of the letters; Zelter visited Goethe for four days in February of 1802. During that time he was given an unusually warm reception and treated to a visit to the Roman House, a private reading from Faust, and evening sessions with Schiller.²⁹ Zelter positively gushed about the experience and said that he thanked God hourly that he was able to meet Goethe face to face.³⁰ From that point forward, the pair grew increasingly close. In May of 1803, when Zelter visited Goethe for a second time, Goethe spent as much time with the composer as he could. Boyle notes that “during his fortnight in Weimar Goethe’s conversations with him [Zelter] became more personal, they talked about more of his ambitions and his family and his stepson’s uncertainty about his future.”³¹

Many scholars, including Boyle and Leppman, point towards the personal element of Goethe and Zelter’s relationship as the defining aspect. Indeed, Boyle goes so far as to say that their long friendship proved to be the hidden merit of Zelter’s mediocrity.³² Boyle’s evaluation of Zelter’s musical skills aside, the idea that Goethe valued Zelter as far more than a musician is common; in Ausstellung zum 200. Geburtstag von Carl Friedrich Zelter, the authors take pains to

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²⁸ For example, in a letter dated 29 May 1801 Goethe asks about the role of the chorus in the second act of Die Zauberflöte. In many cases, Goethe was familiar with the opera in question thanks to his work as the court theatre director in Weimar.

²⁹ Boyle, 718. The Roman House is currently part of UNESCO’s World Heritage program. Goethe had it built after his return from Italy and it is along the Ilm south of Goethe’s Garden House.


³¹ Boyle, 750.

³² Ibid., 271.
point out that Goethe didn’t evaluate Zelter based on his talent, but rather on the type of man he was personally.\textsuperscript{33}

Certainly, it was more than an interest in opera and Lieder that drew the pair ever closer.

Nowhere is the personal side of their relationship more obvious than in their shift away from the use of formal pronouns. The first use of “Du” rather than “Sie” came after the suicide of Zelter’s eldest stepson, Carl Flöricke, whom Zelter had adopted as his heir. Goethe’s response to Zelter’s news is touching:

Your letter, my beloved friend, announcing the great misfortune which has befallen your house, has greatly afflicted me and left me bowed down, for it came to me when I was in the middle of very serious meditations on life, and it was only through you yourself that I was enabled to rise again. In the face of death you have proven yourself genuine, refined gold. How glorious a character appears when it is penetrated with mind and soul, and how beautiful must that talent be that rests on such a basis.\textsuperscript{34}

Dein Brief, mein geliebter Freund, der mir das grosse Unheil meldet, welches Deinem Hause widerfahren, hat mich sehr gedrückt, ja gebeugt, denn er traf mich in sehr ernsten Betrachtungen über das Leben, und ich habe mich nur an Dir selbst wieder aufgerichtet. Du hast Dich auf dem schwarzen Probiersteine des Todes als ein echtes, geläutertes Gold aufgestrichen. Wie herrlich ist ein Charakter, wenn er so von Geist und Seele durchdrungen ist, und wie schön muss ein Talent sein, das auf einem solchen Grunde ruht!\textsuperscript{35}

Goethe’s response shows real empathy for what Zelter was experiencing and also reveals the close friendship they already enjoyed. Goethe’s sympathy was likely in part because he knew what high hopes Zelter had pinned onto his stepson.\textsuperscript{36} The quotation also reveals the depth of feeling Goethe had for Zelter; his praise of his character would have given Zelter strength at a

\textsuperscript{34} Byrne Bodley, 161.
\textsuperscript{35} G to Z, 3 December 1812.
\textsuperscript{36} Kippenberg, 11.
difficult time. Zelter’s reaction to Goethe’s use of the personal pronoun is recalled in his Tagebuch:

Goethe’s letters however at that time often followed one after the other quickly enough that I could think I had gained a living brother in place of the son I had lost.

Goethe’s Briefe aber folgten in dieser Zeit oft genug aufeinander, dass ich denken durfte, an die Stelle eines verlorenen Sohnes einen lebendigen Bruder gewonnen zu haben.37

The passage reveals much about the importance that Zelter placed on Goethe’s friendship; his distress over his son is tempered by correspondence with his “brother” who compassionately distracts and supports him. In the thirty years of their correspondence their relationship gave both of them an emotional and intellectual outlet they might not otherwise have had.

The letters continued to grow more intimate as the men aged, with both referring often to their families and mutual acquaintances. However, the correspondence should not be mistaken for a collection of private letters; both Goethe and Zelter were well aware that letters were a literary form and even within their lifetimes they planned for the letters’ publication.38 Zelter’s daughter Doris, who never married and continued to live with him until his death in 1832, claims to have collected all Zelter’s letters from Goethe and sent them to Goethe’s daughter-in-law, Ottilie, for publication within days of her father’s death.39 Despite the apparent desire to publish the letters quickly, the first edition of the Zelter/Goethe correspondence did not appear until the following year, when Friedrich Willhelm Riemer (1774-1845) published the first

38 During the last five years of their correspondence Goethe begins to gather the letters, and lightly edit them. Certainly from that point forward the pair was aware that their correspondence would become public.
volume of a six-part series, *Briefwechsel zwischen Goethe und Zelter*, in 1833.\(^{40}\) By 1835 the first volume of the twelve-volume *J. W. v. Goethe’s sämmtliche Werke: vollständig in zwölf Bänden* had appeared; unlike the Riemer, which focused solely on the Zelter/Goethe correspondence, the *Sämtliche Werke* aimed to include everything written by Goethe, and therefore the Zelter letters were interspersed among letters to many others which all appeared in chronological order. The next complete edition of the Zelter/Goethe correspondence was published in 1904 by Reclam.\(^{41}\) Complete German-language editions continued to appear in the early twentieth century, although interest in the correspondence began to drop off after 1958, the bicentenary of Zelter’s birth. In 1991 Hans-Günter Ottenberg’s invaluable three-volume collection of the letters appeared as part of the updated *Goethe Sämtliche Werke*; the collection includes two volumes of letters along with a volume of commentary that addresses some of the linguistic nuances of the letters.\(^ {42}\) On the other hand, English editions are few and far between. In fact, apart from some partial translations of the more famous letters, no English edition was published until recently. Lorraine Byrne Bodley’s highly-anticipated *Goethe and Zelter: Musical Dialogues*, published in 2009, is the first English edition to provide translations of the musical letters; the collection offers readers an invaluable resource for approaching the correspondence.\(^ {43}\)

\(^{40}\) Friedrich Wilhelm Riemer, *Briefwechsel zwischen Goethe und Zelter*, th. 1-6 (Berlin: Duncker und Humboldt, 1833).


\(^{43}\) Lorraine Byrne Bodley, *Goethe and Zelter: Musical Dialogues* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).
Part of the challenge for editors, either English or German, has been the vast array of topics covered in the over eight hundred letters. Thanks to the strong personal element of the pair’s friendship, the correspondence includes much besides a scholarly discussion of music. In order to provide a taste of how diverse the many tangents are, a brief overview of some of the larger “strains” of the letters will be mentioned now. Some recurring topics provide interesting insight into the creative processes of Goethe and Zelter, while others point towards their shared musical aesthetics and political agenda.

One topic that recurs throughout the correspondence is their proposed collaborative projects, few of which ever came to fruition. Their discussion not only reveals the lengthy planning process the men embarked on, but also gives an idea of what themes the pair were interested in exploring. For example, their plans for a Reformation cantata, modelled on Handel’s Messiah, show not only how they imagined the form would translate into a modern setting, but also how they hoped to make use of an earlier musical model.\textsuperscript{44} Goethe’s outline of the proposed cantata includes a detailed description of each proposed section, as well as a discussion of how he imagined the work would fit into the repertory of Lutheran states. Goethe’s active interest in creating a work that would suit Protestant states will be addressed later in the chapter.

Another prominent tangent in the correspondence is the concert reports that Zelter and Goethe sent back and forth. The reports, which range in length from a couple of sentences to entire letters, cover recent public and private concerts they had attended, as well as concerts that they themselves had participated in. Their perspectives on the repertoire and skill of the

\textsuperscript{44} G to Z, 14 November 1816.
performers are interesting and although much of the music they discuss is no longer
performed, their commentary on it shows not only what they valued in terms of repertoire but
also how they evaluated musical performances. Especially interesting are Zelter’s comments on
his own performances, as they reveal both how he thought the performance was received and
whether the performance matched his expectations. The following review of a performance of
Haydn’s *The Seasons* performed in December of 1830 is typical:

*My concert yesterday (The Seasons by Joseph Haydn) had a good and joyful reception. Apart from an obvious mistake which I myself made, I hardly noticed anything else and I can be happy since the accursed theatre-ballets and wretched opera nonsense prevent even one prolonged, continuous rehearsal because there is always one or other important individual missing. If my primary singer, Fräulein von Schätzel, were not the most pleasant girl with the loveliest voice, irrepressible good spirits, docility and impertinence, one could not trust the public performance of such a great, difficult work to good luck.*

This quotation is typical on two fronts: Zelter’s resentment over the time constraints placed on
him by other groups (and by extension the attention those groups, as professional organizations, received) and his description of the female lead singer. Zelter’s letters often relate complementary accounts of young female singers; their voices generally only form part of the description. The passage, which goes on to note that Fräulein von Schätzel only paid

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45 Byrne Bodley, 486.
46 Z to G, 2 to 4 December 1830.
attention when she was required to sing and spent the rest of her time laughing, is concluded by a hope that she will retain her innocence.

The same balance of human observation and humour can be seen in Zelter’s commentaries on others’ performances. Often he would include a review of a new opera being performed in Berlin, as Goethe had a particular interest in the genre, as director of the Weimar theatre. In a letter dated 21-26 April 1806, Zelter notes the public’s reaction to a new Zauberoper with music by Himmel and libretto by Levi:

If only this opera were not so long for what it is (it plays for four hours) and the music were not always impossible to play, I would consider it the best of its kind, although I have only seen it once. The whole production has a truly modern tendency in that it represents the theatrical character of our time in a nutshell.47

Wäre diese Oper, als was sie ist und sein kann nicht zu lang (sie spielt 4 Stunden) und die Musik nicht bis zur Unausführbarkeit schwer; so möchte ich sie die Beste in ihrer Art nennen, obgleich ich sie nur erst ein einziges Mal besucht habe. Das Ganze hat eine wahrhaft moderne Tendenz, in welchem man den Theatralischen Kunstcharakter unserer Zeit in nuce bei sammen hat.48

Despite this endorsement, Zelter goes on to remark that the public was confused by the title of the work (which he does not include) and that in general the work has not been well received, at least in part thanks to the anti-Semitic tendencies of the Berlin press (the librettist, Liepmann Levi, was Jewish.) Other reviews were more cursory:

Evening: I have just seen and heard a performance of Mozart’s Titus, which I think I am right in saying was done more successfully at Weimar.49

Abends. Den Titus von Mozart habe ich eben gesehen und gehört und ich darf wohl sagen dass er in Weimar besser gelang.50

47 Byrne Bodley, 89. Byrne Bodley also notes that the opera was Friedrich Heinrich Himmel’s Die Sylphen and that the opera was performed five times in the spring of 1806.
48 Z to G, 21-26 April 1806.
49 Byrne Bodley, 255.
These sorts of comments are very common in Zelter’s letters, especially in the letters that cover a span of several weeks, as Zelter seems to have added a small entry each day, much like a public diary.

Not just musical works are fodder for review in the correspondence. In fact, plays are surprisingly frequently discussed. Indeed the same letter that contains the review of Himmel’s opera ends with a short report on a play that Zelter saw later in the week:

The piece that followed, *die junge Spröde*, was so completely miserable and boring and perhaps the only thing that saved it from utter failure was the fact that there was not a single man in it.

Das darauf folgende Stücke: *die junge Spröde*, war vollkommen eben so elend und langweilig und vielleicht nur der einzige Umstand, dass gar keine Mannsperson darin vorkommt, konnte es vom Untergange retten.51

Scathing though his comments are, it is not clear what Zelter hoped to display by his discussion of plays; certainly his interpretation of them would not hold the same weight as Goethe’s. However, Goethe seems to have enjoyed hearing about the various artistic endeavours in Berlin and often asked Zelter for more detail and to write more frequently. As one of Goethe’s primary links to the Prussian capital, Zelter was in a unique position. His version of events, especially musical, was largely unchallenged, and as a result, Goethe’s understanding of what was fashionable in Berlin was strongly prejudiced.

Another area of mutual interest to the pair that forms a continuous tangent throughout the letters is the progress of their students and colleagues. Zelter in particular was very active in promoting the interests of his students to Goethe, who was then in a position to promote them to others who might have influence in terms of appointments and commissions. The

50 Z to G, 20 July to 9 August 1819.
51 Z to G, 21 to 26 April 1806.
Mendelssohn family is discussed at length and although neither Felix nor Fanny required
Goethe's help with professional advancement, they and their parents saw the benefits of being
counted among Goethe’s friends. Zelter’s first references to Felix Mendelssohn show that
Zelter was excited about Mendelssohn’s potential shortly after he began his lessons:

I have a young pupil, now at work upon his third comic opera, to whom I should
like to give a serious subject. The boy’s talent is solid; his work flows
spontaneously and his love of the art ensures he is industrious.52

Zelter, who obviously feels that Mendelssohn would benefit from the type of “serious”
instruction he can offer, is excited by the possibility of working with Felix. As Felix’s talent
became ever more apparent, Zelter arranged for him to visit Goethe in Weimar. After their
meeting, Zelter and Goethe’s references to Felix begin to sound like those of proud and
protective parents:

I enclose a passage of a letter from Felix, who I imagine is back in Rome right now.
His father would not allow him to see Sicily. He may have his reasons but the
father of an obedient son should recognize the limitations of his power. I
have gently pointed this out to the old gentleman.54

52 Byrne Bodley, 283.
53 Z to G, 20 August to 20 September 1821.
54 Byrne Bodley, 514.
55 Z to G, 10-15 June 1831.
From this quotation it is clear that Zelter and Goethe both took interest in Felix’s development long after he had finished studying with Zelter. It is also clear that Zelter felt confident enough in his relationship with the Mendelssohn family that he was comfortable offering parenting advice to Felix’s father. Other commentary reveals the same fatherly instinct:

Felix has again finished another quintet that we are soon to hear. [...] What really pleases me is that his music is really well paid by the publishers... I prefer to advise him not to fence because he really plays well.\(^{56}\)

Felix hat wieder ein neues Quintett gefertigt, das sich hören lassen wird...Was mir dabei gefällt ist dass ihm seine Sachen recht gut von den Verlegern honoriert werden...zum Fechten mag ich nicht raten weil er in der Tat gut spielt.\(^ {57}\)

This passage suggests an appreciation for Felix’s talent, mild envy over the success of his publications, and fatherly concern for a young man who does not always act in his own best interest (by Zelter’s estimation). Zelter did not hesitate to comment on Felix’s non-musical adventures and did not limit his advice to counterpoint. Zelter, whose pride in Felix was obviously well-founded, knew that Goethe also saw Felix as an important emerging composer and cherished his friendship with him. As such, they wrote back and forth about his individual works and his personal successes, as well as what they hoped Felix might do next. Zelter’s other promising students are also mentioned in the letters. Zelter’s recommendation of Otto Nicolai to Goethe is typical:

\begin{quote}
[Now I come again with a mission.] One of my young students, Otto Nicolai ... has trained himself to be a very cultivated singer and has set several of your poems to music. Now, if you could find a leisure hour in which to listen to this youth, it would...
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Nun komm ich abermalen mit einer Mission. Ein junger Mann meiner Jünger Otto Nicolai...hat sich recht hübsch im Gesange ausgebildet und manche Deiner Gedichte aufs artigste in Musik gesetzt...Hättest Du nun eine lässliche Stunde den jungen Mann anzhören, so dürft ihm das...
\end{quote}

\(^{56}\) Byrne Bodley, 349.
\(^{57}\) Z to G, 6-10 June 1826.
give him joy for the rest of his life [...] zeit Lebens Freude machen.

It is obvious from this passage that Zelter actively sought to promote his students to Goethe, who was in a strong position to introduce them to others who might advance their careers. Although this letter does not ask for such a recommendation, it is clear that Zelter saw Goethe’s reception of his students as important. Goethe’s role as a cultural icon in his own lifetime meant that he was uniquely positioned to endorse rising musicians and ensure their success. Much as Zelter used his friendship with Goethe to advance his own interests in Berlin, so too did he try to use Goethe’s influence to benefit his students. This is not, however, to suggest that the recommendation of students or requests for favours was one-sided. Indeed, Goethe also often asked Zelter to meet with or write to a friend or colleague; one of Goethe’s court musicians even went to study with Zelter for an extended period. Goethe, who hoped that Franz Carl Adabert Eberwein would gain musical expertise that he could not provide, was overjoyed with the progress Eberwein made under Zelter’s tutelage:

Eberwein is doing really well. Through your help he has come further in everything than those he has to conduct in the small school, and he is making good progress....

Goethe, who was in effect Eberwein’s supervisor in Weimar, looked to Zelter to provide a musical education that he himself could not. The ready exchange of introductions (and in this

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58 Byrne Bodley, 525.
59 Z to G, 11-13 September 1831.
60 Byrne Bodley, 129.
61 G to Z, 21 December 1809.
case lessons) for each other’s students and colleagues reveals the professional benefits both Goethe and Zelter enjoyed from their friendship.

Along with advice and news about students a tangent that appears regularly in the correspondence is Goethe and Zelter’s discussion of mutual acquaintances and “artistic” gossip. The concert reports Zelter offered Goethe are the most obvious source for this kind of discussion. Often, after he had given some indication of how he thought a performance had gone, Zelter would begin to comment on the individual performers. His comments are often humorous; they seem to be intended to amuse Goethe who would have been thoroughly familiar with the antics of professional artists. Among his many descriptions is the following:

A Madame Fischer, who appeared as a guest here as surrogate for the leading lady in the Königrliche Oper, did not perform again. [...] Young, pretty, flexible, healthy, a reliable voice but immature. If they let the dear woman play 20 times, they could make a judgement.63

This type of writing is typical of Zelter; as described earlier, he often talked about the physical merits of female artists, while ignoring the same qualities in the men he describes. This kind of commentary, which rarely elicited a direct response (either positive or negative) from Goethe, can only be interpreted as normal or expected in the context of their letters. Perhaps by Zelter’s standards physical appearance (and how well he got along with them personally) was one of the important measures of singers.

63 Byrne Bodley, 534.
64 Z to G, 3 December 1831.
Finally, there is much discussion in the early correspondence about the theoretical nature of music and in particular tonality. Goethe, who had an interest in the interplay between light and dark from his work on the visual arts, seems to have been interested in expanding his understanding of the contrast between the major and minor modes. Although Zelter was often at a loss as to how to answer Goethe’s more metaphysical questions, he grew quite adept at drawing the author back to his own area of expertise, as we shall see shortly.\(^{65}\)

The quotidian nature of the letters and the enormous range of topics discussed may suggest that there is little of substance to be gained from them; however, many themes are discussed in detail and over many years. From among those, the theme of nation emerges. The concept of a German nation was something that both Goethe and Zelter addressed repeatedly, with references that are both direct and indirect. The indirect references that are of particular interest, as they reveal a mutual understanding that Zelter and Goethe had arrived at over much discussion. While the earlier references to “German” music and its role in a potential German nation are important to an understanding of how the pair imagined the nation would take shape, it is the later references that show a concerted and consistent effort to apply the principles of their imagined Nation to their own artistic endeavours. In order to provide a clear background for a discussion of how individual projects were viewed with this national lens, this section of the chapter will begin by establishing how Zelter and Goethe actually applied the words “German” and “Nation” in their correspondence, before examining how they fit music into these constructs.

Germany was not a unified country until 1871 when the Prussian empire (or second Reich) was established. This distinction is important, as it means that Zelter and Goethe were not discussing a physical nation in their correspondence, but rather an imagined, largely intellectual, community. This imagined community crossed modern national boundaries and included most of the German-speaking world. This construct of nation was common among the liberal elite:

From a sample of five dictionaries spanning the semantically and conceptually crucial transition century between 1750 and 1850, he [Koselleck] identifies a trend toward the words’ normalization, in which *Nation* applied to prepolitical groups united by cultural or ethnic affinity, while *Volk* referred to people organized politically into states.66

While this semantic distinction was emerging, other contemporary intellectuals saw less distinction between the terms. Jacob Grimm for example stated: “A people [Volk] is the embodiment of the men who speak the same language.”67 This definition is closer to Goethe and Zelter’s. Both men believed that a common language indicated a shared background and therefore similar values.68 For Zelter in particular, the concept of Germany or German as a nationality was focused on a rather narrow personal experience. As we shall see shortly in the discussion of what Zelter and Goethe considered “national” music, Zelter often defined what was “German” by comparing it to other international models such as the French and Italian styles. Goethe, whose personal experience was far more cosmopolitan, imagined a Germany unified through the various arts and a shared cultural heritage.


67 Ibid., 23.

68 Vick notes that common language was frequently coupled with words like *Sitten* and *Gebräuche* to show a shared worldview. Vick, 27.
Because of their different intellectual backgrounds, Goethe and Zelter had to find a middle ground. Goethe, who corresponded with many authors and scholars about the nature of German literature, often brought up topics that were beyond Zelter’s experience in their early correspondence. Thanks to Goethe’s literary approach, fairy tales and legend figure in his initial discussion with Zelter:

First [I] dictated short stories and fables that I have long carried around in my head; then for a while [I] drew and illuminated landscapes...

Erst kleine Geschichten und Märchen, die ich lang im Kopf herumgetragen diktiert; sodann eine Weile Landschaften gezeichnet und illuminiert...  

Goethe’s revelation of his interest in folk tales provides an inviting opening for Zelter, who likely was familiar with many of the same stories. Goethe goes on to comment that the loss of German folk tales does not necessarily worry him in terms of German culture, but rather what worries him is the loss to literature at large. Later in the letter he muses to Zelter that:

Perhaps what we have most to regret from political change is mainly this: that under its old constitution Germany, and especially the Northern part, allowed the individual to cultivate himself as far as possible, and it allowed everyone to do what was right in his own way, without, however, there ever being any special interest in him by the community at large.  

Vielleicht ist das, was wir bei der politischen Veränderung am meisten zu bedauern haben, hauptsächlich dieses, dass Deutschland und besonders das nördliche, in seiner alten Verfassung den Einzelnen zuließ sich so weit auszubilden als möglich und Jedem erlaubte nach seiner Art beliebig das Rechte zu tun, ohne dass jedoch das Ganze jemals eine sonderliche Teilnahme daran bewiesen hätte.

This nostalgic view of North Germany, which is introduced by Goethe’s assertion that Zelter has accomplished much as a private person, speaks to a desire for cultural independence and a

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69 G to Z, 27 July 1807.
70 Byrne Bodley, 96.
71 G to Z, 27 July 1806.
longing for things past. Zelter, who is flattered by Goethe’s remarks, does not engage (at this point) in the discussion of how political changes have altered the national culture and directs the dialogue elsewhere. This is an approach that Zelter used in almost every instance where he was asked to address issues with which he was uncomfortable; by redirection, Zelter was able to move the conversation back to areas he could feel confident discussing.

A further example of this occurs in the first prolonged discussion of national musical style that appears in the correspondence. The discussion grew out of a question Goethe asked about Eastern Orthodox Church music, wherein he raised the issue of (what he perceived as) a north eastern European tendency towards the minor mode. In his response, Zelter argues that the tendency towards the minor mode is linked to the national character of the works:

This is why the Scottish, Russian, and Polish dances are so beautiful, and so truly national, that they are imitated, though awkwardly enough, among all cultivated nations. [...] The Russian songs and dances that I have heard were, without exception, in minor keys, though at the same time very lively, consisting of many quick notes and short metres. Had these dances been in major keys, I should have thought them extravagant and wild in their elation, whereas in the minor key they become serious, tender, more yearning, as if they are in search of the cheerfulness which is hindered by the damp, cold air and spicy food.

Daher sind die Russischen, Schottischen und Polnischen Tänze so schön und echt national, dass sie unter allen gebildertern Nationen, wie wohl ungeschickt genung, nachgetanzt werden. [...] Die Russischen Lieder und Tänze welche ich gehört habe, waren ohne Ausnahme aus Molltönen, dabei sehr lebhaft und bestanden aus vielen geschwinden Noten und kurzen Metren. Wären diese Tänze aus Durtönen gewesen; so würden sie mir ausgelassen lustig und wild vorgekommen sein; durch die Molltonart aber werden sie ernst, mild, ja sehnsüchtig indem sie nach Heiterkeit zu streben scheinen die eine feuchte, kalte Luft und der Genuss scharfer Nahrungsmittel vielleicht verhindern.

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72 G to Z, 20 April 1808.
73 Byrne Bodley, 110.
74 Z to G, 6 April to 7 May 1808.
This rather stilted response reveals both Zelter’s limited knowledge of other (musical) cultures and his ability to create generalizations about music based on the material with which he is familiar. His attempt to answer Goethe’s question also shows his strong desire to please Goethe and continue their dialogue. Goethe, who does not seem to have challenged Zelter’s national music generalizations, normally responded to such illogical or stereotypical answers with further questions that required Zelter to expand on his earlier points. Later in the same letter Zelter explains why he thinks that North German music is different:

Now, the North Germans stand in the centre, eagerly reaching out to every point of the compass in order to enrich their flat territory. Since they learn to do everything, ultimately they are just looking for spices to free up the blood, and then they call that passion.

Demnach könnte man die Neigung zu den Molltonarten im Klima suchen. Da stehn nun die Norddeutschen in der Mitte deren eifriges Studium nach allen Polen greift um ihr flaches Erdreich zu bereichern. Da sie alles machen lernen so greifen sie endlich nur nach Gewürzen, die das Blut befeuern und das nennen sie dann Leidenschaft.

Here again, Zelter draws on stereotypes and his imagination to form conclusions about music that he hoped would satisfy Goethe. This exchange marks the first of many similar exchanges in the correspondence. Goethe, whose curiosity often outstripped Zelter’s knowledge, would ask about another culture’s musical practice, only to get a comparison of the “other” with the German model with which Zelter was most familiar. That Zelter applied such generalities is not entirely surprising given his narrow musical education, which Fasch had focused so firmly in German church music.

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75 In this case, Goethe does challenge Zelter on the general tonal implications of the minor key and encloses an additional list of questions and ideas for him to consider. Byrne Bodley, 113.
76 Byrne Bodley, 111.
77 Z to G, 6 April to 7 May 1808.
Although limiting, this narrow focus did allow Zelter to speak knowledgably about past German masters, many of whom he advocated as compositional models for both Goethe and his students. He held up composers such as Bach and Handel as exemplars of a style that moved beyond their time to offer inspiration to later composers, such as Haydn.

What old Bach and Handel achieved has no limit, especially in terms of quantity, just as every passing occasion gives rise to an abyss of feeling which they note down with the familiar black dots.\(^78\)

Zelter’s assertion that Bach and Handel’s works have no limits is striking; the passage comes after a discussion of other, more contemporary, composers and the power of word painting. By invoking Bach and Handel, Zelter tries to reshape the discussion about word painting towards a question of the universal in music. For Zelter, Bach and Handel, along with Haydn and Beethoven form part of a group which is connected with universal truth rather than national style. Further, Zelter is moving the composers beyond their previous realms of influence. Bach especially was only used as a model for organ music in this period and his choral works were little known.\(^80\)

By continually referring to his works Zelter managed to invest an increasing amount of authority therein, raising him to an increasingly lofty position amid the emerging German choral canon.

\(^{78}\) Byrne Bodley, 267.

\(^{79}\) Z to G, 13 to 16 May 1820.

\(^{80}\) By continually referring to his works Zelter managed to invest an increasing amount of authority therein, raising him to an increasingly lofty position amid the emerging German choral canon.

That Zelter felt comfortable applying this church music model to a construct of (German) music in general is revealing. Zelter did not hesitate to equate the compositional models with which he was most familiar with the music of the wider German-speaking world. Indeed he would consistently apply the same principles of style, which he termed “German,” to what were clearly more cosmopolitan composers such as Mozart.

One of the primary qualities that Zelter consistently claims as central to a German national style was originality. For Zelter, originality could be best described as either following one’s own compositional inclinations despite popular expectations, as with Bach, or as moving beyond the conventions of a form, as with Hasse. Zelter’s justification of Hasse as a German genius displays this:

Hasse wrote about a hundred operas [...] Each of his works contains powerful passages, such as only a German genius educated in the better times of Italy could composer. In spirit, energy, grace and productivity he surpassed people such as Leo, Durante, Vinci, and Pergolesi, as well as the master, Alexander Scarlatti, whom he acclaimed. If you cast aside the Italian mannerisms universally adopted in those days, you have an original work in all its German power and glory. 

Hasse hat gegen 100 Opern [...] Jedes seiner Werke enthält so mächtige Teile wie sie nur ein deutscher Genius, der sich in Italien in besserer Zeit gebildet hat hervorbringt. An Geist, Energie, Anmut und Fruchtbarkeit hat er die Leo, Durante, Vinci, Pergolese und seinen von ihm selber hochgerühmten Meister Alexander Scarlatti hinter sich gebracht. Wirft man ab was in jener Zeit italienische, allgemein angenommene Manier ist, so hast Du ein Original in deutscher Kraft und Herrlichkeit. 

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81 Byrne Bodley, 501.
82 Z to G, End of February to 5 March 1831.
For Zelter then, Hasse’s use of Italian models does not make his music less German, rather his mastery of the style and his subsequent expansion of it make him an example of German ingenuity, someone who deserves to have his works performed amid others Zelter viewed as German figureheads, such as Bach and Mozart.

J.S. Bach, on the other hand, was held up as an example of a German who resisted the temptation to adopt the reigning style. Zelter, who often interpreted Bach’s unique compositional style as an undeniably German one, was especially vocal about the contrast between Bach and the French keyboard style. In a letter from the spring of 1827, Zelter commented to Goethe that:

Old Bach, with all his originality, is a son of his country and of his age, and could not escape French influence, and in particular that of Couperin. One wants to please and thus something is created which does not endure. One can, however, dissociate him from this foreign element like [removing] a thin froth, and the brilliant substance lies immediately beneath.83 Der alte Bach ist mit aller Originalität ein Sohn seines Landes und seiner Zeit und hat dem Einflusse der Franzosen, namentliche des Couperin nicht entgehn können. Man will sich auch wohl gefällig erweisen, und so entsteht – was nicht besteht. Dies Fremde kann man ihm aber abnehmen wie einen dünnen Schaum und der lichte Gehalt liegt unmittelbar darunter.84

Goethe’s response asks for clarification; what exactly is the French froth and how might it be distinguished from the “deutschen Grundelement”? (German fundamentals) Zelter’s answer shows reflection. He explains:

What I called Sebastian Bach’s French froth is not so easily skimmed off that you can

Was ich an Sebastian Bach den französischen Schaum nannte ist freilich nicht so leicht

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83 Byrne Bodley, 371.
84 Z to G, 5 to 14 April 1827.
After taking the time to reflect on the question, Zelter provides Goethe with a considered defence of Bach as a German original. In the exchange, Goethe does not hesitate to point out the hole in Zelter’s impetuous statement; his request for clarification allows Zelter to ponder his initial claim and consider the reasons behind his quick judgement. Bach’s ability to stand alone, and in Zelter’s opinion above, other composers and styles of his generation made him a model worth emulating. Despite Zelter’s firm belief that Bach’s music was at the heart of a German musical style, it took a great deal of creative license to link J.S. Bach’s works with those of later German masters.

Mozart, who was a favourite of Goethe’s thanks to *Die Zauberflöte*, was among the most problematic to fit within this model. Despite this, he was firmly claimed by Zelter as part of a continuous German style that began with Bach and continued to Beethoven. Indeed, Zelter claimed that Mozart could only really be understood as part of this tradition:

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85 Byrne Bodley, 374.
86 Z to G, 8-9 June 1827.
seemed to me almost unintelligible, though I was attracted by a dim recognition of their value. Then came Haydn, whose style was blamed because it, so to speak, travestied the extreme seriousness of his predecessors, so that good opinion reverted back again to them. At last Mozart appeared, who enabled us to understand each of the three men whom he had for his masters.  

This understanding of Mozart is counterintuitive, especially given Mozart’s own cosmopolitan musical education. It is unclear how Zelter convinced himself to overlook the obvious Italian influences in Mozart’s music or which specific style features he thought were owed to the Bachian tradition, but he argued in a similar vein in many letters.

In a later letter, dated 26 July to 1 August 1826, Zelter again points to Bach as a lens through which Mozart is better understood. This passage, which occurs after a discussion of how Humboldt is in the process of reading the collection of Goethe and Schiller’s letters, stresses the German artistic tradition, to which both Mozart and Johann Sebastian Bach were central for Zelter.

It is only since Mozart that there has arisen a greater inclination to understand Sebastian Bach, for the latter appears thoroughly mystic, where the former impresses us clearly from without and there is a lighter air about him, seeing that he is inspired by life around him. I myself felt no pure pleasure in

unverständlich vorkam wie wohl ein dunkles Gefühl des Echten mich dahin anzog. Da kam Haydn, dessen Art getadelt ward weil sie den bittern Ernst seiner Vorgänger gleichsam travestierte wodurch sich die gute Meinung nun auf jene zurück warf. Endlich erschien Mozart durch den man alle 3 erklären könnte aus welchen er heraus gearbeitet hat.

87 Byrne Bodley, 173.
88 Z to G, 9 March to 2 April 1814.
Mozart’s works because I had known Bach much earlier. [...] Mozart stands much nearer to Sebastian Bach than Emanuel Bach and Haydn, who, both original, stand between the first two.  

Zelter, who is commenting that Humboldt believes that the Schiller-Goethe correspondence shows that Schiller’s best works were the result of Goethe’s influence, is trying to show that the same creative influence is exerted on Mozart by Bach. That Mozart and J.S. Bach did not correspond, share teachers, meet, or even co-exist does not deter Zelter from trying to show a similar artistic collaboration. Here too then Zelter is putting forward an argument to support a link between Bach and Mozart that few would have thought existed (particularly in this period, as Bach was still far from a household name even in the German-speaking arts world).

A further later example illustrates how Zelter attempted to connect the composers he considered the most important by virtue of shared “nationality”. Again, in this case, he creates links between earlier German composers and Mozart to “prove” that Mozart grew out of the same cultural tradition.

Before Mozart had taken a look round north Germany, Handel may have shone out for him as the most powerful talent in Germany; some of his compositions bear the superscription ‘Nel Stilo di Haendel’. Then Mozart arrives in Leipzig, while Hiller is yet active, and pricks his ears up at Sebastian Bach, to the great astonishment of Hiller, who is trying

Ehe Mozart sich in Norddeutschland umgesehen hatte mag ihm Händel als das kräftigste deutsche Talent vorgeleuchtet haben; einige seiner Stücke sind überschrieben nel Stylo di Haendel. So kommt Moz. nach Leipzig, noch bei Hillers Leben und reisst die Ohren auf über den Sebastian Bach, zu Hillers grosser Verwunderung der die Thomaner Muttersöhne mit Abscheu gegen die

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89 Byrne Bodley, 352.
90 Z to G, 26 July to 1 August 1826.
to fill the St Thomas choirboys with horror at the crudities of that Sebastian. What does Mozart do? He tries his hand at this style with a dexterity that only such a school can give. Just listen to the music of the black men in *Die Zauberflöte* (before the ordeal by fire). It is inlaid; it is the Luther Chorale ‘Wenn wir in höchsten Nöthen’, interwoven with the orchestra in Bach’s style – and so on.  

Although in this case Zelter is offering a more concrete style link than he had in the past, he still makes a leap of faith in terms of Mozart’s own compositional intentions.

Clearly, Zelter wanted to do far more than simply link two composers from different periods together; his overarching goal was to support the relationship between a long line of Austro-Germanic composers that he felt could be translated into a unified German style. Indeed, Zelter consistently argued for what amounted to a “chain” of German composers whose styles he believed to be related, which therefore formed a larger “German” style. The timeline of German masters is most succinctly articulated by Goethe:

...the Inspector [Schütz] played to me every day for from three to four hours and at my request, in historical order, selections from Sebastian Bach to Beethoven, including Philipp Emanuel, Handel, Mozart, Haydn, Dussek too, and others like him.  

... da mir denn der Inspektor täglich drei bis vier Stunden vorspielte und zwar, auf mein Ersuchen, nach historischer Reihe: von Sebastian Bach bis zu Beethoven, durch Philipp Emanuel, Händel, Mozart, Haydn durch, auch Dusseck und dergleichen mehr.

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91 Byrne Bodley, 380.  
92 Z to G, 16 June 1827.  
93 Byrne Bodley, 248.  
94 G to Z, 4 January 1819.
Goethe, who enjoyed listening to music with his eyes closed, reveals in this quotation his attempt to understand the links Zelter has suggested between German composers. Goethe’s inclusion of Dussek (a Bohemian) aside, his chosen repertory shows his ready acceptance of Zelter’s historical approach to the question of a national style. Their joint desire to create a national framework that could be used to form a “German” repertory (despite the obvious differences between the composers listed) is further proof of their continued interest in music that could be considered part of a shared cultural tradition.

That Goethe and Zelter saw themselves as part of this German tradition is also important. Throughout their correspondence, the pair sought to extend the cultural canon they had constructed with works of their own. While the works themselves are outside the scope of this chapter, it must be noted that they saw their own image reflected in the older music they promoted. Certainly, their Lutheran cantata can only be understood in this context; its explicit goal was to fill a gap in the repertory of Lutheran states and, to that end, Goethe suggested modelling the work on another Protestant oratorio.

To prevent our friendly and lively discussion coming to a halt, I send you a few words regarding your proposal to write a cantata for the Reformation Jubilee. It would, I suppose, best fashion itself on the lines of Handel’s Messiah, a work which you have understood so deeply.\textsuperscript{95} 

\footnotesize Um die freundliche und aufregende Unterhaltung nicht stocken zu lassen, sag ich ein Wort zu jenem Vorsatz dem Reformations Jubiläum eine Kantate zu widmen, im Sinne des Händelschen Messias, in welchem Du sowohl eingedrungen bist, würde sich es wohl an besten schicken.\textsuperscript{96}

\textsuperscript{95} Byrne Bodley, 221. 
\textsuperscript{96} G to Z, 14 November 1816.
As previously noted, the cantata, like many of their projects, never moved past the planning stages, but their conception of it indicates a strong desire to continue in a tradition that both saw as central to a national musical practice.

The shared cultural repertory they envisioned was put into practise by both Goethe and Zelter in their individual singing groups. As part of their programming both men sought to engage with older German repertoire, which they believed served to illuminate current German cultural practices. Indeed Goethe stated his desire to move away from opera (and the secular age) and towards sacred choral music when he founded his house choir:

I should like now once a week to have sacred part songs performed at my house, in the same way as your Sing-Akademie, though it would be a pale reflection of it.97

Da möchte ich nun alle Woche einmal bei mir mehrstimmige geistliche Gesänge aufführen lassen, im Sinne Ihrer Anstalt, obgleich nur als den fernsten Abglanz derselben.98

The *Hauskapelle* was made up largely of the singers from Weimar’s theatre, which Goethe was in charge of, and was directed by Carl Eberwein.99 Due to Goethe’s own inexperience with choral repertoire, Zelter was called upon to offer suggestions and to pass along manuscripts.100 Zelter was more than happy to oblige, and often gave preference to the composers with whom he was most familiar:

And even if you should already have something of theirs in your collection, from a historical point of view the compositions are important in themselves; particularly those of Sebastian Bach and Kirnberger.101

Und sollte auch von diesen Händen schon etwas in Deiner Sammlung sein; so sind die Stücke selbst in geschichtlich artistischer Hinsicht bedeutend; besonders das Stück von Sebastian Bach und das von Kirnberger.102

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97 Byrne Bodley, 97.
98 G to Z, 27 July 1807.
99 For more information on Eberwein, see p. 112.
100 G to Z, 28 September 1807.
101 Byrne Bodley, 182.
102 Z to G, 11 April 1815.
To Zelter, the historical importance of the work was as important as the suitability of the piece to the choir. Zelter took his role as Goethe’s musical curator seriously and sent works that he hoped would augment Goethe’s music library and their dialogue. However, Zelter’s limited time to copy out scores made this arrangement challenging. While his students and family occasionally helped, Zelter did the majority of copying himself, either because he edited the score as he went or because the original was deemed too precious to circulate. Even when other versions of the same work were publically available, Zelter often sent along his own version:

I will forward the first book of Johann Sebastian Bach’s Preludes and Fugues; I don’t want to send the Leipzig edition because I don’t consider it a good edition.  

This sort of careful management of Goethe’s musical library is indicative of the control Zelter exerted. Direct requests for repertoire, such as Goethe’s request for Zelter’s setting of Schiller’s Punschlieder, were answered, but Goethe did not have much opportunity, or it would seem desire, to explore the older repertoire they so often discussed without Zelter’s guidance.  

As a result much of Goethe’s programming closely mirrored Zelter’s own, although without the large vocal numbers and orchestral accompaniment. Zelter even went so far as to suggest specific composers for Goethe’s listening pleasure, noting in a letter before the Mendelssohn family’s first visit to Weimar that:

He [Abraham Mendelssohn] has lovely

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103 Byrne Bodley, 207.
104 Z to G, 8 to 12 May 1816.
105 Byrne Bodley, 104.
Indeed as we shall see in the later chapter on the pair’s Bach repertoire, Goethe used the Mendelssohn family as a vehicle for his introduction to much of Bach’s music.

The consistent promotion of a German musical style, as defined by Zelter, is a hallmark of the correspondence as a whole. As the friendship between Goethe and Zelter grew firmer, Zelter became increasingly outspoken. His enthusiasm and his perseverance drew Goethe into his somewhat eccentric model and together they began to act on the assumptions they had created about what constituted a uniquely German voice. The ways in which they enacted this voice, and the larger effect their choices had on other contemporary singing groups, will be explored in chapters 4 and 5 where the Handel and J.S. Bach repertoire they selected will be examined in detail.

Before moving forward to those musical case studies, some final thoughts on the larger correspondence of Zelter and Goethe should be included. In particular, the way in which the correspondence has been used by modern scholars deserves some consideration. Early references to the pair’s expansive collection of letters are often not flattering. As noted in the previous chapter on Zelter, shortly after his death, Zelter was replaced at the university by younger music journalists and scholars, many of whom favoured instrumental forms and who saw Beethoven as the pinnacle of German composition. This shift made early scholarship on Zelter an unpopular endeavour, and when the correspondence is mentioned by early music

106 Byrne Bodley, 202.
107 Z to G, 4 April 1816.
historians it is most often with disdain. Zelter was held up to ridicule as the man who steered
Goethe away from such luminaries as Beethoven and Schubert; conversely, Goethe’s own
musical judgement was called into question, as he seemed to have whole-heartedly embraced
the older composers that Zelter promoted.\textsuperscript{108}

Modern scholars have been more balanced in their approach to the correspondence, and it is
currently most often cited as proof of Goethe’s interest (but not mastery) in music. Some
modern scholars have approached the correspondence as a sociological artefact, and have
focused on specific individuals surrounding it. Thomas Richter in particular has examined the
correspondence of Zelter’s eldest daughter Doris, who lived with him until his death, and the
women in Goethe’s household to provide a feminine perspective on the pair’s relationship.\textsuperscript{109}

Some discussion of the Goethe/Zelter correspondence can also be found in recent scholarship
on composers who were either influenced by them, such as Felix Mendelssohn, or to whom
they devoted a great deal of attention, such as J.S. Bach. Mendelssohn studies often include
some mention of Zelter as one of his primary teachers, although the authors are not always
complimentary.\textsuperscript{110} Bach scholars most often cite Zelter, and his association with Goethe, in
reference to his extensive collection of Bachania. Although most of Zelter’s J.S. Bach
autographs were sold to the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin in the late nineteenth-century, many

\textsuperscript{108} Pulver notes that Zelter was not even able to fathom the music of Spohr, and he comments that in
such matters Goethe accepted Zelter’s judgement as that of an “oracle.” Pulver, 124. However, it should be noted
that despite popular perception of Zelter as against Beethoven and his music, in their correspondence Zelter and
Goethe spoke in collegial terms of Beethoven’s works; Zelter recommended \textit{Fidelio} to Goethe after seeing it in
Berlin in 1831 and in 1819 expressed an interest in meeting Beethoven. Byrne Bodley, 493 and 259.

\textsuperscript{109} Thomas Richter, “Ein Brief Doris Zelters über den Besuch mit ihrem Vater bei Goethe im Juli 1826”

\textsuperscript{110} Thomas Schmidt-Beste, “Alles von ihm gelernt?” Die Briefe von Carl Friedrich Zelter an Felix
Mendelssohn Bartholdy” \textit{Mendelssohn-Studien: Beiträge zur neueren deutschen Kultur- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte},
C.P.E. Bach autographs remained part of the private Sing-Akademie collection, which was lost in the aftermath of the Second World War. With the return of the Sing-Akademie archive to Berlin in 2001, Bach scholars continue to catalogue and make new discoveries about Bach’s links to Berlin and Zelter.\footnote{Christoph Wolff is currently working with the Staatsbibliothek to create a complete catalogue of the library and their stated intention is the publication of many original C.P.E. Bach scores. A preliminary report can be found in Christoph Wolff, “Recovered in Kiev: Bach et al. A Preliminary Report on the Music Collection of the Berlin Sing-Akademie” Notes Vol. 58 (Dec. 2001): 259-271. A partial catalogue has also recently been published, which is complete for musical scores. Zelter’s letters and the archival material of the Sing-Akademie are not, however, included. Axel Fischer et al., The Archive of the Sing-Akademie zu Berlin: a Catalogue (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010).}

With a renewed interest in Zelter and Goethe a far greater range of scholarship on their correspondence should begin to appear. The letters, now available in English, have many avenues that remain unexplored including Zelter’s performance reviews, Goethe and Zelter’s dialogue about specific poems and musical settings, and Zelter’s perception of Goethe’s works’ reception in Berlin. Although each scholar has brought new insight into a specific area of the collection, there remains much to be done.
Chapter Three

Zelter’s Sing-Akademie: a labour of love

The Sing-Akademie is a moral, universal Institute, made up of sensible creatures [...] where all work for the same goal.¹

The Sing-Akademie of Berlin,² which at first glance seems to be a typical choral ensemble, is on closer examination an exceptional organization with a two-century-old mandate. This mandate, shaped by Zelter in the early 1800s, represents perhaps his most enduring legacy and will be the focus of this chapter. More than any other conductor, Zelter looms large in the organization’s annals and he continues to enjoy a prominent role in the group’s publicity material.³ Some of Zelter’s lingering prominence must be attributed to the organization’s desire to tie itself to the famous members or directors of its past; in Zelter’s case, however, some of the continued esteem can be acknowledged as a hard-won right. After all, it was under Zelter’s direction that many of the Sing-Akademie’s most important developments took place. To illustrate this point, this chapter will begin by providing a brief history of the Sing-Akademie, followed by an analysis of its membership. The Sing-Akademie’s audience and history of public performance will then be examined. Finally, Zelter’s reflections on the group and his goals for its advancement will be considered. This three-part examination will reveal the scope of Zelter’s ambitions for the group, and will demonstrate how his firm leadership and driving

¹ “Die Sing-Akademie ist ein moralisches, allgemein gültiges Institut, das aus vernünftigen Wesen besteht [...] wo alle auf einen Zweck wirken...” Gottfried Eberle, 200 Jahre Sing-Akademie zu Berlin (Berlin: Nicolai, 1991), 45.
² The group’s formal name is Die Sing-Akademie zu Berlin; its website www.sing-akademie.de provides current concert listings and a historical overview.
³ The current version of the Sing-Akademie website features numerous quotes from Zelter on the homepage and highlights his role in its early history, with images of the poet Goethe, educator Humboldt, architect Schinkel, and composers Felix Mendelssohn, Fanny Hensel, and Ludwig van Beethoven emphasising both Zelter and the group’s importance in the first half of the 1800s.
vision shaped the Sing-Akademie’s development, making it the foremost German choral organization of the nineteenth-century.

The early history of the Sing-Akademie is comparatively well documented thanks to two early, and somewhat rare, histories commissioned by the group.\(^4\) The Sing-Akademie began as an informal singing club in the late 1780s, with fewer than twenty members.\(^5\) It was originally conceived of as a sacred-music society whose primary focus was learning various Mass settings. Its founder, prominent court organist Carl Friedrich Christian Fasch (1736-1800), used the group as a vehicle for the performance of his own motets and masses, which might not otherwise have been performed. Peter Wollny argues that many small private musical groups were established in this period due to the lack of opportunity for music-making at court.\(^6\) Although many renowned musicians were employed by the court, including several students of J.S. Bach along with two of his sons, Frederick the Great encouraged only the musical styles that were of interest to him. This practice left many of his court musicians with extra time and creative energy which they could direct towards their own projects. In the case of Fasch, who had a penchant for religious music, this meant that he was forced to find an alternative venue for his many compositions that would never be performed in court; his informal mass-singing group was just such a medium.

\(^4\) Heinrich Lichtenstein, *Zur Geschichte der Sing-Akademie in Berlin* (Berlin: Trautwein, 1843) and Martin Blumner, *Geschichte der Sing-Akademie zu Berlin* (Berlin: Horn und Raasch, 1891). The works remain rare thanks to their very limited distribution; they are only found in 8 and 26 libraries respectively. There are several modern works which detail the early history of the organization, including Gottfried Eberle’s recent work commemorating the group’s 200\(^{th}\) anniversary: Gottfried Eberle, *200 Jahre Sing-Akademie zu Berlin : „ein Kunstverein für die heilige Musik“* (Berlin: Nicolai, 1991).

\(^5\) Lichtenstein, VI. Lichtenstein’s history is especially valuable as it is contains many copies of early records of which the originals have since been lost.

What began as a small, informal group grew quickly. By 1791, when the group met at Frau General-Chirugus Voitus’ house on Unter den Linden, its members numbered 28; by October 1792 it had outgrown private homes and had begun to meet in a room at the Akademie der Künste. The group was officially named the Sing-Akademie on 5 November 1793 and by this time it boasted 50 members. The next year also included an important first; on 8 April 1794 the Sing-Akademie gave its first public performance, “ein sogenanntes Auditorium.” The concert, which according to Georg Schünemann included motets by J.S. Bach as well as part of Handel’s Judas Maccabaeus and Graun’s Der Tod Jesu, was attended by Prince Louis Ferdinand.

The year 1796 marked a turning point for the group and Zelter. Fasch, who became seriously ill for the first time, promoted Zelter to vice-director and asked him to maintain the records of their rehearsals. Zelter had first joined the group in 1791 as a tenor, shortly after he began composition studies with Fasch. His long tenure and his zeal for the organization made him a good choice for the largely administrative position. However, as Fasch’s health declined, Zelter began to take on an increasing number of artistic tasks. Over the next four years, Zelter led rehearsals and Auditorien, was consulted on programming choices, and continued to expand the group’s membership. His efforts were clearly successful; by 1799 the Sing-Akademie

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7 Lichtenstein, VI.
8 Ibid., VIII.
9 Ibid. Georg Schünemann, Die Sing-Akademie zu Berlin 1791-1941 (Regensburg: G. Bosse, 1941) 19. Schünemann does not cite where he has obtained the programming information for the first Auditorium, nor do any other sources include the same information. In fact, Lichtenstein claims that the group did not perform portions of Graun’s Der Tod Jesu in public until 12 April 1796. Lichtenstein, XI.
10 Ibid., XI.
boasted 94 members and was hosting as many as eighty invited guests to its Auditorien.\textsuperscript{11}

When Fasch died on 3 August 1800, Zelter was the obvious choice for director.

This is not to say that his succession was assured. Indeed, in a letter dated 21 to 23 February 1830 Zelter reminisces that:

My first word to the society after Fasch’s death was, “Fasch’s place with us remains open and I retain my position at the grand piano.” This speech gave the directors at the time (to which I didn’t belong) the courage to see me as an ordinary member, as a subordinate until the opportunity appeared...\textsuperscript{12}

Mein erstes Wort an die Gesellschaft, nach Faschens Tode war: Faschens Stelle unter uns bleibt offen und ich behalte meine Stelle am Flügel. Diese Rede gab den damaligen Vorstehern (zu denen ich nicht gehörte) Courage mich als ordinäres Mitglied, als Untergeordneten anzusehn, bis eine Gelegenheit erschien....\textsuperscript{13}

This passage makes it clear that Zelter did not assume the role of director automatically, but also alludes to the general assumption that he would take on Fasch’s role. That he had to give the directors “the courage” to see him as an ordinary member reinforces that he was, by 1800, anything but that. Predictably, he was soon named director. However, despite the group’s easy acceptance of him, it appears from his letters that Zelter was not entirely comfortable in his new role for at least the first two years. Between 1800 and 1802 he solicited the board of directors’ opinions on everything from invitations to Auditorien, auditions, requests for performances, and rehearsal space.\textsuperscript{14} However, as his tenure lengthened Zelter became more

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., XII.
\textsuperscript{12} Lorraine Byrne Bodley, \textit{Goethe and Zelter: Musical Dialogues} (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 457. The remainder of the passage deals with the finances of the organization, which was a preoccupation for Zelter given the immense cost of the Sing-Akademie’s new hall.
\textsuperscript{13} Z to G, 21-23 February 1830.
\textsuperscript{14} See for example N. Mus. SA 323, 23 where Zelter solicits the endorsement of each director before agreeing to a charity concert for the poor of the French colony. It is only after he has received a written endorsement from each director that Zelter writes a formal response to the request (N. Mus. SA 323, 27 dated 28 April 1801).
confident and assertive and soon did not seek the board’s permission or opinion about the daily business of the Sing-Akademie.\textsuperscript{15}

His growing self-confidence is also clear from copies of his speeches to the Sing-Akademie, some of which have survived in his collection of papers. One such speech, dated Berlin 1803, reminds the Sing-Akademie members that although they are free to come and go from rehearsals as they please, without repercussion, they should keep the morale of the organization in mind. Further, Zelter requests that the members behave in a professional manner and asks that they begin to consider ways to raise money for their events and scores.\textsuperscript{16}

While the tone is collegial, the intention is clear; Zelter is reprimanding the members and setting guidelines for behaviour which he expects to be followed. Unfortunately, the archive does not preserve the Sing-Akademie’s response to Zelter’s speech.

Part of Zelter’s apparent frustration with the laissez-faire attitude of some members likely stemmed from his continued amateur status. Aside from the title of director, there was little formal recognition of the enormous amount of work Zelter put into the organization. Although the Sing-Akademie did pay him a small honorarium for his efforts, the gesture did little to compensate Zelter for the innumerable scores he bought on the organization’s behalf, much less the countless hours he devoted to rehearsals, editing, and planning. Zelter described his frustrations over his workload to Goethe in 1804:

This same Sing-Akademie has 200 members and consequently is a constant heavy workload, because I have to work day and night for it.  I

\textsuperscript{15} See N. Mus. SA 323, 59 dated 30 April 1809 wherein Zelter turns down an invitation from the Bürger-Rettungsinstitut to perform without any consultation with his board.

\textsuperscript{16} N. Mus. SA 323, 36.
have brought it on so much that it will be able to sustain itself in future times if the King can house it in the academy as happened before and this was not exactly easy, because the mere upkeep costs 1,000 thaler per annum and I perform my service free of charge.\textsuperscript{17}

Nachtfür arbeiten muss. Ich habe sie jetzt so weit gebracht, dass sie sich selbst, auf fortwährende Zeiten, vollkommen anständig und kunstwürdig erhalten kann und muss, wenn der König ihr den Raum im Gebäude der Akademie nach wie vor gestattet, und dies war eben nichts leichtes, weil die blosse Unterhaltung derselben jährlich gegen 1000 Thaler kostet und ich dabei meinen Dienst ganz unentgeltlich verrichte.\textsuperscript{18}

In this letter Zelter describes his work as unpaid, despite the honorarium. It is unclear if Zelter thought of the honorarium as payment for scores bought on the Sing-Akademie’s behalf, or if he simply felt the amount, which was well below a living wage, was too small to mention.

Indeed it was not until 1809 when he was appointed the first chair of music at the Akademie der Künste, that he earned a living as a musician.\textsuperscript{19}

The record keeping for the Sing-Akademie alone must have taken Zelter an enormous amount of time. Although the Tagebücher for the Sing-Akademie do not survive, the Liedertafel Tagebücher do and the detail Zelter records for each rehearsal is exhaustive.\textsuperscript{20} In each entry every member is counted and every piece is listed along with commentary on the work’s progress. After each entry, plans for the next meeting are recorded along with any additional thoughts. While we cannot be certain that the same obsessive attention to detail was devoted

\textsuperscript{17} Byrne Bodley, 58.
\textsuperscript{18} Z to G, 5 March 1804.
\textsuperscript{19} More information on Zelter’s exact salary and his various appointments may be found in chapter 1.
\textsuperscript{20} Although the records do not survive, it is clear from Zelter’s correspondence that, at a minimum, the Sing-Akademie books contained an attendance sheet which was completed each Tuesday. Z to G, 7-10 February 1827. The early Liedertafel books survive as N. Mus. SA 280, 281, 282,283, 284. In addition to listing each work rehearsed, the notes also include the shelf number of the work within the Sing-Akademie library and letters requesting admission to the group. The amount of care poured into each volume is astounding.
to the Sing-Akademie record books, it seems likely given Lichtenstein’s assertion that when he wrote his history there were over 100 such *Tagebücher* for the Sing-Akademie.\(^{21}\)

Recruitment, at least, does not seem to have been an arduous task. The Sing-Akademie’s membership, which continued to grow by leaps and bounds over the next half-century, was largely drawn from the elite of Berlin. Zelter, himself, described the membership of the organization as: “dass der Charakter der Societaet auf dem Nationalcharakter deutscher Beständigkeit gebauet ist.” (the society’s character is constructed from the national German character.)\(^{22}\) Many of its members were the wives of highly-placed court officials and the aristocracy. Both the men and women were screened to assess their suitability and talent through an audition process. In 1803, so many women were applying that new female members were selected by lottery from among the qualified.\(^{23}\) The group’s remarkable popularity can be attributed to the niche it offered its members; their membership gave them social standing and validation as it meant that they had demonstrated musical proficiency. Despite their shared skills, wealth, and education, not all came from equal social spheres. In the Sing-Akademie members found a venue where they could mix with people whose interests matched their own but whom they might never have had occasion to meet in another circumstance. Zelter himself provides the perfect example of this. It was through the Sing-Akademie that he met his second wife, Julie Pappritz. Julie, the daughter of Geh. Oberfinanzrat Pappritz, served as a handmaid for Princess Friederike before her marriage and therefore came

\(^{21}\) There is one Sing-Akademie *Tagebuch*, but it is simply a short table of the repertoire from 1827-1832. At least one other form of notes must have existed; scholars as late as Schünemann claim to have seen Zelter’s last rehearsal log, which includes his note stating that he was feeling ill and left after the first number.

\(^{22}\) Eberle, 47.

\(^{23}\) N. Mus. SA 323, 56.
from a different social class than Zelter. Despite their different social statuses, the pair shared a deep love of music and were married in 1796, a year after the death of Zelter’s first wife.

Although class was not a barrier to membership, money most certainly was. The dues for membership were raised as the group grew, jumping from 12 ggr. to 16 ggr. per month in 1815. Despite the expense, the Sing-Akademie had such a substantial waiting list that by 1827 a chorus was formed of the waiting list members alone. Perhaps one of the reasons that the waiting list was so long was the length of time some members stayed in the Sing-Akademie. Although no Tagebücher from the early period of the chorus survive, it is possible to track the membership of the group from its founding through to 1841, thanks to Lichtenstein’s inclusion of a complete list of chorus members. The list, which is set up as one long alphabetical table, includes the each member’s name, occupation (if applicable), voice type, and years of membership. The predictably long list spans 47 pages and is a treasure-trove of information. Perhaps most interesting are the years of membership. Of the 1641 members who overlap with Zelter’s tenure, the breakdown of years spent in the Sing-Akademie is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Less than two years</th>
<th>Two to five years</th>
<th>Six to ten years</th>
<th>Eleven or more years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27 %</td>
<td>33 %</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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24 Schünemann, 16.
25 Lichtenstein, XXV.
26 The Mittwochs Akademie, as it was known, practised on Wednesdays under the vice-director (Rungenhagen for most of Zelter’s tenure). Ibid., XXIX.
27 Z to G, 7 to 10 February 1827. Zelter comments that he can be certain of the number of choristers at each Tuesday rehearsal as: “every Tuesday the names of those present are written down...” Byrne Bodley, 367.
Notably, a full 8 percent of these members are listed as leaving due to death. It is clear from this breakdown that the majority of Sing-Akademie members left within five years of joining. While it is possible that at least some of them left due to a physical move or job demands, it is more likely the slow pace of rehearsals that deterred them. As we will examine further in chapter 4 some works were studied for months and while that attention to detail might have yielded a superior result, it is not hard to imagine becoming frustrated. Some of the departures may also be explained by age or health; with a long wait list, particularly for the female spaces, it is likely that some singers did not join until they were middle-aged. The demands of standing for long periods in very crowded spaces might well have forced some to leave before they would have liked. Despite these challenges, many long-serving members recruited their families to join and the records show many examples of large family groups whose memberships overlap. The 24 percent who remained with the group for 11 years or more are especially interesting, particularly given the escalating costs and the increasing time burden placed on the membership. With multiple rehearsals a week, informal and formal concerts on a regular basis, and a director whose expectations were exceptionally high, the longevity of these members speaks to a deep loyalty.

Lichtenstein’s list also provides a record of the professions of the Sing-Akademie’s membership. While other histories of the Sing-Akademie, such as Blumner’s, indicate that the membership was made up of the upper level of Berlin society, Lichtenstein is the only source that gives a complete picture of the variety of professions. The 403 members whose professions are listed, Lichtenstein marks a cross beside these singers, to indicate the means of their departure. He does not, however, include any information about other member’s reasons for leaving the group.

The space constraints of the Sing-Akademie are considered in detail later in the chapter. See pp. 109-111.
and whose tenures overlap with Zelter’s, represent a wide range of occupations.\textsuperscript{30} Professionals, such as doctors, apothecaries, and architects make up 15 percent; when the court advisors are added to that category, the number jumps to 31 percent.\textsuperscript{31} These professionals would all have been educated and privileged, with considerable disposable income and time. Another group of Sing-Akademie members represents a newer elite class within Berlin: tradesman. Although tradesmen only represent six percent of the group’s membership, their inclusion demonstrates the changing role of trades within society in the period.\textsuperscript{32} As a tradesman himself, Zelter obviously did not hold an applicant’s occupation against him and so long as the potential member met the musical and financial requirements (and there was a space available in their voice type) they were eligible to join.

Along with court and city professionals and tradesmen, music professionals form a large group within the Sing-Akademie membership. With designations from Königlicher Sänger to Kapellmeister to Musiklehrer, they constitute a full 15 percent of the chorus. Among the musical professionals, names such as Meyerbeer and Felix Mendelssohn stand out. It would seem that Zelter regularly recruited his private composition students into the chorus; the Sing-Akademie functioned as an extension of his private teaching. The large number of musicians who gave their time to the chorus shows that professional musicians in Berlin embraced both Zelter and the Sing-Akademie. Especially notable are the 13 court singers who were willing to

\textsuperscript{30} Note that although some women have professions listed, it is almost certain that the designations reflect their husbands’ positions, rather than their own and as such they were not included in the calculation of professions. The only exceptions are women whose professions are listed as court singers and court actresses, as those are occupations they might actually have held.

\textsuperscript{31} The term “rath” is applied to a wide range of disciplines on the membership list, including: Kriegs-rath, wirkl. Geheim. Reg. Rath, geh. Legations-rath, and Geheimer Medizinal-rath. See Appendix 2 for a complete list.

\textsuperscript{32} The trades represented range from medeilleur to fabricant.
provide their expertise free of charge to a large amateur group; their membership suggests that despite the size and limited repertoire of the group, Zelter offered something to challenge his members.

Of course, not every member was as involved as the next. Some, such as Felix Mendelssohn’s aunt Sara Levy who joined in 1792, focused a great deal of their energy on promoting the group and helping to shape its mandate. In the case of Sara Levy, who hosted an active salon before devoting herself to the Sing-Akademie, the group allowed her to explore the music of composers whose works she would otherwise never have heard performed. This idea of mutual education and continuous experimentation made the Sing-Akademie all the more exciting both for its members and its audience.

The question of who exactly formed part of the Sing-Akademie’s audience has long been problematic. The Akademie saw itself as a private academic endeavour thanks largely to Zelter, who had always treated it as such, and most histories of the organization take care to note that the Auditorien were only open to invited guests. Unfortunately, other scholarly works parrot this claim. Indeed, James Garratt’s recent article, “Performing Renaissance Church Music in Nineteenth Century Germany: Issues and Challenges in the Study of Performative Reception,” points towards the “private” nature of Sing-Akademie performances to support the assertion that choral music was solely for the elite. Although Garratt is correct that choral music was largely the domain of the upper class in this period, his description of Auditorien as private is misleading. What this description fails to clarify is that the number of “invited guests” often

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exceeded 100 and that the “invitations” were given, at least in part, in exchange for services. This system of exchange-in-kind demonstrates that although the guests did not pay for their admission with currency, the “invitations” had real value.

It seems from early accounts that the majority of Berlin society attended the “private” Auditorien. Although the exact number of attendees at each event is difficult to track, early histories take care to mention that the performances were attended by all the important members of society. While this was likely not true for every Auditorium, it is clear from surviving documents that Einlassbilletten were very much in demand. A series of letters from 1802 between Zelter and the Akademie der Künste (represented by Herr Prof. Hartung) illustrates this point.\(^{34}\) In the letters Zelter is arguing for the renewal of the informal agreement wherein the Sing-Akademie had use of some of the Akademie der Künste’s rooms. With over 200 members by this time and ever more weeknights occupied by rehearsals, it is understandable that the Akademie did not immediately agree to Zelter’s request. After much haggling over room size and payment, an informal agreement was finally reached. As part of that agreement, the Akademie der Künste received six Einlassbilletten to each Auditorium, with the option for more when desired. In his letter, Zelter reminds Hartung that the choir is made up of amateurs who are pursuing music in their leisure time; this reminder was likely an attempt to temper the expectations of the visitors.\(^{35}\) While no money changed hands as part of this transaction, it is clear that the tickets had real value to the Akademie. This exchange undermines the “private” designation for the event, as the “guests” in this case were not

\(^{34}\) N. Mus. SA 323, 36-39.  
\(^{35}\) N. Mus. DA 323, 39. The agreement was confirmed again in 1805, this time with the Akademie receiving their choice of tickets to every “Auditorio” N. Mus. Sa 323, 46.
invited by Zelter or the chorus members, but rather by the board members of the Akademie der Künste.

Further evidence that the *Einlassbilletten* were in demand is found in Zelter’s correspondence. In an exchange with Prof. Wagner dated 4 December 1803, Wagner asks Zelter for tickets to a number of Auditorien; Zelter responds with a list of five dates that he would honour the “Einlassbillete” for.\(^\text{36}\) Again, money is not part of the transaction, however; the request suggests that the “invitations” to these performances were often solicited by the attendee rather than awarded by a chorus member. Also, the exchange suggests that the tickets were carefully regulated and could not simply be used to attend an Auditorium of the patron’s choice. Further, Zelter’s inclusion of five separate dates raises some obvious questions. First, what exactly was being performed at these five concerts? Does Zelter’s grouping of the five dates mean that the same music was heard at all five? Second, how were the *Einlassbillette* accounted for? Was there an usher who checked that the guest was attending on the correct date? Were seats assigned? Sadly these questions will likely remain unanswered unless the original *Tagebücher* resurface.

One group which did not have to haggle for admission was the royal family, whose patronage of the Auditorien has already been mentioned. The royal patronage of the Sing-Akademie was very important to Zelter personally, as revealed in his letters to Goethe:

> Our Queen was with us on 3 January and on 14 February the King paid a visit with his whole court, which gave me tremendous joy. I entertained the King with an eight-part Te

\(^\text{36}\) N. Mus. SA 323, 58.
Deum for double choir, which I composed for his birthday two years ago. He was obviously very pleased and paid me many personal compliments, which I lapped up from him.37 König mit einem 8stimmigen und Zweichörigen Te Deum bewirtet, welches ich vor zwei Jahren zu seinem Geburtstage komponiert habe. Er hat darüber seine Zufriedenheit bezeugt und mir persönlich viele angenehme Dinge gesagt, die ich von Ihm gern gehört habe.38

Visits from the royal family became a comparatively common occurrence according to Schünemann.39 Certainly, Zelter seems to have enjoyed a good relationship with Princess Louise Ferdinand. In a series of three letters (N. Mus. SA 322, 7-9) the Princess asks Zelter for a private performance of an unnamed Handel choral work that the Sing-Akademie had performed on 21 March, 1811 at the Domkirche as well as a meeting with Zelter at her home to discuss the work.40 Zelter, predictably, is happy to oblige and arranges for the Princess to visit the Sing-Akademie on 26 March 1811, and for him to visit the Princess the day before. The letter ends with assurance from Zelter that the (unnamed) “Choral der händelischen Musik” (Handel chorale) “nur eine viertelstunde ausfüllt” (only takes a quarter hour).41 Although the exchange tells us little about the specifics of the work in question, it shows the enviable position Zelter enjoyed by 1811. It is obvious from the Princess’ request that Zelter was seen as an expert on choral music whose opinions were valued. Royal patronage of the Sing-Akademie

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37 Byrne Bodley, 57.
38 Z to G, 5 March 1804.
39 Schünemann, 32.
40 N. Mus. SA 322, 7.
41 N. Mus. SA 322, 8. Presumably, the length of time quoted represents the chorale’s rehearsal, rather than a performance. It is possible however, that Zelter intended to perform several chorales as a unit.
continued throughout Zelter’s tenure, further augmenting both Zelter and the Sing-Akademie’s reputations.\textsuperscript{42}

Along with local academics and the royal family, visitors to Berlin seem to have been regular guests at the “private” Auditorien. Among the visitors are Beethoven, who visited twice in June of 1796,\textsuperscript{43} John Quincy Adams (son of American president John Adams), who visited in 1799,\textsuperscript{44} and Frau von Arnstein of Vienna, who visited in 1801.\textsuperscript{45} In a letter dated 28 March 1804, Goethe testifies to this practice as well:

Many a traveller testifies to your works and deeds, in so far as they are in the public forum and have a public impact.\textsuperscript{46}  
So mancher Reisende zeugt von Ihren Werken und Taten, insofern sie erscheinen und nach aussen wirken; [...]\textsuperscript{47}

That Goethe saw the Sing-Akademie as part of a public forum is very telling; obviously the “unpaid” nature of the concerts did not impact Goethe’s understanding of them as public performances. The steady stream of visitors described by Goethe also reinforces the public nature of the “private” Auditorien; clearly the performances were considered polished enough for visitors to attend along with professional concerts when visiting Berlin.

The popularity of the Sing-Akademie’s Auditorien explains, in part, why Zelter was so eager to create a building for the group’s dedicated use. The Akademie der Künste room was only large

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{42} Zelter mentions several visits from various members of the royal family, along with several private concerts. For examples see Byrne Bodley, 516, 458, 316.
  \item \textsuperscript{43} Schünemann, 18.
  \item \textsuperscript{44} Lichtenstein, XIII
  \item \textsuperscript{45} Frau von Arnstein was the sister of Frau Levy, Mendelssohn’s aunt and a member of the Sing-Akademie. In this letter she offers to host any member of the Sing-Akademie who might be visiting Vienna and informs Zelter which dates she is planning to visit the Sing-Akademie. N. Mus. SA 323, 20.
  \item \textsuperscript{46} Byrne Bodley, 58.
  \item \textsuperscript{47} G to Z, 28 March 1804.
\end{itemize}
enough to accommodate 150 comfortably, although it could be stretched to 180 if needed.\textsuperscript{48}

This was obviously a problem, as the number of chorus members soon outstripped their physical space.\textsuperscript{49} Their size meant that by 1818 they were renting space on Charlottenstrasse and their concerts were performed in churches and the King’s theatre.\textsuperscript{50} Zelter complained bitterly about the lack of space for decades, but it was not until after a considerable wait that the Sing-Akademie was granted suitable land beside the finance ministry on 27 April 1821.\textsuperscript{51}

The original plans for the building were drawn by famed Berlin architect K.Fr. Schinkel, who was a friend of Zelter’s and whose wife was a member of the chorus.\textsuperscript{52} The final plans for the building were done by Schinkel’s student Ottmer, whose fees were lower. Despite Zelter’s initial excitement at finally having a space that could accommodate his large chorus and guests, the construction process was long and very expensive. The cost overruns forced the Sing-Akademie to fundraise, which they did with paid public concerts. The concerts and their repertoire are discussed in detail in chapter 5. It was not until 2 January 1827 that a rehearsal was held in the new building.\textsuperscript{53} According to Zelter the room, however, remained incomplete for some time:

\begin{quote}
Since 2 January our Sing-Akademie has quietly entered the new building and is trying out the most suitable positions. The acoustics are good; Chladni who was here recently considers them first-rate. At the same time nothing is completely finished. Today the doors were still not hanging, the
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Seit dem 2ten Januar ist unsere Sing-Akademie in das neue Gebäude still eingetreten und probiert sich seitdem die bequemsten Stellungen aus. Der Klang ist gut, ja Chladni der eben hier war findet ihn vorzüglich. Dazu ist noch nichts ganz fertig; die Türen waren bis heut noch nicht alle angeschlagen; die Sitze sind noch nicht fertig und
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{48} Blumner, 52.
\textsuperscript{49} By 1800 there were 147 members; 1805, 227; 1810 275; 1815, 291; 1820, 288. Lichtenstein, XXIX.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., XVII.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., XVIII. Byrne Bodley describes Zelter’s impatience: Byrne Bodley, 280.
\textsuperscript{52} Schünemann, 36.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 42.
The remaining alterations took time and it wasn’t until 8 April 1827 that the hall was officially opened.\textsuperscript{56}

One of the advantages of the new hall was space to accommodate an orchestra to accompany the chorus. The Sing-Akademie orchestra, which Zelter began in 1807, was instituted to enhance the performance of large-scale works, which called for more than just an organ or piano, and was made up of talented amateurs. The \textit{Ripienschule}, as it was called, soon expanded to become an orchestra in its own right, playing music that did not have vocal parts. Indeed, the group even adapted some keyboard fugues as string quartets, in order to learn the music more thoroughly.\textsuperscript{57} Here too, Zelter acted as a curator and copyist; he went so far as to buy the scores with his own money so that the group could be exposed to the best possible repertoire.\textsuperscript{58} The \textit{Ripienschule} repaid Zelter’s dedication by performing with the Sing-Akademie regularly.

Zelter’s dedication to the Sing-Akademie and the enormous effort he poured into its many ventures is a reflection of the important place Zelter felt the chorus held within the cultural organizations of Berlin. From his letters, it is clear that Zelter took time to conceptualize what...
the group could contribute to Berlin’s musical life. Further, both he and Goethe saw the Sing-Akademie as having the potential to make a real impact on Berlin’s musical life:

I think you are lucky to be exerting a growing, formative influence on that environment which you yourself have created, and to have the hope that you have also achieved something that will last.  

Mein Plan, etwas Beständiges für Musik, im Allgemeinen zu tun, beschäftigt mich Tag und Nacht und befestigt sich in Absicht auf Grundsätze immer mehr.

Zelter (and Goethe) actively imagined their legacies even as they created them; Zelter especially advocated for his Sing-Akademie by describing what choral music could do for Berlin society in general, thereby ensuring its continued existence and his musical legacy.  

Even his [Weimar composer Eberwein] participation in the Sing-Akademie can only be of use to him as an artist if he attends a series of lectures, whose product he sees develop and grow, but

Selbst seine [Eberwein] Teilnahme an der Sing-Akademie kann ihm nur in so fern als Artist nützlich werden, wenn er einer Reihe von Lektionen bewohnt, deren Produkt er entstehen und wachsen sieht, besonders aber wenn er

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59 Byrne Bodley, 58.
60 G to Z, 28 March 1804.
61 Ibid., 59
62 Z to G, 1 May 1804.
63 An example of this can be found in Zelter’s memos to Minister Hardenberg on the role of music within the arts academy. For complete copies of the memoranda see: Georg Schünemann, *Carl Friedrich Zelter der Begründer der Preussischen Musikpflege* (Berlin: Hesse, 1932).
especially if he hears solid and masterly compositions in the plain German style...  

In this passage, Zelter suggests that the rehearsals offer an opportunity for learning beyond the notes of the piece; he suggests that the material is discussed and worked through in an academic manner that would help an aspiring composer hone his craft. This “lecture” style of rehearsal might explain why such a large portion of the chorus consisted of professional musicians, despite the group’s amateur status. If Zelter used the director’s podium to offer analysis and context for the works rehearsed, then perhaps musicians saw the rehearsals as an opportunity to learn from a master.

This passage also raises another interesting issue: what did Zelter consider the “plain German style” and why did he consider it beneficial? In a period where Italianate vocal music dominated, Zelter consistently programmed German choral repertoire, much of which was generations old. This is not to say that the Sing-Akademie’s repertoire was exclusively older German music; in fact, Zelter included many new works and also many older works by non-Germanic composers. However, it is undeniable that the Sing-Akademie’s bread and butter was baroque German choral works by masters such as J.S. Bach and G.F. Handel. Zelter described the Sing-Akademie’s repertoire thus:

The Sing-Akademie is an arts organization for holy and serious music, particularly for music in the legato style, and its aim: practical rehearsals of the works [of music in said style] and the edification of the members, for which reason [the Sing-Akademie is ein Kunstverein für die heilige und ernste Musik, besonders für die Musik im gebundenen Styl, und ihr Zweck: praktische Uebung in den Werken derselben, zur Erbauung der Mitglieder, daher sie selten und nie anders als unter der Leitung ihres Directors.

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64 Z to G, 9-11 September 1808.
Akademie] performs only seldom in public and exclusively under the leadership of its director. öffentlich auftritt.65

This emphasis on older music as a foundation for the chorus was due, at least in part, to Zelter’s own taste, as shown in chapter 1. Along with taste, the inclusion of older repertoire also reflects Zelter’s area of expertise. Not one for false modesty, Zelter describes his talent for older music:

Then those [good professionals] would also have to be doubly skilful in order to handle older works well, which always go down best under my direction. Two years ago Spontini included a Credo by old Bach in a benefit concert for the widows of musical directors. It was a disaster...66

[...] dann müssen diese auch wieder doppelt geschickt sein um ältere Stücke gut zu behandeln welches unter meiner Anführung immer noch am Besten geht. Spontini hatte vor 2 Jahren im Benefizkonzerte für die Witwen der Kappellmusiker ein Credo vom alter Bach aufgenommen das war zum Krepieren ...67

This passage illustrates not only Zelter’s self-confidence, but also the status of the “old Bach” in 1830. Even a year after Mendelssohn’s performance of Bach’s St. Matthew Passion, Zelter did not consider the average musician fully capable of performing Bach’s works.68 In an earlier part of the same letter, Zelter bemoans the audience’s inability to listen to Bach correctly, a complaint that will be considered further in chapter 4.

Zelter’s inclusion of older music in the repertoire of the Sing-Akademie seems commonplace by today’s choral repertoire standards; however, his programming was groundbreaking in the

65 Eberle, 71.
66 Byrne Bodley, 458.
67 Z to G, 15 to 23 March 1830.
68 This belief might at least partly explain some of Mendelssohn’s performance changes to the St. Matthew Passion score. A recording of Mendelssohn’s arrangement is now available. J.S. Bach/Felix Mendelssohn, St. Matthew Passion, Chorus Musicus/Neue Orchester conducted by Christoph Spering (Opus B0000260SU), compact disc.
early 1800s. Fasch inaugurated the group specifically to perform religious music, especially his own sixteen-voice Mass. ⁶⁹ Along with his own compositions, Fasch programmed several Bach motets in the 1790s, although the majority of the repertoire was drawn from more recent composers. When Zelter took over the reins of the Sing-Akademie he continued to programme contemporary composers, but also began to steadily increase the number of works by older composers. For example, Zelter included a portion of one work by J.S. Bach at each rehearsal, moving gradually through the motets to the more challenging larger works. According to Schünemann, the chorus began to study the Kyrie from the B-minor Mass on 25 October 1811 ⁷⁰ and from that point forward Zelter continued to build toward monumental works by both Bach and Handel. ⁷¹

Previous studies of the Sing-Akademie have not questioned what inspired Zelter to increase the ratio of old to new works, although some studies explain his “conservative” taste by his age or education. ⁷² Zelter’s musical conservatism was widely accepted as it applied to choral music, with the Sing-Akademie earning accolades from the majority of the Berlin music press. Zelter’s opinions on non-choral music, which he gave freely, were less well-received. His dismissal of Beethoven and his reluctance to program some newer works made him appear rigid; his own

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⁶⁹ In Zelter’s biography of Fasch he reports that Fasch’s mass gave rise to the Sing-Akademie. Goethe comments in a letter dated 29 May 1801: “I was particularly delighted with your account of the Mass in 16 parts, and of the Sing-Akademie to which it gave rise; how pleased I was that the good Fasch should be so fortunate as to have lived to see such an idea realized.” Byrne Bodley, 34.

⁷⁰ Schünemann, 43. Note that this is difficult to corroborate, as Schünemann had access to records that have not survived. Lichtenstein does not make mention of which specific works were studied, with the exception of several lists of oratorios performed.

⁷¹ For more information on the specific years and works, please see chapters 4 and 5 respectively.

⁷² Cornelia Auerbach, Carl Friedrich Zelter und die Akademie; Dokumente und Briefe zur Entstehung der Musik-Sektion in der Preussischen Akademie der Künste (Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 1959), 50.
compositions, which were in a traditional style, solidified this image.\textsuperscript{73} As a result, more recent studies of Zelter often try to correct the unflattering portrayal of him as unimaginative; what these rationalisations overlook is the whole-hearted acceptance of this “conservative” model by the Sing-Akademie, which was made up of well-educated, wealthy individuals. Further, music critics, including A.B. Marx, whose scathing comments marked Zelter as an arch-conservative, saw what the Sing-Akademie was doing as important for German music as a whole.\textsuperscript{74} This contradiction demands comment; how could Marx damn Zelter as a Philistine in one breath and applaud his programming choices in the next? I believe that the difference is the medium; even Marx understood that the older choral works created a larger historical backdrop for understanding a national voice. What Marx condemned was Zelter using his influence to pass judgement on modern composers, whom Marx felt Zelter judged unfairly, most notably Beethoven.

Zelter’s library affirms his penchant for older music, choral and instrumental alike. His private collection is outstanding and spans all genres and periods.\textsuperscript{75} That its focus is German choral music is not surprising, given that he collected not just for his own interest, but also for his beloved Sing-Akademie. Indeed Zelter’s and the Sing-Akademie’s music collections were so intertwined that when Zelter died the Akademie launched a lawsuit; Zelter had kept all the valuable scores (both his own and the Akademie’s) at his home and there were no markings to

\textsuperscript{73} As noted on page 93 Zelter was cordial with Beethoven and did not dismiss Beethoven’s works out of hand; indeed he liked some of the vocal works.

\textsuperscript{74} Susanne Oschmann, “Die Bach-Pflege der Sing-Akademien” in \textit{Bach und die Nachwelt} vol. 1, ed. Michael Heinemann and Hans-Joachim Hinrichsen (Laaber: Laaber Verlag, 1997), 311. Also, it should be noted that Zelter acted as Marx’s teacher for a short period; despite this personal connection, there was no love lost between them.

\textsuperscript{75} Thomas Richter’s reconstruction of Zelter’s private library offers the most complete account of its contents. Thomas Richter, ‘\textit{Bibliotheca Zelteriana.’ Rekonstruktion der Bibliothek Carl Friedrich Zelters. Alphabetischer Katalog} (Stuttgart: Metzler Verlag, 1999).
show which belonged to him and which to the group. In the end, his heirs settled with the Sing-Akademie, accepting payment and turning over the complete contents of his library.  

As previously mentioned it was not just the Sing-Akademie that benefited from Zelter’s collection; as other musicians visited the Akademie they often took away with them copies of the scores. In this way Zelter acted as a mentor to organizations across northern Germany. One group which traces its roots directly to the Sing-Akademie’s model is the Breslauer Sing-Akademie, which was founded in May 1825 by the court composer Johann Theodor Mosewius. The Breslauer Akademie took shape after Mosewius and his wife, who was a professional singer, visited Berlin and the Sing-Akademie in 1811 and met with Zelter. Despite their immediate interest, it took a second visit by Mosewius in 1825 before the couple set up the Breslauer Sing-Akademie. Zelter supported the group by providing scores, hosting Mosewius on visits so he could observe the Berlin group, and by lending him money so that he could avoid paying the start-up fees for the group.

Other similar groups in Dresden and Frankfurt am Main also took on the Berlin Sing-Akademie model. The Dresden group, which was founded in 1807 by the court organist Anton Dreyssig, aspired to Berlin’s model. Dreyssig, who visited Zelter in 1811, commented that:

The enduring love of music and arts culture — Die ausdauernde Kunstliebe und Geistescultur

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76 This lawsuit was a blessing in disguise as it forced the creation of a catalogue, which would later be used to recreate the Sing-Akademie holdings after they were misplaced during the Second World War. Wollny, 655
78 Ibid., 159.
79 The Dresden Sing-Akademie boasted at least one very prominent member, Carl Maria von Weber, who joined the group at its founding in 1807. Zelter issued a personal invitation to Weber inviting him to join the Berlin Sing-Akademie and the Liedertafel. Wilhelm Virneisel, “Aus dem Berliner Freundeskreise Webers: Unveröffentliche Briefe Webers an Friedericke Koch.” Bande der Freundschaft 54. [N. Mus. SA 260]
of Berlin’s citizens is embodied by their institute. der Bewohner Berlins seinem Institut gewesen war.80

Dreyssig clearly saw the Sing-Akademie as part of a larger practice of cultural appreciation in Berlin and envied them the support given by the court and city. The Dresden Sing-Akademie began to sing works by Bach shortly after Dreyssig’s visit to Berlin; motets were rehearsed first and by 1833 they had performed the _St Matthew Passion_. Zelter’s willingness to mentor emerging groups meant that his model quickly became a standard across Germany, especially after the widely publicized 1829 performance of the _St Matthew Passion_.

Frankfurt am Main’s _Cäcilienverein_ is another group that owes their beginning to the Sing-Akademie. Johann Nepomuk Schelbe heard about Zelter and the work he was doing with the Berlin Sing-Akademie and set out to create a similar group in Frankfurt am Main, using the Berlin Akademie as a model.81 Schelbe began to program Bach’s music in the 1820s; for scores he had to rely on copies from Berlin and Breslau, as there were few extant copies in Frankfurt am Main.82 Despite the practical problems, the group built their Bach repertoire and in fact premiered the _St Matthew Passion_ only a week after Berlin, on 29 May 1829. In the case of Frankfurt am Main, Dresden, and Breslau, Zelter provided encouragement and scores, along with details of his own approach with the Berlin Sing-Akademie. This mentoring made the Berlin Sing-Akademie the direct model for the groups’ repertoire choices. With the positive reviews of the _St. Matthew Passion_ première, there were soon groups of amateur singers

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80 Oschmann, 327.
81 Ibid., 316.
82 Ibid., 317.
across northern Germany who not only knew the name of J.S. Bach but had also heard some of his music.

It was only after Zelter’s death that it became clear how deeply the Sing-Akademie had relied on him; with his death they lost their strongest advocate. During Zelter’s tenure with the group his own musical predilections became the Akademie’s; its repertoire reflects his own interests and ambitions. The Sing-Akademie acted as an experimental group, in which Zelter was free to try new directions, highlighting composers who had long passed out of fashion, but who Zelter believed offered something of value. That the Sing-Akademie took Zelter’s academic inclinations to heart is evident from the chorus’ choice of successor after his death. Despite Felix Mendelssohn’s prestige both locally and internationally, the chorus overlooked him for the directorship after Zelter’s death; the counterargument to Devrient’s pleas that Mendelssohn showed much promise and would increase their stature was that the Akademie did not rehearse to become famous but rather to learn.83 While the wisdom of their choice (of Vice-director Carl Friedrich Rungenhagen) is easily argued, it reinforces the group’s commitment to continue in Zelter’s academic model. Zelter would certainly have applauded their dedication.

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Chapter Four

Zelter’s Bach: “Ich habe dich wieder ans Licht gebracht”

The extraordinary thing about Bach is that a genius, in whom taste is innate, should from such soil have revealed a spirit that must have very deep roots.¹

In 1827 C.F. Zelter famously pronounced: “Du hast mir Arbeit gemacht, -- Ich habe dich wieder ans Licht gebracht.” (You made work for me and I brought you back to light)² This statement, more than any other, makes it clear that Zelter saw himself as the person responsible for the revival of J.S. Bach. The obvious discrepancy between this statement and the more familiar history of the Bach revival raises some important questions, notably, why did Zelter think that he had brought Bach back “ans Licht” two years before Mendelssohn’s famous revival of the *St. Matthew Passion*? This chapter will set out to answer this question by examining Zelter’s myriad Bach-related activities, which range from editing manuscripts to conducting large-scale choral works. Further, his portrayal of Bach in his correspondence with Goethe will be reviewed to show the prominent role Zelter gave Bach in Goethe’s musical education. While Zelter’s admiration of J.S. Bach was far from unique among Berlin musicians, his far-reaching advocacy and programming of Bach was. Zelter took Bach’s music out of the realm of private study and brought it to the centre of Berlin’s cultural life; this reimagining of Bach and his musical legacy served to reposition Bach as the bedrock of the German choral canon.

In order to clearly articulate this repositioning, this chapter will begin with a brief overview of Bach’s legacy in Berlin in the late 1700s, in order to make the links between Zelter and the Bach legacy clear.

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² Z to G, 8 June 1827.
family apparent. This will be followed by a discussion of Zelter’s activities as a Bach scholar, including his work as an assessor and editor of manuscripts, especially those from the Pölchau Bach collection. Finally, the chapter will provide a detailed summary of Zelter’s programming of Bach at the Berlin Sing-Akademie, in order to show the practical application of Zelter’s academic pursuits.

As previously mentioned in the Sing-Akademie chapter, the music of J.S. Bach never truly died in Berlin. Indeed, Peter Wollny argues in “Ein ‘musikalischer Veteran Berlins’” that Berlin became the centre of the “Bach-Tradition” after 1750. This shift away from Leipzig to Berlin is explained by the large number of Bach students and sons who were active in Berlin in the second half of the eighteenth-century. In fact, three of J.S. Bach’s sons lived in Berlin: Carl Philipp Emanuel from 1739-1768, Johann Christian from 1750-1755, and Wilhelm Friedemann from 1774-1784. As well, four of Bach’s more prominent pupils also settled in Berlin: Johann Friedrich Agricola, Johann Philipp Kirnberger, Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg, and Christoph Nichelmann. With the exception of J.C. Bach and C. Nichelmann, these men soon became prominent figures in the Berlin music community, largely thanks to their work at the court of Frederick the Great. Not surprisingly, in addition to a shared musical education, Bach’s students and sons brought with them copies (and in some cases autographs) of Bach’s music, which they used as part of their own teaching practices.

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4 Ibid.
5 Thanks to Fasch’s close association with C.P.E. Bach, under whom he worked at Frederick the Great’s court, the Sing-Akademie inherited many of C.P.E.’s copies of his father’s work, including motets and three-voice inventions. Joachim Jaenecke, “Zur Bedeutung der Werke Johann Sebastian Bachs in der Sing-Akademie zu Berlin
These teaching practices kept Bach’s music alive in Berlin; Kirnberger in particular made J.S. Bach one of the pillars of his pedagogical keyboard repertoire. Two of his students, Princess Anna Amalie of Prussia and Sara Itzig (later Levy), were among the first collectors of J.S. Bach manuscripts in Berlin.\textsuperscript{6} Princess Amalia’s collection, which she began in 1758 and eventually donated to the Royal Library of Prussia, numbered over 200 works, many of them autographs.\textsuperscript{7} Although the relationship between a royal manuscript collection and an amateur choral director might seem tenuous, the Amalien-Bibliothek played a pivotal role in Zelter’s Bach education. Between 1800 and 1802 Zelter created the first catalogue of the collection, which provided him with a thorough knowledge of the library’s contents and allowed him a unique level of access to its materials, including many sacred vocal scores.\textsuperscript{8} As we shall see shortly, Zelter translated this early exposure to rare Bach scores into a reputation as Bach manuscript expert.

In addition to these larger collections of Bachiana, scores were passed from composer to composer, often by way of personal copies, as the music was either unpublished or out of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item Sara Levy, née Itzig, who was one of Felix Mendelssohn’s great-aunts, organized a music club at her home that focused on the performance of Bach keyboard and chamber music. The group, which only performed for invited guests, was the inspiration for Zelter’s Rippienschule (at which Levy became a regular keyboard soloist). Levy, along with her sister Bella Salomon, is credited with providing Felix with many of the J.S. Bach manuscripts that he studied. Sara Levy also donated many C.P.E. Bach scores to the Sing-Akademie library. For more information on Sara Levy and her interest in the music of the Bach family, please see Peter Wollny’s article: “Sara Levy and the Making of Musical Taste in Berlin,” \textit{Musical Quarterly} 77 (1993): 651-688. Christoph Wolff’s “A Bach Cult in Late Eighteenth-Century Berlin: Sara Levy’s Musical Salon,” \textit{Bulletin of the American Academy} (Spring 2005): 26-31 is also an excellent resource that illuminates the deep ties between the music of J.S. Bach and the extended Mendelssohn family and also details the contents of Sara Levy’s music collection.
\item The Royal Library eventually became the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (SBB). For more information on the Amalien-Bibliothek please see: Eva Renata Wutta, ed. \textit{Quellen der Bach-Tradition in der Berliner Amalien-Bibliothek} (Tutzing: H. Schneider, 1989).
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
print. Thanks to this practice, which valued the classical master of harmonic settings by the turn of the nineteenth-century Berlin had more copies of Bach manuscripts than any other German city. It is clear then that Bach enjoyed a far more prominent position in the musical life of Berlin than elsewhere.

The combination of enthusiastic amateur collectors and counterpoint students meant that in Berlin J.S. Bach’s music was never forgotten. However, we must remember that these collectors and students accounted for a very small portion of the city’s population and that even within the “Bach community” only certain works were actively performed. Even in Berlin then, the performance of Bach’s choral music was rare, and it was not until Fasch founded his sacred singing group in 1791 that a mixed-voice choir started to work on J.S. Bach’s motets.

Fasch’s Sing-Akademie began to rehearse J.S. Bach’s “Komm, Jesu, komm” on 21 January 1794 and performed the motet at a public Auditorium on 8 April of the same year. This marked the beginning of what would be a hallmark of the programming at the Sing-Akademie. From 1794 on, the group worked through Bach’s choral pieces one after another, moving from motets to parts of larger works by the early 1800s.

While the specifics of the Sing-Akademie’s Bach repertoire require clarification, the context of the programming choices is vital to understanding them. To that end, the next portion of this
chapter will examine Zelter’s own relationship with the music of J.S. Bach. Without an understanding of Zelter as a Bach scholar, it is impossible to appreciate his motivation for featuring the works of J.S. Bach so prominently in the Sing-Akademie’s repertoire.

Zelter’s own experience with J.S. Bach began during his private composition studies with Fasch and Kirnberger. In his studies his teachers used Bach’s music as a model for counterpoint. However, unlike most students who would have had to be satisfied with imagining how the small-scale choral works might sound, Zelter had the unique opportunity to perform them as part of Fasch’s singing group, which he joined in 1791.\textsuperscript{13} Indeed, as early as 1794, when the Sing-Akademie began its work on Bach, Zelter was leading rehearsals due to Fasch’s failing health.\textsuperscript{14} Zelter, than, developed an early and unusual appreciation for the choral works of Bach, which he and Fasch programmed alongside the group’s diverse sacred repertoire. While it is easy for modern scholars to look at their Bach repertoire as somewhat incidental to the larger repertoire of the Sing-Akademie, it translated into a very real passion for Zelter, who began to actively acquire Bach manuscripts.\textsuperscript{15} Further, his contemporaries also recognized Zelter’s Bach passion as special and began to turn to him for help with their own Bach sources.

\textsuperscript{13} Schünemann, 15.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 17. Zelter’s role in these early rehearsals should not be underestimated. Fasch’s failing health meant that Zelter was responsible for many of the rehearsals and he was likely able to take a comparatively active role in the programming of the Sing-Akademie from 1794 on. Also, he began to formally maintain the Sing-Akademie’s records in 1796. Heinrich Lichtenstein, \textit{Zur Geschichte der Sing-Akademie in Berlin: Nebst einer Nachricht über das Fest am fünfzigsten Jahrestage ihrer Stiftung und einem alphabetischen Verzeichniss aller Personen, die ihr als Mitgelder angehört haben} (Berlin: Trautwein und Co, 1843), XI.
\textsuperscript{15} Zelter’s private score collection has been reconstructed in: Thomas Richter, \textit{Bibliotheca Zelteriana: Rekonstruktion der Bibliothek Carl Friedrich Zelters} (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler Verlag, 2000). Zelter also seems to have been gifted at encouraging others to donate their collections to the Sing-Akademie library; both Sara Levy and Abraham Mendelssohn donated a large number of unpublished Bach scores they had purchased at auction. Wolff suggests that they donated them to Zelter and the Sing-Akademie because he was the first to consciously start an archive of the music. Wolff, 30.
The most notable early example of this is Zelter’s involvement with the Amalien-Bibliothek; in the early 1800s he took on the role of cataloguer and caretaker of the collection. Zelter’s catalogue, which is still available in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (SBB), shows a remarkable attention to detail and a dedication to the preservation of Bach’s music. Cataloguing the collection was a turning point in Zelter’s career; from that point forward he became a respected authority on the music of J.S. Bach and soon other Bach enthusiasts were seeking his advice on their own collections.

One such enthusiast was Georg Pölchau (1773-1836). Pölchau, who was one of the nineteenth-century’s foremost Bach manuscript collectors, had a close relationship with both the Sing-Akademie and Zelter personally. Pölchau amassed a large collection of Bach manuscripts, which would serve as templates for new (published) Bach editions as early as 1811, and corresponded with Zelter regularly. He joined the Sing-Akademie in 1814, shortly after moving to Berlin. Many of the extant manuscripts that bear Zelter’s notes come from Pölchau’s collection. Zelter’s interaction with the collection seems to have taken two forms: assessor and editor.

While assessing Pölchau’s Bach acquisitions, Zelter often took notes on the score itself (i.e. number of voices, text missing, number of orchestral parts present etc.) and in some cases

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16 As early as 1810 Pölchau indicated that he planned to bequeath his music collection to the Sing-Akademie (although he eventually changed his mind and followed Zelter’s suggestion to donate it to the Royal Library). Axel Fischer and Matthias Kornemann, *Die Bach-Sammlung aus dem Archiv der Sing-Akademie zu Berlin: Katalog und Einführung zur Mikrofiche-Edition* (Munich: K.G. Saur), 43.


18 Pölchau’s collection of Bach manuscripts was donated to the SBB in 1841 by his son. The collection ranges from instrumental to choral works and are, in general, not performing copies. All include his initial P in their call numbers.
commented on the possible dating or authenticity of the manuscript. One example of Zelter’s work as an assessor can be found in Mus. Ms Bach P65, Kantate BWV 195 *Dem Gerechten muss das Licht*. This score, which has a title page in J.S. Bach’s hand, includes part of a note by Zelter in its binding. The note, which is on a torn fragment of paper and which appears to be a section of a longer letter, is undated and badly smudged. The note reads:

More than likely the music of this chorus was written earlier than that of the other.  

*Mehr als wahrscheinlig ist die Musik dieses Chors früher als anders Werk gesetzt gewesen.*

It is unclear which “other” Zelter thought this work was written earlier than, and also on what basis he was making his judgement. While this makes it impossible to determine the validity of Zelter’s assessment, that Zelter thought he was able to make a judgement such as this is revealing. He obviously felt that his expertise in Bach’s choral music was such that he could place newly acquired pieces within the oeuvre. This suggests a familiarity that few composers of his generation would have claimed. The only other notes by Zelter on this manuscript are a copy of the text in poetic form, and he made no notes on the music itself.  

Other parts of the Pölchau collection include more detailed notes, such as Mus. Ms Bach P124 BWV 161 “Komm, du süsse Todesstunde.” Mus. Ms Bach P124 includes a two-page assessment by Zelter, although it is, sadly, undated. In this instance it appears that Zelter is trying to determine who copied the manuscript:

So also the whole text is without a doubt from the immortal author’s hand, except for the Cantoi words Domin Tessio partitii Maria, which were written by C.P.E. Bach.

*Sowas auch der ganze Text, ist ohne Zweifel von des unsterblichen verfassers Hand. Hiervon aus genommen sind die Cantoi Worte Domin Tessio partitii Maria, welche C.P.E. Bach (der hamburger)*

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19 Mus. Ms Bach P65
(the Hamburger). geschrieben hat.\textsuperscript{20}

He goes on to note that there are several small errors in the Partitur, although it is unclear what source he is comparing it with.\textsuperscript{21} Zelter signs the assessment with “Zelter in Berlin”, which suggests that Pölchau was not yet living in Berlin. Although Zelter asserts that there are errors, it is impossible to tell what he considered errors, as Zelter did not make any marking on the score itself. Here again then, Pölchau is turning to Zelter to assess the authenticity of a score he has acquired, and Zelter is responding as an expert, who trusts that his judgement will be respected.

In addition to evaluating manuscripts, Zelter also acted as an editor of Pölchau’s Bach manuscripts. As an editor, Zelter altered the scores themselves, normally writing his changes in red ink. Often the changes he made were small, such as an added accidental or slur, but in some cases he wrote in lines of missing text and music and added new figured bass. Many of Zelter’s additions seem to represent what he viewed as corrections to Pölchau’s versions of the work. A good example of this is Mus. ms Bach P35 BWV 249 (\textit{Easter Oratorio}), where Zelter served two functions. First, he identified the work, which is titled “Partitura von Sinfonien del sigl: JS Bach” as “Kommt, eilet und laufet” from Bach’s \textit{Easter Oratorio} (in fact the Pölchau manuscript also includes the preceding Sinfonia No.2.) Second, he made a number of changes to the instrumental Sinfonia. In this score, Zelter’s additions involve the “correction” of notes and rhythmic values.

\textsuperscript{20} Mus. Ms Bach P124 (SBB)
\textsuperscript{21} It is possible that Zelter was comparing Pölchau’s version with one from the Amalien-Bibliothek, or a copy he had made himself from one of Kirnberger or Fasch’s copies.
The Zelter changes, which are written in red in a (previously empty) staff above the original, are the lower line (Z.) in the above example. In this excerpt, Zelter has added, rather than subtracted, notes and has added slurs and accidentals as well. This example is also interesting in that neither the original passage from Mus ms Bach P35 nor Zelter’s emendations match the Neue Bach-Ausgabe version edited by Paul Brainard. Zelter’s changes give the passage more flourishes, making it more difficult to play. Zelter’s additions to this passage are likely reflective of the differences between the source sent by Pölchau and the source Zelter was familiar with, although it is possible that Zelter’s changes show a performance practice. However, Zelter’s markings do not seem to reflect his own editorial or arrangement practice. As we shall see shortly, Zelter’s own arrangement practice seems to have generally involved simplifying the music to make it more accessible for amateur performers, which is not the case here.
In Mus ms Bach P 57 BWV 38 Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu Dir Zelter’s changes include more performance indications. In mm.14-23 of No. 3, “Ich höre mitten in den Leiden,” Zelter has added a large number of slurs, dynamic markings, and ornamentation instructions.


Zelter’s changes are marked with red (as they are in the original.)
While this example’s additional dynamic and articulation markings might tempt scholars to posit that Zelter was creating a performance edition, this seems unlikely given the changes he made to the rest of the score, which are by-and-large corrections to accidentals. That Zelter’s alterations are “corrections” would also explain why the changes make the passage more, not less, difficult. Although Zelter’s changes do not match the authoritative *Neue Bach-Ausgabe* edition available today, they almost certainly represent alterations to correct what he
perceived as errors, either because the score did not match the version he was familiar with, or because the score did not fit with his understanding of Bach’s compositional style. These two examples illustrate the role Zelter assumed in the Bach community; he did not hesitate to make changes to newly acquired Bach scores and he used his access to the Amalien-Bibliothek and the Sing-Akademie library to verify the accuracy of these scores as they were sent to him. His co-collectors clearly saw him as an expert whose opinion was worth soliciting.

While Zelter’s changes to the Pölchau collection are interesting as further proof that Zelter was sought out as a Bach expert, and was trusted to make corrections to scores, they do not give a clear picture of the changes Zelter made to his performance copies of Bach’s works. Sadly, the fractured nature of the Sing-Akademie collection makes it difficult to evaluate just how often and to what extent Zelter altered Bach’s choral works for performance.22

As previously mentioned, the vast majority of the Sing-Akademie’s Bach performance scores have been lost; one crucial example, however, has survived. SA 4658 St. Matthäus is the Sing-Akademie’s full-score, complete version of J.S. Bach’s St. Matthew Passion. The score is carefully handwritten and begins with a complete poetic form reduction of the text and a small note that states that this is a copy of the score from the Amalien-Bibliothek and that the

22 The Sing-Akademie library was “lost” to the Soviets at the end of the Second World War. While it has now been repatriated to Berlin (as cited in chapter 3), there remain many gaps in the collection, including most of Zelter’s performing copies. It is clear that these copies were part of the collection prior to the war, as earlier musicologists, such as Georg Schünemann, were able to see them in the 1930s. To complicate matters further, the Sing-Akademie sold their original J.S. Bach scores to (what became) the SBB in 1854. The Sing-Akademie’s Bach collection, according to Elias N. Kulukundis’s paper “Again: CPE Bach in the Sing-Akademie Library – the Zelter catalogue (Observations and catalogue)” presented at a CPE Bach Studies conference in 1988, were acquired from CPE Bach’s estate by George Pölchau and Abraham Mendelssohn and donated directly to the Sing-Akademie. While it is possible to determine which scores were sold (thanks to the catalogue of the Sing-Akademie library made in 1833 by Pölchau for the lawsuit against Zelter’s heirs) several of the scores seem to have disappeared in the intervening years. This means that some of the only examples of Zelter’s editorial practice come from his additions to the Pölchau collection, and it is unlikely that his changes to those manuscripts show the full extent of his “performance” changes.
changes were made by Zelter. The note, which is signed Max Schneider, 1935, offers no details to explain how this information was gleaned. Moreover, the score has been poorly preserved and in many places the ink and pencil markings are badly faded.

The changes to SA 4658 are extensive and it appears that they were made on at least four separate occasions; changes appear in four different forms: light red ink, dark red ink, black ink, and pencil. The writing looks similar in all cases, and in some instances the earlier pencil markings have been traced over in red, suggesting that they are all by the same person. The majority of the changes are to the recitative, particularly the part of the Evangelist. A good example of the types of changes can be found in No. 4e “Da das Jesus merkete,” page 27v of the score.

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23 Schneider’s note reads “mit Eintragungen und Andringen Zelters für die Aufführung.” However, it is unclear which performance he believes the changes were made for.
24 For example on page 17v, the bass at m. 51 has been changed from a to g, first in pencil then in red.
25 There are in fact two sets of page numbers on this score. I have used the page numbers that start at the beginning of the score and which only appear on the right hand side of the page.
Ex. 3a) SA 4658 St. Matthäu, No. 8 “Da das Jesus merkete,” mm. 1-7.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{26}Note that the red note heads are Zelter’s changes; in the original manuscript (viewed at the SBB in Berlin) the entire note (head and stem) is red. However, in an attempt to preserve the visual integrity of the example I have only added colour to the head portion. Note also that accidentals are likewise not “coloured” here as colouring them would cause them to be distorted beyond recognition.
In this recitativo, Zelter changed the notes to simplify the runs and eliminate much of the higher range. To accomplish this, he chose to change the pitches themselves, seemingly without any regard for the original. Zelter does not just move the higher passages down an octave; he also changes the melodic contour, as at m. 7. Also note that Zelter applies the same range-limiting principle equally to the Evangelist and Jesus, so it would seem unlikely that he had a specific singer’s vocal range in mind.

A similar approach is taken on page 30v in No. 7 “Da ging hin der Zwölfen,” one of the Evangelist’s recitatives.
Here as well the register has been changed and most of the leaps have been narrowed. The notable exception is in measure 2, where Zelter’s alterations alter the leap from a downward third to an upward octave. Generally though, the changes represent a narrower range. In these passages it seems that Zelter is arranging the music to make it more accessible to amateur singers, rather than altering the edition to reflect differences from other sources as he
did in the examples from the Pölchau collection. One further telling example of this practice is found in No. 58a “Und da sie an die Stätte kamen.”

Ex. 5a) SA 4658 St. Matthäu, No. 65 “Und da sie an die Stätte kamen,” mm. 1-27.
In this example, Zelter’s alterations effectively limit the top register of the soloist. The repeated passages above middle-c are replaced (with one exception at m. 15) by alternates in a lower
register. In most cases Zelter has tried to maintain the outline of the melody, and has simply moved the pitches down an octave. However, in some cases, as at m.7, his alterations change the outline of the run. Although some of Zelter’s alterations (such as the addition of the bass line at mm. 11-13) likely represent a correction rather than a stylistic choice, the majority of changes to No. 58a seem to be changes to make the work easier or more accessible.

The changes shown in the examples above raise questions about the early performance practice for the *St. Matthew Passion*. In his 1928 article, “Die Bach-Pflege der Berliner Sing-Akademie,” Georg Schünemann argued that Zelter’s changes suggest that the part of the Evangelist was sung by a bass at the 1829 revival. His reasoning was that Mendelssohn used a copy of Zelter’s score, and so Zelter’s register changes indicate a lower voice type was used. This is unlikely for several reasons. First, there is no concrete evidence that Mendelssohn used an exact copy of Zelter’s score. Further, even if Mendelssohn did make his initial copy from the score now known as SA 4658, there is no way to determine exactly when Zelter made the changes and whether Mendelssohn adopted them in his own copy. Second, the role of the Evangelist was sung by a tenor, Heinrich Stümer, who Zelter credits with a wonderful performance:

> The Evangelist, Stümer of the Königliches Theater, one of my former pupils, sang the narrative part so admirably (especially in the execution of it) that you heard the repetition of the Gospel words with delight.

> Der Evangelist Stümer vom Königl. Theater einer meiner ehemal. Schüler hat so vortrefflich (besonders in der Ausführung) seine Relation abgesungen dass man mit Genuss das Evangelium wiederholen hört.

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28 Byrne Bodley, 424.
29 Z to G, 12 to 22 March 1829.
It seems likely then that even if Zelter made the changes to SA 4658 to make the solo passages more accessible, it was not for the 1829 première.

Along with emendations to the solo parts, in this score Zelter also makes countless changes to the articulation and additions to the dynamics. A typical example is found in No. 12 “Blute nur, du liebes Herz” on page 30v.

Ex. 6a) SA 4658 St. Matthäu, No. 12 “Blute nur, du liebes Herz,” mm. 9-22.
Ex. 6b) *Neue Bach-Ausgabe*, No. 8 “Blute nur, du liebes Herz,” serie II, band 5, mm. 9-19.
In this passage, Zelter adds slurs to the upper two instrumental lines, inserts dynamic alternations, and corrects one pitch. Unlike his changes to the soloist’s parts, these changes do not make the work any easier to perform. They do, however, give a clearer picture of how Zelter expected the articulation to be executed and show the attention that Zelter lavished on this score.

Unlike the soloists’ passages, the choruses have been left largely untouched, except for small corrections. Representative examples of Zelter’s small corrections are his changes to the chorale “Wenn ich einmal soll scheiden.” In mm. 2 and 4 Zelter changes the tenor notes. His changes make the tenor line match the now standard version of the chorale, from the Neue Bach Ausgabe.

Ex. 7a) SA 4658 St. Matthäu, Choral “Wenn ich einmal soll scheiden,” mm.1-4.

Here then, Zelter’s goal is not to simplify the passage or add performance instructions, but rather to correct mistakes in the transcription.

SA 4658 also includes a number of penciled in instructions, such as on page 9v where the upper chorus of the double choir No. 1 “Kommt ihr Töchter helft mir klagen” is labelled “Solostimmen”, and performance notes, such as on page 49v where the bass aria “Gerne will ich mich bequemen” is labelled “Hellwig.” These types of additions to the score are more difficult to account for than the re-working of the difficult solo passages and the correction of transcription errors. Unlike Zelter’s other alterations, these serve little purpose other than as reminders to the performer, which suggests that the score might have been used as a conductor’s copy at some point.

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30 Hellwig, who first joined the Sing-Akademia in 1795, became the assistant director in 1815 and also actively participated in Zelter’s Liedertafel. Unfortunately, the years he performed as a soloist are not listed in the record books.
Of the three types of additions, it is Zelter’s alterations of the solo passages that raise the most questions for modern scholars. After all, shouldn’t Zelter, as a self-proclaimed Bach expert, have been eager to offer the most “correct” version of the work possible? In short, no. Zelter, like the majority of his contemporaries, did not view (even his hero’s) scores as sacrosanct. Zelter, it would seem, had no qualms about altering Bach’s works to make them more approachable for performance:

One can make a go at a master such as Seb. Bach, to test oneself; but one cannot judge him. The former happened here, and how did it happen? Let him who understands it answer, for it is not possible to speak for everything here.


Schönemann (apparently) responded to this assertion by saying:

So they come and say: not everyone is qualified to place their hands on such a document, and they aren’t wrong; but for me it is a means of coming to an understanding and admiration of the True, and if I allow them to have their opinion, why don’t you allow me to have mine?

Da kommen sie denn wohl und sagen: man sollte seine Hand nicht an so etwas legen und haben nicht unrecht, weil es nicht jeder darf; aber mir ist es ein Mittel zur Erkenntniss und Bewunderung des Wahren zu kommen und wenn ich ihnen ihr Urtheil lasse, was geht Euch das meine an?

Zelter’s argument reflects his unique position. As the principal curator of Bach manuscripts in Berlin, Zelter felt he had the right to alter scores with corrections and performance changes.

That Zelter saw himself as uniquely positioned to understand and alter Bach’s works

31 Georg Schünemann, Die Sing-Akademie zu Berlin 1791-1941 (Berlin), 48. Please note that Schünemann does not give any source for this (or any other) quotation. This makes it difficult to accept his quoted passages as entirely accurate, especially given Zelter’s notoriously messy handwriting. However, as Schünemann was in many cases the last scholar to see sources before they went missing at the end of the Second World War, he is often cited in more modern sources. I would caution the reader to remember his strong bias, shown in chapter 1.

32 Ibid.
demonstrates again that he saw himself as a leading expert on Bach’s choral music. Zelter even goes so far as to argue that his reworkings were in the spirit of Bach himself:

I have arranged much of his religious music, purely for myself, and my heart tells me that old Bach gives me the nod of approval, just as honest Haydn used to say, ‘Yes, yes, that is what I intended!’

So habe mir für mich alleine, manche seiner Kirchenstücke zugerichtet und das Herz sagt mir, der alte Bach nickt mir zu, wie der gute Haydn: Ja, ja so hab’ ichs gewollt!

This passage also suggests that Zelter thought that his alterations of Bach’s music were necessary in order to have the works sung at all. Indeed, in his correspondence with Goethe, Zelter stresses many times that having the works sung is important, by extension implying that the “authenticity” of the version performed was of little importance to him.

Nowhere is Zelter’s active assertion of Bach as central to the German choral tradition more obvious then in his programming. In his tenure as director of the Berlin Sing-Akademie, Zelter programmed at least one Bach work per year. The tradition of including Bach in the Sing-Akademie’s repertoire began under Fasch in 1794, as previously stated. However, under Zelter, Bach took on an increasingly prominent role and Schünemann relates that “das Jahr 1808 brachte ganze ‘Bach-Proben’” (the year 1808 brought entire Bach rehearsals) to the Sing-Akademie.

While the Sing-Akademie continued its work on various Bach motets, Zelter

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33 According to Schünemann, Zelter did not alter any instrumental works with performance in mind, rather he confined himself to the cantatas (of which he altered more then 25) and the Passions. Schünemann, 48.
34 Byrne Bodley, 371.
35 Z to G, 5-14 April 1827.
36 Schünemann, 28. Here again we are in the difficult position of having to rely on Schünemann’s version of events, as the rehearsal records of the Sing-Akademie were never recovered after the Second World War. While much of Schünemann’s information can be corroborated by other early scholars and Zelter’s letters to Goethe, some details remain open to question.
initiated rehearsals of the Kyrie of the *B-Minor Mass* on 25 October 1811.\(^{37}\) Over the next several years Zelter worked his way through the entire mass, finally completing it to his satisfaction in 1813, which Schünemann believes represents the first time that a mixed-voice choir had performed the entire work.\(^{38}\) In the midst of preparing the *B-Minor Mass*, Zelter decided to introduce the *A-Major Mass*, which he believed was less difficult. The *A-Major Mass*, which, according to Schünemann, required much less editing, was given Zelter’s stamp of approval after only thirty-five practices.\(^{39}\)

Dating the introduction of the *St. Matthew Passion* and the *Christmas Oratorio* into the Sing-Akademie’s repertoire is more problematic.\(^{40}\) Although Schünemann and other early historians include the works in their lists of repertoire for the Sing-Akademie, they do not provide a date for their first rehearsals. In the case of the *Christmas Oratorio*, there is proof that Zelter had access to a score by 1828 at the latest.\(^{41}\) A Bach autograph was sent to Zelter by Pölchau in July of that year, it would seem for evaluation. Zelter wrote out a tally of the instrumental and vocal parts, as well as the components of each of the six sections, but did not make any marks on the score. While it is unclear if this was Zelter’s first encounter with the Oratorio, it is a safe

\(^{37}\) Schünemann, 43. On the same page Schünemann provides a list of Bach motets that were rehearsed each year: “Komm, Jesu, komm” (1809, 1810, 1814, 1816) “Ich lasse dich nicht” (1808, 1812, 1813, 1815, 1816) “Fürchte dich nicht” (1810) “Der Geist hilft” (1810, 1811, 1812, 1816) “Jesu, meine Freude” (1812, 1815, 1816) and “Singet dem Herrn” (1814, 1815, 1816). This list appears, however, to be incomplete, as Blummer lists other small choral works in the same years. For example, he includes (the now spurious) “Uns ist ein Kind” in the repertoire list for 1818. Martin Blummer, *Geschichte der Sing-Akademie zu Berlin: Ein festgabe zur Säcularfeier am 24. Mai 1891.* (Berlin: Horn und Raasch, 1891), 56. The year of 1811 was especially important in regards to the Singakademie’s Bach repertoire, as it was the year that Abraham Mendelssohn donated many unpublished J.S. Bach scores to the Sing-Akademie. Wolff, 28.

\(^{38}\) Schünemann, 45.

\(^{39}\) Ibid.

\(^{40}\) Wolff believes that the Sing-Akademie began work on sections of all extant Passions in 1811 when they were purchased from C.P.E. Bach’s estate. Wolff, 28.

\(^{41}\) Mus ms autogr. Bach P32 BWV 248
The \textit{St. Matthew Passion} poses a similar problem. According to Schünemann the Sing-Akademie began to rehearse portions of the work in the 1820s. However, no record books survive and Schünemann’s details are vague. He does not provide dates or give specifics about which parts of the work were rehearsed when.\footnote{This is especially suspicious as Schünemann actively tried to re-write the history of the performance of the \textit{St. Matthew Passion} in 1829, to make Zelter the leading figure. His bias, coupled with the lack of specifics make it difficult to accept his account as entirely accurate.} However, Schünemann was not alone in asserting that Zelter performed the work before Mendelssohn’s première in 1829. In the collection of documents assembled by the Sing-Akademie to mark Zelter’s 100\textsuperscript{th} death-day, there is an unsigned page titled “Sing-Akademie zu Berlin. Auszug aus ihrer Geschichte” which claims that Zelter directed a full piano version of the Passion in 1828.\footnote{Here again, the agenda of the author must be questioned. While it is entirely possible, perhaps even probable, that Zelter performed parts of the St. Matthew Passion in public in 1828 there are no extant sources that corroborate the document’s timeline. (Call number N. Mus. SA 310)} Andreas Glöckner notes in his 2004 \textit{Kritischer Bericht} that Zelter had access to the copy no later than 1815.\footnote{Andreas Glöckner, ed. \textit{Kritischer Bericht: Matthäus-Passion Frühfassung, Die Neue Bach-Ausgabe} serie II Band 5b (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2004); a further discussion on the 1829 performance itself and its sources can be found in: Andreas Glöckner, “Zelter und Mendelssohn – Zur ‘Wiederentdeckung’ der Matthäus-Passion im Jahre 1829” \textit{Bach-Jahrbuch} (2004): 133-155.}\footnote{Schünemann, 148.} The veracity of the performance claim aside, it seems possible that Zelter rehearsed sections of the \textit{St. Matthew Passion} as early as 1815.

Also problematic is Schünemann’s account of the Sing-Akademie’s readings of the \textit{St John Passion}, which he dates to May of 1815; no performance copy has survived and no other source lists the \textit{St. John Passion} as part of the group’s public repertoire.\footnote{Schünemann, 148.} This does not mean that the
Sing-Akademie was not working on portions of the pieces. Rather, it only suggests that Zelter did not consider them good material for the benefit concerts at which the Sing-Akademie performed.\textsuperscript{46}

Strangely, despite his inclusion of progressively larger numbers of works by J.S. Bach in the Sing-Akademie’s repertoire, Zelter did not feature Bach’s works in public concerts.\textsuperscript{47} Zelter, it would seem, had a negative view of the public’s taste and as a result did not think that works by J.S. Bach would be well received. According to Blummer, Zelter reacted with surprise in the fall of 1829 when an audience member told him that the Bach work she had just heard [“Singet den Herrn”] had been very enjoyable.\textsuperscript{48} While Zelter might have doubted the average audience’s capacity to appreciate the “old Bach” he did not hesitate to suggest Bach as repertoire to colleagues and often included Bach in his Auditorien, which were open to select guests. However, as mentioned in the preceding chapter, it is impossible to know exactly what was performed at each of the Auditorien, as no record books prior to 1828 have been recovered.

Despite the lack of extant repertoire lists, it is clear from early accounts that Bach played a large role in the lore of the Sing-Akademie. By including Bach in his chorus’s repertoire, Zelter brought his music to a wider audience, especially as the group’s numbers grew. Zelter actively tried to carve a place for Bach alongside the Handel oratorios and modern compositions that

\textsuperscript{46} The repertoire of the benefit concerts was most often works by Handel and Mozart. Chapter 5 provides an overview of the Sing-Akademie’s Handel repertoire.

\textsuperscript{47} While it wasn’t until after Zelter’s death that the Sing-Akademie produced a full subscription concert series, there can be no doubt that Zelter led the choir in a number of public performances, for which there were tickets sold. For example, on 29 September 1827 the Sing-Akademie performed Fasch’s 8-voice mass at the Petrikirche; for that performance they sold almost 2,200 tickets, which earned them almost 150 Thlrn. Heinrich Lichtenstein, \textit{Zur Geschichte der Sing-Akademie in Berlin: Nebst einer Nachricht über das Fest am fünfzigsten Jahrestage ihrer Stiftung und einem alphabetischen Verzeichniss aller Personen, die ihr als Mitglieder angehört haben} (Berlin: Trautwein und Co, 1843), XIX.

\textsuperscript{48} Blummer, 75.
formed the larger repertoire of the Sing-Akademie. In addition to increasing the amount of J.S. Bach’s music being rehearsed by the Sing-Akademie, Zelter also intensified his advocacy of Bach’s music to Goethe over the course of their correspondence.

In the correspondence, as elsewhere, Zelter did not hesitate to position himself as a Bach expert, writing to Goethe in September of 1827 that:

I am listening to the work for the hundredth time and am still not finished with it and never will be. ‘Compared to him we are all children’, his son Philipp Emanuel remarked. Yes, children! I feel myself raised up and destroyed. He is terrible but divine.49

Ich höre die Stücke [eine von S. Bachs Motteten] zum wievielhundertsten Male und bin lange noch nicht damit fertig und werde es nie werden. Gegen Den sind wir alle Kinder hat sein Sohn Philipp Emanuel gesagt. Ja, ja: Kinder; ich fühle mich erhoben und vernichtet; er ist grausam aber göttlich.50

In this quote, Zelter simultaneously stresses his own long exposure to Bach and the eternal quality of Bach’s music, with which Zelter expects he will “never be done.” Further, he encourages Goethe to become ever more familiar with Bach’s motets, which he considers to be at the “centre of the world.” This is especially revealing as Zelter saw Bach as important not just for his music, but also for his role in the history of German music.

Indeed, as Zelter becomes increasingly outspoken in his advocacy of Bach, he places him at the centre of the German choral tradition, and often cites him as an important influence on Mozart, as seen in chapter 2. The relationship that Zelter saw between the music of Mozart and J.S. Bach is difficult to account for. Zelter, it would seem, was trying to create a link between two of Goethe’s favourite composers. In many of the examples from chapter 2, Zelter tries to suggest

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49 Byrne Bodley, 386.
50 Z to G, 5 September to 13 October 1827.
that Mozart’s music grew out of Bach’s and that a thorough understanding of Bach’s music would help Goethe appreciate Mozart in a different way. However, the links that Zelter suggest seem tenuous and his argument weak. It is not the specifics of the argument that make it interesting; rather it is Zelter’s advocacy of the (perceived) links that demonstrates how he conceived of the history of German music. In his correspondence with Goethe, Zelter actively seeks to make Bach’s music central to all later German styles and continually affirms his own admiration for the “Meister.” In the process of stressing Bach’s role in German musical development to Goethe, Zelter expands the Berlin “Bach cult” described by Wollny.\(^{51}\) While Zelter’s attempts to link Mozart to Bach’s compositional practice are largely unconvincing to a modern reader, the perceived commonality is important as it reinforces the framework of German music Zelter sought to build. This served two purposes; first it enabled Zelter to justify his programming choices to Goethe, and second, it allowed him to talk at length about one of the few areas of music about which he might justifiably be considered an expert.

Goethe, whose exposure to Bach was limited before his correspondence with Zelter, seems to have embraced this understanding of German musical development. As early as 1819 Goethe was enacting Zelter’s “chain” of German composers by having the organist Schütz perform works in a historical order (as seen in chapter 2). From his description, it appears that Goethe followed Zelter’s model and made J.S. Bach the foundation of his musical exploration. Although he rarely played Bach’s music himself, he sought out performers who would be willing to perform Bach’s works for him. In addition to buying scores himself Zelter also copied new

\(^{51}\) Wollny, “Sara Levy,” 651.
scores and had them sent to Goethe.\textsuperscript{52} It seems that Goethe made a practice of listening to Bach’s works as part of his musical education:

To me his [Felix Mendelssohn] presence was especially beneficial, for I found that my relation to music is still the same as ever; I listen to it with pleasure, interest and reflection, and I love the historical part of it. Who can understand any kind of occurrence if he is not thoroughly acquainted with its development down to the present time? What was great for me was that Felix understood this progressive advancement admirably and luckily his excellent memory enables him to call before him at will every kind of example. Beginning with the Bach epoch, he brought Haydn, Mozart and Gluck to life again for me, and gave me a fairly good impression of the great masters of technique in more modern times...\textsuperscript{53}

Here too then is an example of Goethe choosing to listen in historical order, which he thought gave him insight into each new work encountered. According to Felix’s letter to his parents, in addition to playing the works of great composers in a historical sequence, he was also asked to explain what each had done to further the art.\textsuperscript{55} The narrative created by such a historically minded presentation of music was not developed on a whim. Goethe (and Felix) did not choose

\textsuperscript{52} In a letter dated 11 April 1815 Zelter explains to Goethe that he is sending a package of manuscripts to add to his collection. He suggests that Goethe pay special attention to the pieces by Sebastian Bach and Kirnberger. Z to G, 11 April 1815. Another example of a Bach manuscript being passed along is found in Z to G, 31 March 1822.

\textsuperscript{53} Byrne Bodley, 470.

\textsuperscript{54} Note, <> indicates an insertion of text by the volumes’ editors. G to Z, 3 June 1830.

\textsuperscript{55} Byrne Bodley, 470.
the order of composers out of the air; rather he is acting on Zelter’s long-standing advice and
listening to pieces in an order that he hopes will make the (assumed) relationship between
them clear.

In addition to positioning Bach as the bedrock of German choral music, Zelter also actively
positions him as German, in contrast to other composers. One example of this is found in a
letter from Zelter dated 11 to 12 April 1830:

By this, I wished to satisfy, as far as I
could, two sections of my good Berlin,
by putting on after the other in
the one week, two genuine German
religious composers: Johann
Sebastian Bach, whom people here
compare to Calderón, and Carl
Heinrich Graun, whom his friends like
to compare to Tasso. Each
performance attracted its own
audience. Der Tod Jesu is especially
valued by those who have received
communion on Good Friday and
Bach’s Passion attracts persons, who
understand something more than the
general public. I wanted to show the
latter the mutual relationship of two
original German geniuses – the
second of whom formed himself
entirely upon Italian models and
generally worked upon Italian texts,
while the other never went out of
Germany, and (to my knowledge)
ever set any Italian piece. They are
distinguished by nature from each
other, one by depth, another by
clarity, while in terms of productivity
they are equal...56

Ich habe damit zwei Teile meines guten
Berlin nach Vermögen befriedigen wollen
indem ich zwei echt deutsche religiöse
Komponisten aus gleicher Zeit in einer
Woche nebeneinander auftreten lassen.
J.S. Bach den sie hier mit Calderon und C.H.
Graun den seine Freunde mit Tasso
vergleichen wollen. Beide Aufführungen
hatten, jede im Ganzen ihr besonderes
Publikum. Der Tod Jesu ist besonders
denen wert die am Karfreitage zum
Abendmahle gewesen und die Bachsche
Passion zieht solche an welche sich etwas
mehr zugeben als die Menge zugesteht;
diesen hätte ich zeigen mögen wie sich
zwei originale deutsche Talente gegen
einander verahlen von denen der Letzte
ganz nach italienischen Mustern gebildet, ja
meistens nach italienischen Worten
gearbeitet, der Erste aber nie aus
Deutschland gekommen und (meines
Wissens) kein italienisches Stück gesetzt
hat; die sich naturgemäss der Eine durch
Tiefe und der andere <durch> Klarheit
unterscheiden wie sie durch Fruchtbarkeit
einander gleichen.57

56 Byrne Bodley, 463.
57 Z to G, 11-12 April 1830.
In this passage Zelter portrays Bach as the prototypical German composer; he did not set Italian words, did not study outside of Germany etc. Graun’s use of Italian forms does not, however, make him less of a German genius by Zelter’s estimation. Indeed, it would seem that Zelter felt his audience could learn to better appreciate Bach by having a firmer knowledge of the Graun. This emphasis on the “intangible” German qualities of German masters is reminiscent of Zelter’s discussion of Bach’s “French froth” discussed in chapter 2. The letter goes on to discuss Bach’s pedagogical approach to teaching his sons the keyboard. How Zelter came upon this information is unclear, however it is obvious from his tone in the letter that he felt passionate about the topic.

Zelter, then, imagined himself as uniquely placed to understand and promote Bach’s music. As a collector, editor, educator and choral director he was able to introduce Bach to a far wider audience than had previously been the case, even in Berlin. By consistently including Bach in the repertoire of the Sing-Akademie, even as its numbers outgrew the music, Zelter ensured that Bach would be associated with the German amateur choral movement. Although his public concerts did not feature Bach until after 1829, the semi-private Auditorien surely did and the constant stream of visitors meant that many heard Bach’s choral works performed there for the first time.\(^{58}\) Further, Zelter acted as a collector and editor to promote Bach’s music to an increasingly large circle, sending manuscripts to Goethe, among others, and corresponding with other collectors and music directors.\(^{59}\) Any one of these actions would have put Zelter at the

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\(^{58}\) According to Schünemann, Beethoven heard multiple Bach pieces when he visited the Sing-Akademie in June of 1796. Schünemann, 18.

\(^{59}\) Zelter’s interactions with other choral directors were not always polite. In a letter from 1829 he relates to Goethe that a Herr Paskal had written to request a “rare” manuscript [*Ein’ feste Burg ist unser Gott*] that had in fact been available in print for many years from Breitkopf in Leipzig. Z to G, 7 January 1829.
forefront of the Bach renaissance; combined, they put him at the centre of it. Certainly, Zelter himself thought that he was an important figure in the movement and did not doubt his own role as a Bach expert. In his program for the première of *St. Matthew Passion* in 1829 Zelter wrote:

Of such an old art work one could scarcely hope for an easy understanding, if the music itself had not since that time enjoyed a living, continuous fresh flow [of performance], which has provided us with the most recent immortal German heros of art.

Von einem so bejahrten Kunstwerke möchte sich kaum ein leichtes Verständniss hoffen lassen, wenn nicht die Musik sich seit jener Zeit eines lebendigen, immer frischen Stromes erfreute, der uns die allernächsten, unsterblichen deutschen Kunsthelden herbei geführt hat. 

In his work Zelter sought to keep Bach’s choral works alive, but more than that he sought to ensure that Bach held a prominent role in German music history. While Zelter’s assertion that he brought Bach back “ans Licht” remains difficult to prove, it is clear that his active promotion of Bach’s music brought it to a far wider public than ever before.

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60 Fest Aufführungen zur Erinnerung an die Wiedererweckung der Matthäus-Passion durch die Sing-Akademie zu Berlin am 11 März 1829 unter Leitung von Felix Mendelssohn [N. Mus SA 241], 44.
Chapter Five

The Sing-Akademie’s use of Handel: public and for profit

Next Wednesday we will perform Judas Maccabaeus for the general public once more. If only you could hear it. The way people talk and write about it, neither Handel nor anyone else would recognize it.¹

In many ways this excerpt encapsulates the role Handel played in the repertoire of the Sing-Akademie under Zelter’s leadership. Unlike J.S. Bach’s works, which were studied for long periods but rarely performed beyond the immediate circle of the Sing-Akademie, Handel’s choral works were regularly performed for large audiences to wide acclaim. His music formed the backbone of the repertoire heard at memorial concerts and his large-scale choral works were featured at the first concerts for which the Sing-Akademie sold tickets. Handel was the public face of the Sing-Akademie. Whereas Bach was a figure for study and private music making, Handel was the composer who could be reliably programmed to draw crowds. Indeed, Zelter treated Handel’s music as music which appealed to “non-specialists” or as “popular” music.² To illustrate this fundamental difference between the roles of Bach and Handel within

¹ Lorraine Byrne Bodley, Goethe and Zelter: Musical Dialogues (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 395. “Künftigen Mittwoch fiedeln wir dem Publikum noch einmal den Makkabäer vor. Könntest Du ihn doch hören! Wie auch die Leute hier reden und schreiben, so hat weder Händel noch ein Anderer seine Arbeit so widergefunden.” Z to G, 3 Feb 1828. Zelter is referring to the second public performance of Judas Maccabaeus (on 6 February 1828) by the Sing-Akademie. In his next letter he reveals that the King attended the performance and paid 20 Friedrichs d’or for his box.

² William Weber sets choral music outside of his “popular-classical” dichotomy: “The one other leading kind of taste which was not associated with either of the two scenes was that of choral music. During the period amateur choruses developed in each city for the performance of the oratorios of Handel, Haydn, and Mendelssohn, and a few contemporary composers. Composed largely of people from the middle class, the choruses did not have a strong orientation to fashion and new music as did the popular-music public.... Still, this public did not have any esoteric or elitist values and exhibited instead various kinds of religious and nationalistic tendencies.” William Weber, Music and the Middle Class (Burlington: Ashgate Press, 2004), 24. However it is obvious that for Zelter Handel’s music was popular, in that he did not expect his audience to have any prior knowledge of it in order to enjoy it. Whereas Zelter felt strongly that it took a thorough musical understanding to appreciate the music of Bach, he felt that Handel was accessible to all music lovers. In his early history of the Sing-Akademie, Blumner reveals that the audiences for Bach works were incidental to the experience, as what was valued by Zelter was the musical education (Bildung) of the chorus members. Guests were only allowed if they did
the Sing-Akademie’s repertoire, this chapter will examine Zelter’s inclusion of Handel at memorial and fundraising concerts. Through this examination a clear picture of the prominent, and occasionally political, role Handel played in Zelter’s programming will emerge.

Before considering the ways in which Handel satisfied the public side of the Sing-Akademie’s repertoire, his legacy in Berlin must be discussed. The previous chapter showed that Bach maintained a stronger audience in Berlin than elsewhere after his death; likewise, Handel’s music continued to be performed in Berlin throughout the eighteenth-century. While this is hardly surprising, given Handel’s continued prominence in England and elsewhere, his following in Berlin requires a little more explanation. After all, unlike England, Berlin did not have large amateur groups to perform the repertoire and the royal musical establishment was decidedly depleted following years of war. As noted in the preceding chapter, Berlin’s concert life was limited to a small number of semi-professional ensembles that performed for largely invited audiences. As Frederick the Great’s interest in music was limited to a few special genres, individual musicians pursued their musical interests outside the court environment. It is hardly surprising then that even during Handel’s lifetime, it was his instrumental music, especially his cembalo suites, that were heard most often in Berlin. Indeed it was not until 1766 that Alexander’s Feast was performed privately in the salon of Princess Anna Amalie, and another three years before the work was performed in public, under Johann Philipp Kirnberger’s


direction. In 1776 and 1777 C.P.E. Bach led performances of *Messiah* in Berlin, and Johann Adam Hiller did the same in 1786, 1787, and 1788. *Judas Maccabaeus* received its Berlin première in 1774.

Who then participated in the performances of these large-scale works? After all, Berlin did not boast a large professional instrumental musical establishment during this period. These performances used groups of talented amateurs; professional musicians would recruit from among their students and friends to create larger groups which then presented the works in “Liebhaber” concerts. While Annette Monheim has pieced together which Handel works were performed between 1770 and 1786 as part of the “Liebhaber” subscription series, it is not clear which versions of the works were used. The concerts, which were presented in the great hall of *Korsicaschen Hause*, cost only eighteen thalern for a yearly subscription. Monheim suggests the low price was thanks to the audience taking it in turns to perform; in other words, the performers were largely unpaid.

What is clear is that Zelter attended at least some of the later eighteenth-century Handel performances, as he wrote a review of one *Messiah* performance in the *Berliner Musikalische*
Zeitung (BMZ). Zelter’s review, to which he referred Goethe in 1824 for guidance, provides an interesting overview of Messiah; Zelter acts in the review as a guide, taking his readers through the plot of Messiah and offering additional narrative links to help smooth the transitions between sections. That Zelter felt his readers needed such a detailed account of the “plot” of Messiah illustrates that in 1805 the work was still little-known even among those with an avowed interest in music. Zelter ends his review with an expression of outrage over the language used for the solo passages:

The work could not be performed in English, but there was a good German translation at hand; but what happened? The work of one of the greatest German artists ever born was, in a German capital, translated from the German version into the worst Italian, so that a few Italian singers could sing along, who from the very first disfigured the work by inserting Italian opera arias between the German choruses. Das Werk konnte aber in englischer Sprache nicht aufgeführt werden, doch man hatte eine gute deutsche Übersetzung; und was geschah also? das Werk eines der größten deutschen Künstler, die jemals geboren worden sind, wurde in einer deutschen Hauptstadt aus einer deutschen Übersetzung in das schlechteste Italienisch übersetzt, damit einige italienische Sänger mit hinein singen konnten, die obenein das Werk dadurch entstellten, dass sie zwischen den Chören des Händelschen Messias italienische Opernarien einlegten.

Zelter’s indignation is two-fold: first that in a German-speaking capital a work was translated out of German into Italian, and second that (in his experience) the translation distorted the natural flow of Messiah. Zelter’s indignation might also have grown out of surprise that the common practice of performing such works in the vernacular was not honoured at this performance. While the Sing-Akademie’s own collection includes two or more copies of Messiah in Italian, it would seem likely from this comment that those versions were never used.

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10 Monheim, Händels Oratorien, 345. The review was of Hiller’s much publicised 1786 production, which featured 304 musicians, including 119 singers drawn from the schools and the Italian opera company. Zelter’s review, however, was only published years after the event, in 1805. See note 11.

in performance.\textsuperscript{12} Zelter’s later writings reveal a similar indignation over the availability of Handel scores in Germany:

A hundred years ago, the great German Handel had to leave his homeland, to have his name and art glorified in two foreign nations; that is why we, his compatriots, only have his youthful experiments available to us. We find ourselves, 60 years after his death, having to again translate the works of a German genius from the Italian and the English...

Vor hundert Jahren müsste der grosse Deutsche Händel diese seine Geburtsstadt verlassen, um unter zwey fremden Nationen seinen Namen und seine Kunst zu verherrlichen; daher haben wir, seine Landsleute, nur seine ersten Jugendversuche in Hände und befinden uns 60 Jahren nach seinem Todt in der Nothwendigkeit die Werk eines deutschen Genies aus dem Italienischen und Englischen, wieder zu übersetzen...\textsuperscript{13}

Zelter clearly regretted the “adoption” of Handel by foreign countries and was eager to have his works translated and returned to the German public. Zelter’s admiration for Handel is also evident in his second autobiography, which includes a detailed description of walking through the night from Berlin to Potsdam to hear a performance of \textit{Messiah}.\textsuperscript{14} He also took part in Hiller’s 1786 \textit{Messiah} performance, where he played second violin.\textsuperscript{15}

Given Berlin (and Zelter’s) apparent appetite for Handel in the late eighteenth-century, it is hardly surprising that the Sing-Akademie included his music in its earliest repertoire. Under Fasch’s leadership, the group rehearsed \textit{Judas Maccabaeus} in 1795; in 1800 they performed “Ehre sei Gott” and “Halleluja” from \textit{Messiah} under Zelter’s leadership.\textsuperscript{16} By 1804, the group

\textsuperscript{12} SA 54 and SA 1644 include Italian text. Note, the Italian copies are limited to the soloists’ numbers.
\textsuperscript{13} Rackwitz, 186.
began work on the complete *Messiah*. On 13 October 1807, the Sing-Akademie performed *Alexander’s Feast* in public for the first time for a “large private audience.” Although Zelter did not describe the performance to Goethe, he does make mention of the rehearsals:

If only you could have heard Handel’s choruses in Alexanderfest! I am certain that the glory, the power, the life, and the peace would have shown you another aspect of the music, as very few people see it – and then only very seldom.

O, dass Sie doch die Händelschen Chöre des Alexanderfestes hören könnten! ich bin gewiss, dass die Pracht, Kraft, das Leben und die Ruhe Ihnen die Musik von einer Seite zeigen würden, wie sie nur wenigen und nur selten erscheint.

Goethe, who had heard *Alexander’s Feast* years before at the Weimar court, did not respond to Zelter’s enthusiastic endorsement and the subject was quickly dropped.

Despite Goethe’s initial lack of enthusiasm, Zelter’s interest in Handel continued to grow. This interest is best reflected in Zelter’s increased acquisition of Handel manuscripts. As previously noted in chapter 4, Zelter was an avid music collector whose library was full of master works from previous generations. Matthias Kornemann recently described Zelter’s collecting interest as “exclusively historical” and suggested that Zelter collected only works that he considered exemplary and worthy of preservation. Given Zelter’s predisposition for historical works, his inclusion of Handel in his ever-expanding library is hardly surprising; however, the

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18 Ibid., 69.
19 Byrne Bodley, 102.
21 Hortschansky, 8.
works themselves are unexpected. The collection includes the generally accepted canon of Handel choral works performed in nineteenth-century Germany: *Alexander’s Feast, Judas Maccabaeus, Utrecht Te Deum, and Messiah*. All these works were performed regularly by the Sing-Akademie, as we shall see in the next section of this chapter. However, the library also includes works which Zelter would never have expected to perform, most notably many examples of Handel’s *seria* operas.\(^{24}\)

This more catholic interest is reflected in a letter that Felix Mendelssohn sent to Zelter, dated 20 July 1829, from London. In it, Mendelssohn thanks Zelter for introducing him to the “masters” and for reminding him that the royal library in London holds many original Handel scores. Mendelssohn goes on to include a list of all the available vocal originals, oratorios and operas alike. The letter ends with an offer to copy out whichever works Zelter would like for his library.\(^{25}\) Zelter then was familiar with Handel’s works outside of the more common choral masterworks and his interests were catholic enough that his favourite student was unsure which of the manuscripts he might be interested in acquiring.

Zelter’s extensive Handel collection would have been used for his own study and likely as part of his teaching curriculum. Certainly, Handel formed a part of Mendelssohn’s musical education. By Felix’s account he was familiar with Handel’s works prior to his trip to Paris in 1825. He includes an anecdote wherein he was asked before playing a fugue if he was familiar

\(^{24}\) Ibid.  

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with Handel and after playing was assured that: “he could see that I knew something of Handel’s works.”

In addition to forming part of Zelter’s teaching curriculum, Handel’s music also played a large role in the Sing-Akademie’s repertoire. The oratorios, which were obviously a good match for the ever-expanding group, were performed regularly. The first venue where the oratorios, or sections thereof, were performed was memorial concerts. Gedächtnisfeiern were presented for all notable members of the Sing-Akademie after their deaths. The repertoire for the concerts is largely a mystery, but in the few instances for which programs survive Handel’s music is included. One such example is Julie Zelter’s (née Pappritz) Gedächtnis concert. As she was Zelter’s much-loved second wife, he obviously chose the music himself. The selections then are especially telling: choruses from Messiah and Alexander’s Feast were programmed along with Mozart’s Te Deum. The memorial concerts were semi-private, in that the audiences seem to have been made up of friends and family and no admission was charged. Despite the lack of admission charge, Zelter seems to have treated the concerts as essentially public, in that he chose to include works by Handel rather than by Bach, despite his later claims that her voice was best suited to Bach.

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27 Zelter wrote of her death to Goethe saying: “...in the ten years of our marriage we were always of one mind and felt the same about everything, whether it was within us or external to us...” Byrne Bodley, 85.
28 Georg Schünemann, Die Sing-Akademie zu Berlin (Regensburg: G. Bosse Verlag, 1941), 25. Schünemann also states that unlike in later years when the Mozart arrangement of Messiah was used, at Julie Zelter’s Gedächtnisfeier the original was performed. He does not offer any information on the translation or source for this information.
29 Indeed, Zelter was very proud of his wife’s voice, telling Goethe that: “Her pure heart poured forth from her mouth like a fresh, enlivening zephyr; it was touching, bringing ease.” She also performed with Madame Mara in 1803. Byrne Bodley, 87.
The Sing-Akademie did not limit performances of Handel’s oratorios to these semi-private concerts. In fact, from 1827 to 1833 (the only period for which complete records survive) Handel’s large-scale choral works appear regularly, with at least one work presented each season.\(^{30}\) How then was the programming of Handel different from that of J.S. Bach, whose works were also featured at least once per year in the same period? The primary difference is that Handel’s works were performed at public venues and at concerts for which there was an admission charge. Zelter, who famously thought the public had no appetite for the choral music of Bach, did not hesitate to program Handel’s works at concerts. What made Handel so different from Bach, in Zelter’s eyes? The next portion of this chapter will examine the repertoire, audience, and reception of these concerts to show the distinct place Handel held within the group’s increasingly public image.

The first record of the Sing-Akademie presenting a public concert that featured the music of Handel is from 30 October 1817, when they presented a public concert of Messiah, in collaboration with musicians of the Königliche Kapelle. The Berliner allgemeine musikalische Zeitung (AMZ) review reveals that the Mozart arrangement was used for this performance and that, despite at least one number being omitted, the concert lasted almost three hours.\(^{31}\) The next public concert on record is 2 November 1820, when Zelter and opera director Gaspare Spontini collaborated to present Judas Maccabaeus at the Garnisonkirche.\(^{32}\) Zelter does not

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\(^{30}\) Heinrich Lichtenstein, Zur Geschichte der Sing-Akademie in Berlin (Berlin: Trautwein, 1843), XXII. The list provided appears as Appendix 1.

\(^{31}\) Henzel, 232.

\(^{32}\) Lichtenstein, XX. It is unclear how much involvement Spontini had in these concerts, beyond lending his (still-new-to-Berlin) name and the singers from the Hofoper. Also, there are records which show that the Sing-Akademie presented concerts as early as 1800, when they were asked by the French embassy in Berlin to present a fundraising concert to benefit the “pauvres de la Colonie” (N Mus SA 323,23). Sadly, the repertoire lists of this and
make mention of the concert or its rehearsals in his correspondence with Goethe and no record of attendance survives. The concerts later in the decade, however, provide more insight.

Zelter’s first mention of a public concert in his correspondence with Goethe is in a letter dated 24 February 1821. In the letter he informs Goethe that architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel’s new concert hall is being opened with a performance of Handel’s *Alexander’s Feast* and that he himself is involved with the production.\(^{33}\) The concert, and the new hall, seems to have met with initial enthusiasm. However, Schinkel’s concert hall soon began to be criticized and Zelter makes reference to the inaugural concert again in October, when he informs Goethe that despite the complaints:

> I have just recently conducted Handel’s Alexanderfest and found it [the hall] fine.\(^{34}\)  
> Nur einmal erst habe das Händelsche alexanderfest dirigiert und die Sache ordentlich befunden.\(^{35}\)

While it is interesting that Zelter, whose opinion on new buildings might be more professional than that of other musicians, thought the building was fine, this comment does not provide much insight into the concert itself. It is unclear from the exchange who participated in the concert, who the audience was, and if the Sing-Akademie (or Zelter personally) gained financially from the endeavour.

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\(^{33}\) Z to G, 24 Feb. 1821. The concert hall is the new theatre built by Karl Friedrich Schinkel on the Gendarmenmarkt. Byrne Bodley, 278.  
\(^{34}\) Byrne Bodley, 287.  
\(^{35}\) Z to G, 21 to 31 October 1821.
Zelter’s performance of *Messiah* the next year was unequivocally a financial success. Zelter, who programmed the work for Good Friday in 1822, explains to Goethe that his plan has met with some resistance:

Next Good Friday I am thinking about putting on Handel’s *Messiah* instead of the favourite Graun setting of Ramler’s Passion and I shall take the step forward at my [own] risk, in so far as the choir is not completely happy with it. [...] Handel’s *Messiah* is without doubt a more poetic work then Ramler’s *Tod Jesu*, which is founded on compassion. The *Messiah* contains nothing but the consolation of redemption which should certainly be the point of all suffering.\(^{36}\)

Zelter’s statement that *Messiah* is “more poetic” seems at first to be counterintuitive, given the lack of a conventional libretto. His point is perhaps clearer in his 1805 BMZ review, where he comments that:

[...] since it is likely that this *Messiah*, this incomparable work of epic Art, came into being of its own accord, so to speak; that the historical and poetic composition turned out fortuitously for Handel, in that earlier he, without the intention of creating a poetic whole, composed many of the choruses and only afterwards when dwelling on the composition conceived of a larger work.

\(^{36}\) Byrne Bodley, 291.  
\(^{37}\) Z to G, 17-23 March 1822.  
\(^{38}\) Zelter, 41.
For Zelter, Handel’s poetic choices were an organic outgrowth of each other; like the biblical texts themselves they only became part of a larger work at the end, when their relationship became obvious. Goethe shared the same conviction:

Moreover, your conviction of the unconscious origin of this work is quite in accordance with my own opinion: for it is quite possible for the mind to raise up out of fragmentary elements a funeral pyre and finally to point its flame like a pyramid to Heaven.39

So ist auch Deine Ansicht von dem rhapsodischen Entstehen diese Werks meiner Ansicht ganz gemäss: denn der Geist vermag aus fragmentarischen Elementen gar wohl einen Rogus aufzuschichten, den er denn zuletzt durch seine Flamme pyramidalisch gen Himmel zuzuspitzen weiss.40

Goethe, who is relating Zelter’s description of Handel’s compositional process to his own artistic process, can imagine that the texts were fragments that only gained cohesion over time. Zelter also believed that allowing the biblical texts to speak for themselves revealed a deeper truth. In the same review Zelter elaborates:

His genius guided him [towards] a different portrayal: the business of the redemption of a degenerate mankind cannot [come from] this species, rather it can only be thought of and settled in higher regions.

Sein Genius hat ihn dermalen anders geführt: Das Geschäft der Erlösung eines entarteten Geschlechts konnte nicht unter diesem Geschlechte, sondern nur in höhern Regionen gedacht und beschlossen werden.41

Here again Zelter is drawing his readers’ attention to the difference between Handel’s *Messiah* and other Passion stories they are more familiar with. Zelter stresses the “divine” origins of the text (with little regard for the involvement of Charles Jennens or the German translator) and suggests that these origins give the text (and work as a whole) more poetic power.42 That Zelter’s understanding of *Messiah*’s compositional process is flawed makes it hard for modern

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39 Byrne Bodley, 313.
40 G to Z, 27 March 1824.
41 Zelter, 46.
42 Messiah’s text was translated by Ebeling and Klopstock in Hamburg in the 1770s. Monheim, Händels Oratorien, 327.
readers to appreciate his suggestion that the biblical source for *Messiah’s* texts lend the work more authority; however his understanding shaped his appreciation of the work and explains his statement that *Messiah* is “more poetic” than the Ramler.

To return to the March 1822 letter wherein Zelter informs Goethe of the choir’s resistance to performing *Messiah* for Good Friday, it is difficult to tell if the choir’s reluctance was due to the break with tradition, or whether they had a specific argument with the message of *Messiah*. It seems likely that it was largely an issue of tradition, given that *Messiah* was only programmed for Good Friday a handful of other times, whereas the Graun was regularly performed at events leading up to Easter until the middle of the century. Despite the choir’s lack of enthusiasm, the concert was well received. Zelter proudly tells Goethe in his next letter that his audience “appeared to be happy” and that the concert grossed about 1,000 thalers.

While the sum itself is interesting, Zelter’s clear statement that the concert is an economic venture is more so. The Sing-Akademie was in the process of working towards building its own theatre and had to raise funds to pay for the hall. The theatre was important to the group (and Zelter personally) as it would increase its public prestige and allow it to expand its membership. At the *Akademie der Kunst*, where they had rehearsed since the 1790s, there was limited space. As the group’s numbers grew to the mid two-hundreds, they required a venue that could

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43 While in other German cities Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion* became an Easter favourite, in Berlin Graun’s *Tod Jesu* remained part of the Easter repertoire until the middle of the century. According to Heinrich Lichtenstein, *Tod Jesu* was performed ten times between 1833-1842 more than any other oratorio in the Sing-Akademie repertoire. Lichtenstein, XXIII.


45 Z to G, 26 March to 6 April 1822.
accommodate them all, plus an orchestra and potential audience. As the project got under way, Zelter’s correspondence reveals a strong interest in paid concerts.

With the paid concerts taking on a vitally important role for the future of the Sing-Akademie, the repertoire must have been carefully considered. After all to ensure success, the concerts would need to draw in the largest possible audience. It is interesting then that these fundraising concerts featured almost exclusively music by Handel. In fact, in his summary of the Messiah concert, Zelter clarifies that he wants his audience to be happy so that they are willing to come back.\textsuperscript{46} The public’s approval was something that Zelter valued not only as a form of wider recognition, but also because it ensured his audience (and by extension revenue) would continue to grow.

The final mention of this Sing-Akademie performance of Messiah is from Zelter’s next letter to Goethe, dated 7-11 April 1822.

She [Madame Mara] finished by confessing that our performance might compete with those in London, of which the English are proud enough. Now I must admit that after a single swift rehearsal (apart from a few mistakes made by the Königliche Kapelle who were well paid by me), I was really happy with it. That music lasting three hours can so continuously interest and satisfy a crowded audience shows that the work of 32 years has borne fruit here and there...\textsuperscript{47}

\[\text{\footnotesize \begin{quote} [...] in summa sie gesteht dass unsere Produktion sich wohl neben der Londoner worauf sich die Engländer genug zu Gute tun, könne hören lassen. Nun muss ich sagen dass, nach einer einzigen flüchtigen Probe (einige Placker der König. Kapelle, die sich von mir gern recht gut bezahlen lässt, abgerechnet) es mir selber gefallen hat. Aber dass eine 3 Stunden lange Musik so anhaltend eine gedrängte Menge interessieren und befriedigen kann – daran merken wir dass eine 32jährige Arbeit hier und dort in Frucht gegangen ist.\end{quote}}\textsuperscript{48}\]

\textsuperscript{46} Byrne Bodley, 292.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} Z to G, 7-11 April 1822.
Madame Mara’s visit (and resounding praise) clearly gave Zelter the confidence to share with Goethe his own delight in the concert. Madame Mara’s enthusiastic reception of the concert was especially important to Zelter, as Mara had enjoyed great success in London during the late eighteenth-century performing Handel oratorios. He is obviously proud of the Sing-Akademie, who he claims did not make mistakes despite their amateur status, and he is also proud of his programming. Zelter feels that Handel’s Messiah was a good choice; the music engaged his audience despite the length and even though Messiah was hardly new material for the Berlin audience, they left satisfied (in his estimation).

But what exactly did Zelter mean by Handel’s Messiah? In his letter, he mentions that the concert lasted three hours, which would imply that the work was performed in its entirety. Judging from extant scores and librettos, however, this is unlikely. In “Hiller-Lehmann-Zelter: Zu Einigen Berliner Messias-Aufführungen” Christoph Henzel traces some of the variations between surviving performance copies of the period. Henzel traces the Sing-Akademie’s source for their 1817 performance to a copy that was heavily edited by Berlin musician Johann Georg Lehmann. The performance vocal and instrumental parts, currently catalogued as SA 73 in the Sing-Akademie archive, represent a shortened version of Messiah. Along with many cut repeats and instrumental interludes, nos. 6 and 7 (“But who may abide the day of His coming;”

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50 Henzel, 227.
51 Ibid., 257. Lehmann’s many alterations include cutting numbers, crossing out repeats, and crossing out instrumental interludes between verses.
“And He shall purify”) do not appear in the scores. Although SA 73 features three editorial hands distinct from Lehmann’s, Henzel was unable to identify any of them positively as Zelter. However SA 51, which was the source for the 1822 performance of Messiah, does have clear markings in Zelter’s hand. SA 51 is part of the microfiched Sing-Akademie collection, available at many North American University libraries; it was fortunate that I was able to view it on a research trip in 2010. SA 51 includes only the choral voice parts, rather than a complete conductor’s score. The text is in German, although the translator is not listed. The collection begins with number four (“And the glory, the glory of the Lord”) and includes almost all of the choral portions of the work (nos. 4, 7, 8, 11, 15, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 25, 30, 31, 33, 39, 41, 45, and 47); choruses no. 34, 35a, and 37 (“How beautiful are the feet of them;” “Their sound is gone out into all lands;” “Let us break their bonds asunder”) do not appear in the score. The absence is especially noticeable as after one complete statement of each choral vocal part (soprano, alto, tenor, bass) there is a second identical copy of each part. As the score is not marked as shortened, it is difficult to account for the missing choruses.

One of the many anomalies of the collection is the insertion of nos. 21, 22, and 23 (“Surely, He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;” “And with His stripes we are healed;” “All we like sheep, have gone astray”) between nos. 7 and 8. The three pieces lack both titles and Coro

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52 All numbers are taken from G.F. Handel, Der Messias, Hallische Händel-Ausgabe, Serie 1, Band 17 (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1965).
53 I was fortunate to have the opportunity to examine the microfiched Sing-Akademie Handel collection at the University of Pittsburgh library. While the image quality was excellent, the microfiche did not include colour. The microfiche does, however, show an altered pigment for Zelter’s alterations, which I have assumed is red, as seen in the Bach collection (which I viewed in person in Berlin).
54 The choral numbers are numbered separately from the larger work. In SA 51 they are titled Coro 1, Coro 2 etc. In some cases the choral numbers are split into two “Coro,” as in Hallische Händel-Ausgabe (HHA) no. 47, which is split into Coro 20 and Coro 21 (at the Allegro moderato tempo marking) respectively.
numbers, although their tempo and dynamic marking remain the same. It seems unlikely that the three choruses were performed twice in the same concert, and as they also appear in the correct place later in the collection, it is hard to imagine why they are included here. The oddities of the numbering and duplications within the collection aside, among the most consistent of Zelter changes are added slurs in the vocal parts.

Ex. 8a) SA 51, Messias, Coro 9 “Der Herde gleich,” Soprano, mm.1-10.
The slurs that Zelter added to the vocal line change the articulation of the passage considerably, by emphasizing the two-note groups within the run. Here, as in the Bach examples in the previous chapter, Zelter seems to be adding slurs as an indication of performance practice. In the following example, from the chorus that ends No. 8 “O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion,” Zelter has made changes to the soprano voice.

Ex. 9a) SA 51, Messias, Coro 2, Soprano, mm.18-30.
Ex. 9b) *Hallische Händel-Ausgabe*, No. 8 “O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion,” Soprano, mm. 19-27.
Why the soprano’s melodic outline in mm. 24-25 has been altered to match the bass and tenor lines is unclear. This variation does not appear in the Chrysander edition, but it is possible it did occur in other scores to which Zelter had access. Although, in the example above, Zelter’s changes simplify the vocal line, in general his changes to Messiah do not seem to be an effort to simplify the vocal lines, rather they seem to represent simply a different version of the work.

There are other small variants in SA 51, such as missing tempo markings and changes to accidentals. The following example, “And with his stripes we are healed,” is a typical example of this.

Ex. 10a) SA 51, Messias, Coro 8, Soprano, mm.1-16.
Ex. 10b) *Hallische Händel-Ausgabe*, No. 22 “And with His stripes we are healed,” mm. 1-16.
Many of the different accidentals relate to the different key signature; rather than four flats, as in the Hallische Händel-Ausgabe (HHA), Zelter uses three.

Finally, Zelter divides Messiah into four sections in this score; no. 12 begins section two, no. 19 begins section three, and no. 30 begins the fourth section.\(^\text{55}\) This pattern follows the outline that Zelter included in his BMZ review and the letter he wrote Goethe in 1824, showing the practical application of his theoretical understanding of the work.

After the resounding success of his Messiah performance, Zelter turned to Handel for most fundraising concerts. In early 1828, with the Sing-Akademie building well over budget, Zelter wrote to Goethe that:

> Our building has cost money, more than we have, so Judas had to be called in – not the one with the purse.\(^\text{56}\)  
> Unser Haus hat Geld gekostet, mehr als wir haben, da hat der Judas heran gemusst; es war aber nicht der den Beutel hat...\(^\text{57}\)

To raise money, Zelter offered two performances of the oratorio: 17 January 1828 and 6 February 1828. Overall the performances were greeted with general enthusiasm and Zelter reports to Goethe that the second performance of Judas Maccabeus was attended by the King himself, to Zelter’s advantage.\(^\text{58}\) Here again, Zelter notes the double importance of the King’s visit, in that it showed his approval of Zelter professionally and because

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\(^\text{55}\) Henzel, 258.  
\(^\text{56}\) Byrne Bodley, 394. The new Sing-Akademie building was estimated at 28,000 thalers, although it ended up costing almost three times that much.  
\(^\text{57}\) Z to G, 28 January to 3 February 1828.  
\(^\text{58}\) AMZ 30 (1828) no. 9, 27 Feb column 146.
...his pieces of gold are necessary to us because we have to raise over 3,000 thalers per annum.\footnote{Byrne Bodley, 396.}

...ist so notwendig uns auch seine Goldstücke sind denn wir haben jährlich über 3000 rh an Zinsen aufzubringen.\footnote{Z to G, 7-9 February 1828.}

As part of their fundraising efforts, the Sing-Akademie began to offer subscription concerts in 1830. Despite the resounding success of the Sing-Akademie’s \textit{St. Matthew Passion} performance the previous year, Handel’s music dominated the repertoire. The first of the concerts, on 4 November 1830, featured \textit{Alexander’s Feast}. Zelter, who described his audience for the concert as “the general public,” obviously felt that the public would embrace the music and would continue to pay for performances of it, despite the fact that it was hardly new repertoire.

As late as March 1832, Zelter was still using \textit{Messiah} to raise funds. He writes to Goethe that his performance of \textit{Messiah} on 1 March 1832 was well received and that he must continue to offer subscription concerts because:

\begin{itemize}
\item \ldots we must earn interest on 60,000 thaler per year and be happy if musical professionals and popular virtuosi do not begrudge us the thalers which we try to earn for them.\footnote{Byrne Bodley, 549.}
\item \ldots wir müssen Zinsen für 60\textsuperscript{m} Taler Kapital schaffen und froh sein wenn musikalische Professionisten und Virtuosen der Popularität uns die Taler gönnen die wir ihnen vorab zu verdienen suchen.\footnote{Z to G, 4-6 March 1832.}
\end{itemize}

The economic drive behind the concerts is reinforced by Zelter’s comment that even professional musicians were asked to donate their usual fees to the chorus’ fund. Here again is
evidence of the economic motivation behind the concerts; Zelter no longer offers critiques of
the soloists or orchestra, but considers financially profitable concerts successes.

To ensure financial success, Zelter chose to program works that had been well received in the
past. From 1830 to 1832, the Sing-Akademie presented at least two Handel oratorios per year.
_Judas Maccabaeus_ was given most regularly, appearing in the Sing-Akademie _Tagebuch_ six
times. While six performances over three seasons might not seem that high a number, it
represents a clear favourite when compared with other works from the same period. This
popularity is linked to the widely-held political associations of the work. The oratorio, which
enjoyed enormous popularity across Germany during this period, was seen as a uniquely
German work, and had been used by the Sing-Akademie and other amateur choral groups to
celebrate the end of the French occupation earlier in the century.\(^6^3\)

The work, which was already a favourite in Germany, was an obvious choice for political
appropriation. Written to celebrate the English victory in the Jacobite rising of 1745, it uses
the story of the plight of the Jews under the Seleucid Empire to show the triumph of
righteousness. By choosing the oratorio, Zelter and others highlighted the righteousness of
their own cause and celebrated their own triumph. The association of Germans with a warrior
tribe of Jews seems ironic given the long history of German anti-Semitism. However, it seems
contemporary audiences were more moved by Handel’s depiction of the Maccabeus triumph
despite the wider association.

\(^{63}\) For a complete look at the politicized use of _Judas Maccabaeus_ see: Werner Rackwitz, “Friedrich
Zelter however, worried that the music (and by extension the Sing-Akademie) were being manipulated to suit political ends unnecessarily:

Many sides have suggested to me that we perform *Judas Maccabaeus* to provide the best public [representation] of our current situation for the organized fighters for the Fatherland. As large [as] my inclination to the same enterprise would be, it comes down to the answer to this question: Whether the Sing-Akademie should voluntarily mix itself up in political games and take sides? I think: No!\textsuperscript{64}

Von mehreren Seiten ist mir der Antrag gemacht, den Judas Makkabäus als etwas unseren Tagen Zustehendes öffentlich zum Besten der zu organisierenden Streiter für das Vaterland aufzuführen. So gross meine Neigung zu dergleichen Enterprisen seyn mag, so kommt es auf die Beantwortung der Frage an: Ob sich die Sing-Akademie als solche freiwillig in die Händel der weltlichen Mächte zu mischen und Parthey zu nehmen habe? Ich denke: Nein!

This passage suggests that Zelter felt some reluctance during the turbulent Napoleonic period to turn the Sing-Akademie into a political vehicle. Note that he agrees with the suggestions that *Judas Maccabaeus* is relevant to the contemporaneous political circumstances; it is the mixing of worldly concerns that worries Zelter. He clearly does not want his group to suffer from his musical programming. This reluctance was likely due to the forced break from performance that the Sing-Akademie took during 1812 and part of 1813 while Berlin was occupied.\textsuperscript{65} Having already had to cancel all rehearsals from October 1806 to February 1807 due to French occupation, Zelter was naturally worried about the possible ramifications of mixing politics with music.\textsuperscript{66} His personal politics aside, Zelter’s primary concern was the continued existence of the organization he worked so hard for; pragmatic in this as in most things, Zelter wanted to wait before making a strong (pro-German) political statement with a


\textsuperscript{65} Lichtenstein, XX.

\textsuperscript{66} At the time of the 1806 closing Zelter wrote to Goethe that he was unsure when it would be possible to begin working with the group again. Byrne Bodley, 91.
public concert. By 29 March 1814 Zelter felt confident enough to program the work for a large public concert at the Garnisonkirche to celebrate the battle of Leipzig.  

Possible political implications aside, it is clear from the Sing-Akademie’s programming records that Handel’s oratorios formed the backbone of its subscription series. Overall, Handel’s works were performed sixteen times in a three-year period; in other words 43 percent of the time, Zelter chose to produce a work by Handel for public performance. That Zelter continued to program Handel’s choral works so long after they were first “rediscovered” in the late eighteenth-century shows that the public appetite for them was ever increasing. By Zelter’s own account, the Sing-Akademie’s performances of Handel were continually well received and, more importantly, were consistently well attended.

What drew such large crowds to amateur choral concerts of Handel’s music? Surely after the first two or three performances the novelty of the music would have worn off. Handel’s continued popularity in Berlin is most credibly explained by the contemporary movement to “re-claim” Handel as a German master. As Wolfgang Ruf highlights in “Händel und Deutschland” the relationship between Handel and the German public was problematic; although Germany was Handel’s homeland, his greatest works were written elsewhere and received their initial acclaim abroad. As early as 1740 German writers were laying claim to Handel, referring to him as “our world renowned Handel.” By 1799, scholars such as Wilhelm Heinse, were actively seeking to highlight the German character of Handel’s choral music:

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67 Lichtenstein, XX.
68 Ruf, 22.
69 Ibid., “unsers weltberühmten Händel.” Italics my own.
Handel’s melodies and characterizations almost always have a heartfelt German character; there is something powerful and untouched within [them].

By 1802 Herder made sure to state Handel’s nationality in the first sentence of his short biography; later he clarified that Handel, despite living and working abroad, still spoke to the German soul:

All the great Masters, including Handel, knew this way to the heart; they knew how to speak directly to it with national melodies, often in the simplest tones. Where their tones were not of that kind, they soon became so, because they corresponded to the national feeling.

While modern musicologists might find it hard to rationalize the early nineteenth-century drive to claim Handel and his works as predominantly German in nature, it was a perspective embraced by Zelter, as shown earlier. Indeed, Zelter was among the scholars who saw Handel as a uniquely German composer and took care to explain his music in the context of German Protestantism. When he wrote an introduction for Ruppert’s 1831 edition of Dettinger Te Deum, he explained to Goethe that he:

...wanted to explain how Handel treated it in this one case, namely as a German in England, as a Lutheran German Christian, and as none other than Handel.  


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70 Ibid., 27. Originally from Wilhelm Heinse, Hildegard von Hohenthal, Bd. 1, Sämtliche Schriften (Leipzig: Laube, 1838), 38.
72 Byrne Bodley, 490.
73 Z to G, 8-20 January 1831.
It remains unclear exactly how Zelter imagined Handel’s music as exemplifying a “Lutheran German Christian.” Although Handel did borrow from Lutheran chorales, John Roberts has convincingly shown that often the borrowings come via another source entirely and almost always carry little religious association. It is possible that Zelter heard allusions to chorales that elude modern scholars, however it is more likely that Zelter was referencing Handel’s nationality to stress his (and by extension his works) “Germanness.” Zelter’s views, although in tune with his contemporary Germans, do not reflect a thorough understanding of Handel. Zelter failed to recognize the cosmopolitan nature of Handel’s works and preferred to see him in the context of a German choral tradition.

Perhaps the strangest example of this is in Zelter’s explanation of Handel’s Messiah in the context of the German chorale. In March of 1824 Zelter wrote out a short analysis of Messiah for Goethe. In it, he divides the work into four sections, listing the primary arias that form each part. Strangely this led him to provide a history of musical forms leading up to the cavatina. In this “history” he argues that the German chorale (as an “original form”) forms the basis for the introduction of figured bass into church music. His circular history then follows the progression of (chorale-derived) figured bass into arias, then opera and back into the “true cavatina.”

... and we find such a true cavatina in the Messiah: ‘Behold and see! He who knows such torment, heavy like his torment,’ whereby the whole [notion of] suffering summed up quietly and the business of atonement perfected.75...und eine solche echte Cavatine finden wir im Messias: ‘Schau her und sieh! Wer kennet solche Qualen, schwer wie seine Qualen!’ Womit das ganze Leiden still beschlossen und das Versöhnungsgeschäft vollbracht ist.76

75 Byrne Bodley, 311.
76 Z to G, 20-23 March 1824.
Zelter’s attempt to link cavatina style to the German chorale tradition is at first puzzling, until we realise that he is making the connection to stress the German character of the work as a whole. Also, it is possible that he is making a link between the “purity” of cavatinas (which according to his definition are without the “worthless residue” of the da capo aria form) and the “purity” that German scholars of the period tried to link to a national German style.\(^77\)

Zelter, here as elsewhere, strives to create tangible links between seemingly disparate ideas. In so doing he seeks to create a new context by which Goethe can appreciate the work in question. Indeed Goethe professed himself happy with Zelter’s analysis and commented in his next letter that:

One evening, recently, I was listening to the Messiah, some day or other I shall say a few words on the subject myself, but meanwhile I will be following your guidance.\(^78\)

Einen Abend schon hab’ ich am Messias gehört; zuletzt will ich auch ein Wort darüber verlauten lassen, indessen aber mich an Deinem Leitfaden vorwärts bewegen.\(^79\)

Further to Zelter’s somewhat narrow view of Handel’s music in the context of the German choral tradition, Zelter also saw the performance of Handel in language other than German as a shame (see also page 160). He reported to Goethe in April of 1827 that Italian soprano Angelica Catalani was a disgrace:

An Italian turkey comes to Germany – Germany with her academies and high schools, and old students and young professors sit to listen, while she sings in English – yes, English – Handel’s German arias. What a disgrace, when it is meant as...

Eine italienische Pute kommt nach Deutschland wo Akademien sind; hohe Schulen; alte Studenten, junge Professoren sitzen, und singt des Deutschen Händels Arien englisch – scriebe englisch. Welche Schande, wenns eine Ehre sein soll! mitten in Deutschland!\(^81\)

\(^{77}\) See p. 181.  
\(^{78}\) Byrne Bodley, 314.  
\(^{79}\) G to Z, 27 March 1824.
an honour! In the heart of Germany too!\textsuperscript{80}

Of course, Madame Catalani was singing the works in their original form; Zelter’s indignation reflects the common practice in Berlin of performing the works in translation. That Zelter saw this as an affront to the “Germanness” of the arias is almost comical to modern readers; however it offers valuable insight into how the work was viewed in Berlin in the first half of the nineteenth-century.

In conclusion, it is clear that Handel’s works formed the basis of the Sing-Akademie’s public repertoire. Zelter chose Handel’s music for concerts that were designed to solidify the financial future of the group; he believed that Handel’s music appealed to a large audience and that his essentially amateur productions of it would raise the money required to ensure the survival of the Sing-Akademie. Although Zelter did not study Handel’s music with the vigour he applied to Bach, he showed an avid interest in it and included it in his teaching curriculum, as evidenced by Mendelssohn’s thanks. Further, despite obvious contradictions Zelter sought to explain Handel’s music within the context of the German choral tradition, an endeavour that Goethe appreciated. Handel then occupied a unique role in the Sing-Akademie’s repertoire. His music was treated as publically accessible and, unlike Bach, his works were consistently programmed for large fundraising concerts. For Zelter, Handel’s music was popular and as such occupied a special place in his group’s repertoire.

\textsuperscript{81} Z to G, 15 April 1827.
\textsuperscript{80} Byrne Bodley, 372. Catalani, who had “retired” in 1824, returned to Berlin in April 1827 to perform numerous concerts of spiritual music at the Königliches Opernhaus. Zelter, who begrudged her the steep admission price, wrote: “Madame Catalani has sniffed out a few extra groschen, which I begrudge her. Too much is too much!... It really is a pity! What a voice! A golden bowl with common mushrooms in it! And we – one could almost curse oneself for admiring what is so contemptible!”
Conclusion

Attempts to revive choral singing go back to the first half of the eighteenth-century, however these efforts only brought minor and passing success; singing in choirs was left to students [...] The [Sing-Akademie] provided a model of mixed-voice singing for all the world.¹

The quotation above, which is taken from the commemorative book published in honour of the Sing-Akademie’s 125th anniversary, carves a very special place for the chorus among the choral community. By its 125th year, the Sing-Akademie looked back on its first few decades and saw itself as the leader in a new era that saw choirs moved out of the realm of schools and into the larger community. At the heart of this (positive) change, according to the monograph, is Carl Friedrich Zelter. Zelter, who for over thirty years worked tirelessly on the choir’s behalf, saw the group grow from a small informal singing group to a cultural force, with over four hundred members and its own hall. Certainly, Zelter directed the Sing-Akademie at a time of great change. What then can we learn from examining Zelter’s repertoire selections? After all, the Sing-Akademie’s inclusion of works by J.S. Bach and Handel has long been established. The role the works played within Zelter and Goethe’s larger goals, however, has up until now not been explored. For Zelter and Goethe, rehearsing and (to a lesser extent) performing works of “old masters” allowed them to make the music part of a living tradition, in the spirit of the liberal Aufklärung. Bach and Handel’s music was an important element in the artistic renewal that the pair hoped would spark a cultural regeneration across Germany; by performing the works (both

privately and for large audiences) people experienced and could appreciate what Goethe and Zelter imagined was the bedrock of the German choral tradition.

Zelter’s advocacy of J.S. Bach as a musical model is evident in both his repertoire choices and his teaching practice. Zelter, who once called Bach and Hasse his “Gottheit” (see chapter 1), took care to stress the former composer and his works in his teaching. Some might argue that this emphasis was simply an extension of the model that Fasch used to teach Zelter composition and that Zelter was simply making use of the music with which he was most familiar. While there is likely an element of truth to that, given Zelter’s obvious gaps in knowledge found in his dialogue on tonality with Goethe, this explanation does not do justice to Zelter’s wholehearted adoption of Bach. Zelter did not limit Bach to an exercise book; as we have seen, he advocated for Bach by performing his works, large and small, and collecting and disseminating his works across his ever-growing network of musical colleagues.

For Zelter, Bach and Handel, along with other past masters, offered inspiration rather than direct compositional models. While some scholars have suggested that Zelter’s emphasis on Bach as a composition model led his most famous student, Felix Mendelssohn, to write in a style imitative of Bach, more recent scholarship has shown that Mendelssohn himself was aware of the comparisons and defended his work against them. In a letter to Zelter from 1830, Mendelssohn writes:

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In your last letter you seemed to fear that I might possibly be led, through my admiration for one of the great masters, to apply myself too much to church music, still further to abandon myself to imitation. This is definitely not the case....Certainly, no one can prevent me from enjoying and continuing to work at what the great masters have bequeathed to me, because not everyone should start from scratch, but it should however be a continued working from one’s own powers, not a lifeless repetition of what already exists.³

Sie schienen mir in Ihrem vorigen Briefe zu fürchten, ich möchte, durch Vorliebe für irgend einen der grossen Meister geleitet, mich viel an Kirchenmusik machen, um mich einer Nachahmung hinzugeben. Das ist aber wohl bestimmt nicht der Fall.... Freilich kann mir niemand verbieten, mich dessen zu verfreuen, und an dem weiter zu arbeiten, was mir die grossen Meister hinterlassen haben, denn von vorne soll wohl nicht jeder wieder anfangen, aber er soll auch ein Weiterarbeiten nicht Kräften sein, nicht ein todtes Wiederholen des schon Vorhandenen...⁴

Mendelssohn at least does not see his style as imitative and views his exposure to earlier masters as beneficial, as seen in chapter 5. It is also clear from the excerpt above that Zelter did not hope that Mendelssohn would choose to imitate Bach, or other past masters. Byrne Bodley notes that Zelter aimed to nurture Mendelssohn’s musical intuition, something that he believed each individual must find inside himself.⁵ Zelter then did not include Bach’s works with the hope of having composers imitate them thoughtlessly; rather he hoped that exposure to the works would enhance their harmonic understandings.

Despite Garratt’s assertion that Zelter sought to redefine the distinction between the church and secular styles by adopting older music, it would seem that Zelter’s aim for the music was more complex. Certainly, Zelter argued that sacred music had an important role to play in the rebuilding of a national choral music tradition; however, Zelter does not limit the works to

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⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Lorraine Byrne Bodley, Goethe and Zelter: Musical Dialogues (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 20.
simply a religious context. While Garratt suggests that Zelter’s efforts were largely ideological, he does not consider the ways in which the music is treated in Zelter’s correspondence with Goethe. In their dialogue the music is alive and full of potential, not just for pedagogical purposes (on an individual or national scale), but for a wholesale renewal of choral singing as a communal experience. It is true that the membership of Goethe’s Hauskapelle and Zelter’s Sing-Akademie was limited to a chosen few who represent a small sample of the larger population.\(^6\) However, the Sing-Akademie’s membership records show that even at its peak the chorus was not restricted to the highest class; Zelter welcomed all who were capable musically and financially, happy that chorus members were able to experience the music that meant so much to him.

This is not to suggest that the chorus necessarily learned historical works in editions that a modern audience would be familiar with. Indeed, as we saw in chapter 4, Zelter edited Bach’s music in an effort to make it suitable to his large chorus. As already discussed, Zelter did not see this as a betrayal of Bach’s vision for the music; instead he preferred to take a pragmatic approach. In his editing, Zelter considered both the music itself and the use to which it was to be put. As Zelter once explained in marginalia from St. John Passion:

> I have put together this score from the collected fragments which were, in part, in the author’s hand, and out of an old devotion to the great master I have wanted to make much of this material accessible for the ability of my students who are a hundred years younger [than Bach]. In doing this my intent is to be in agreement with him should I come ever [to] meet the good Bach.\(^7\)

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\(^6\) A description of Goethe’s Hauskapelle may be found on pp. 91-92.

\(^7\) Byrne Bodley, 371.
While Zelter’s editing practice would be unthinkable by modern historically informed performance practice, it is clear that without it Bach’s music would have been either ignored or inaccessible. Zelter’s tireless hand copying of scores meant that the music was disseminated more broadly than ever before. Further, Zelter’s alterations give modern scholars a clearer picture of the performance practice of his time and the limitations of choral groups in the period.

Likewise, Zelter’s advocacy of Handel created a great awareness of the German versions of his oratorios. While Zelter studied and collected works by Handel that fell far outside the purvue of the chorus, he also consistently programmed several of Handel’s oratorios. In his writings, Zelter shows a great admiration for Handel and regret that the composer was so much better known in his adopted country of England. As the anecdote of Madame Mara’s visit reveals, Zelter was eager to (at least) match the English performances of Handel’s oratorios. Although Zelter’s inclusion of Handel in the Sing-Akademie repertoire might seem less novel than his inclusion of Bach’s choral works, Zelter did, in fact, offer the first mixed-choir performances of several works. Also, his consistent inclusion of Handel in his dialogue about historical music with Goethe confirms that Zelter saw Handel as central to the German choral canon.

What effect did Zelter’s editing, dissemination, and repertoire selections have on the choral groups springing up in Germany? From the Sing-Akademie archives, it would seem a deep one. In the reconstituted archives, many anniversary albums and letters of praise from other German choral organizations are preserved. While most of the albums and letters are from the group’s fiftieth anniversary and onwards, some date from Zelter’s tenure. One such letter, sent
by the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna, invites the Sing-Akademie to perform a concert and refers to Zelter as a leader in Singkunst (the art of singing.)\textsuperscript{8} Although the letter does not mention any specific repertoire, it is clear that the Viennese group is aware of the Sing-Akademie and supports its mandate for older choral music. This contemporary acclaim was only magnified with time; to commemorate the 100\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the Sing-Akademie (1891) choral groups from across Germany sent elaborate albums full of praise. One such album is from the Oratorien-Verein of Kassel. The costly album’s cover is a carved wood plaque and the interior is silk. On the enclosed paper, the group sent their congratulations to the Sing-Akademie:

…with pride and joy to the oldest and noblest German place of conservation and continued practice of German mixed choral singing.

…mit Stolz und Freude auf die ältestes und vornehmste deutsche Pflegstätte des gemischten Chorgesangs.\textsuperscript{9}

This deference and appreciation is mirrored in other albums, such as the one from the Kieler Gesangverein, which likewise calls the Sing-Akademie the “ältesten Chorvereine Deutschlands” (the oldest German choral group.) The Sing-Akademie’s members also celebrated the group’s 100\textsuperscript{th} anniversary; the concerts, which spanned three days (24-26 May 1891) included works by Fasch and J.S. Bach and the promotional material notes that an eight-volume edition of Zelter’s works is being released to commemorate the event.\textsuperscript{10} The local and national interest in celebrating the Sing-Akademie’s foundation demonstrates its perceived cultural importance for

\textsuperscript{8} N. Mus. SA 323, 10.  
\textsuperscript{9} N. Mus. SA 303.  
\textsuperscript{10} N. Mus. SA 316. The eight-volume collection, which was advertised by the Rob. Lienau Verlag (Berlin-Lichterfelde) at the price of Gm 80-90, does not seem to have been published.
Germany. Zelter and Goethe’s role as innovators was surely appreciated by other German choral organizations, who looked to the Sing-Akademie for repertoire and pedagogical guidance.

Some scholars, however, do not find Zelter’s historical interest well-considered. Garratt suggests in “Prophets Looking Backwards: German Romantic Historicism and the Representation of Renaissance Music” that early North German musicologists’ tendency to include the work of renaissance Italians along with baroque German composers as models for church music is a reflection of the Goethezeit practice of venerating all that is old, which Nietzsche calls a “restless raking together of all that has once been.” Goethe and Zelter did not, however, advocate for older music indiscriminately. Their letters reveal a genuine interest in older music, but not at the expense of form or style. Neither man shows an interest in music that does not speak to their own aesthetics. This much is obvious from Goethe’s demand that Mendelssohn explain the contributions of the composers he chose to include in his historically ordered performances. Goethe is not happy to simply “rake together” music of the past and ascribe value to it; rather he expects that the music should be able to stand on its own merits, both in its own context and amid other works.

Goethe and Zelter’s aesthetic judgements and their prioritizing of certain older choral music suggest many directions for continued study. The questions of score transmission and editing practices, for example, have only begun to be explored. With further study the network of dissemination and the variants used in these scores could be detailed; it might also be possible

12 Byrne Bodley, 12.
to determine if Zelter’s editorial practices were widespread and if his choral colleagues took similar approaches in the preparation of their performance scores. The reception history of specific works might also be examined; while the 1829 St. Matthew Passion performance has received much attention, there has been little or no work on the Sing-Akademie’s premières of other masterworks, including several of Handel’s oratorios. It is hoped that this dissertation will aid in the pursuit of a fuller picture of both Zelter’s musical legacy and the importance of the choral movement in nineteenth-century Germany.
Appendix One:

Handel oratorios performed under Zelter by the Sing-Akademie

Lichtenstein, Heinrich. *Zur Geschichte der Sing-Akademie in Berlin*. Berlin: Trautwein, 1843, XXII.

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Appendix Two:

List of the professions of Sing-Akademie members during Zelter’s tenure


Note: this list does not include female professional designations, unless the woman is listed as either a musician or an actor. Further, I have not corrected the list’s abbreviations or inconsistencies.

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