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Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words* and Without Titles: Imposed Semiotics or Overt *Mitgesehen*? A Case Study on the Typology of Character Pieces, Program Music, and Ekphrasis

Mendelssohno „Dainos be žodžių" ir pavadinimų: primesta semiotika ar atviras Mitgesehen? *Atvejo tyrimas: instrumentinių pjesių tipologija, programinė muzika ir ekfrazė*

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Abstract

Though there has been a well-documented practice of giving suggestive titles to keyboard pieces since the publications of the French *clavecinistes* in the seventeenth century, the need for titles for short pieces became widespread in the Romantic period, thus creating programmatic expectations for keyboard music. Today, many of these compositions are classified as "character pieces" – a label that encompasses more intention than objectivity while suggesting mimesis of representation. The several publications for piano by Mendelssohn collectively titled *Songs Without Words* are a unique exemplar of the genre, especially if we consider the interferences of editors in assigning programmatic content to them. These pieces are used here as a case study for musical typology. Titles and descriptors mediate between the score and the imagination of both the performer and the audience, not only serving as rhetorical scaffolding for the performer's choice of interpretation, but also awakening in the audience connections and emotional content as individualized as the number of listeners. Through examination of Mendelssohn's letters, editions of these pieces, and contemporary musical writing that addresses programmatic and technical aspects of the *Songs Without Words*, this paper addresses the aesthetics of representation as a defining aspect of musical typology. The function and power of types and classifications are explored within the epistemic frame of ekphrasis and the expansion of its meaning in Gadamer concept of *mitgesehen* (seeing-together-as), where the artist (composer) and the public (listener) play equally essential roles in developing the subject matter activated by the artistic product, in this case, the musical composition.

Keywords: Ekphrasis, Program Music, Character Piece, *Mitgesehen*.

Anotacija

Nors jau nuo XVII a. prancūzų klavesino natų leidinių egzistuoja gerai dokumentuota praktika suteikti įtaigius pavadinimus kūriniams klavišiniams instrumentams, romantizmo laikotarpiu poreikis teikti pavadinimus trumpiems kūriniams itin paplito. Taip atsirado programiniai lūkesčiai klavišinei muzikai. Šiandien daug tokių kūrinių vadinami instrumentinėmis pjesėmis – etiketėje daugiau intencijos nei objektyvumo ir ji implikuoja reprezentacijos mimezę. Felixo Mendelssohno „Dainos be žodžių", trumpų pjesių fortepijonui leidinys, yra unikalus žanro pavyzdys, ypač jei atsižvelgsime į redaktorių kišimąsi, priskiriant joms programinį turinį. Straipsnyje šios instrumentinės pjesės pasitelkiamos kaip pagrindas muzikos tipologijos atvejo tyrimui. Pavadinimai ir aprašai veikia kaip tarpininkai tarp partitūros ir atlikėjo bei publikos vaizduotės, jie tampa retoriniu tramplinu atlikėjo interpretacijos pasirinkimui, taip pat kelia publikos asociacijas ir kuria emocinį turinį, individualizuojamą pagal klausytojų skaičių. Šis straipsnis, skirtas reprezentacijos estetikai kaip muzikos tipologijos apibrėžimo aspektui, remiasi Mendelssohno laiškų, minėtų instrumentinių pjesių leidinių ir šiuolaikinių publikacijų, kuriose aptariami „Dainų be žodžių" programiniai ir techniniai aspektai, tyrimais. Tipų ir klasifikacijų funkcija bei galia nagrinėjama pasitelkiant ekfrazę ir išplečiant Hanso Georgo Gadamerio *Mitgesehen* (matymas-drauge-kaip) sampratą, kai menininkas (kompozitorius) ir publika (klausytojas) vaidina vienodai svarbius vaidmenis plėtodami temą, aktyvuojamą meninio produkto, šiuo atveju muzikos kūrinio.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: ekfrazė, programinė muzika, instrumentinė pjesė, *Mitgesehen*.

Musical Typology: The Tension Between Conceptual Expectations and the Realities of Specific Music Compositions and Styles

In her article "Genre Is Disappearing. What Comes Next?", which appeared in *The New Yorker* on March 8, 2021, Amanda Petrusich reported on the breakdown of traditional pop genres now that streaming algorithms have taken over as one of the main tools for music commerce. She starts by reporting on Justin Bieber's disappointment at the November 2020 Grammy nomination ceremony because his album *Changes*, which he claims to have conceived as an R&B album, had been entered into the competition in the Best Pop Vocal Album category. Bieber immediately went

to social media, in this case, his Instagram account, where he expressed his confusion because in his words, he was "very meticulous and intentional about (his) music" (Petrusich 2021: 1). This anecdote gets at the core of musical typology and the different constituencies that need and use them, encompassing not only the composer and the audience, but also musicians, critics, and commercial institutions that act and interact in the aesthetic process. While musicological work that addresses classic repertoire still relies on musical typology transmitted through decades of academic traditions, studies of popular music have addressed the fluidity of typology with more urgency, such as the seminal work by Franco Fabbri when he examined the concept of genre as a separator of categories (Fabbri 1982: 53). Fabbri also addressed the question of who should have the authority to create the agreements that define a genre, since typology might be a tool for quite specific interests or for broad reach. Perhaps because of how obviously commercial forces influence popular music production and consumption in our times, he included record producers and journalists as arbiters of genre (Fabbri 1982: 54). Bieber's complaint about misguided genre identification, however, exposes the present-day tension that has been part of musical typology for centuries, namely, the dissonances in musical criteria that define typology. Any typological approach starts with dimensions that represent concepts with heuristic potential (Smith 2002: 381). Artistic creation, however, aims to deliver unique products, and often that uniqueness rests on deviations of the very genre-expected traits. Titles and genre descriptors, that is, music typology in its most literal sense, mediate between the score and the imagination of both the performer and the audience, serving as rhetorical scaffolding for the performer's choice of interpretation as well as awakening in the audience connections and emotional content as individualized as the number of listeners. As established by Hans-Georg Gadamer, "the artistic presentation, by its nature, exists for someone" (Gadamer 2004: 110); therefore, the audience, though rarely involved in the creation of typology, will interact with its categories. Accordingly, titles and genre descriptors may act as the key that opens the space of methexis in a concert setting: as individual listeners read the title of a composition, personal recollections and experiences build up an expectation for what should be heard in that piece. Musical typology can, in this sense, play a vital role in the process of awakening in the audience both aesthetic fruition and intellectual understanding, either at the center of the observation or in a more peripheral space, but always present in the phenomenon that Gadamer coined as "seen-together-as" (*mitgesehen*) (Gadamer 2004: 79).

Composers as well as musicologists have questioned accepted typology and the methodology that generates it. When Charles Rosen published his "Sonata Forms" in

1980, just by adding the plural to what many musicians learned in class as a singular possibility – the ubiquitous but ever shape-shifting sonata form – he indirectly forced the recognition that typology often generates an over-simplification that cannot augment understanding or aesthetical fruition. More directly, he attacked classifications built on the perception of shared traits between composers and musicians, since, in his own words, "statistically defined, 'general practice' is pure fiction" (Rosen 1980: 6). However, musical typology, as any typology, occupies a space between conceptual dimensions and a body of evidence that affirms the existence of the concept in material form. When artists create works that do not fit the pre-existing typology, those works might be shoehorned into classifications that fit one or some of their prevalent musical traits, but not all of them. Forces other than what the creator artist imposes also influence classifications and nomenclature that makes the work accessible to musicians and audience, even if the composer resents the labels attached to the work.

A particularly complex example of imposed labels in musical typology is the several character pieces for piano composed by Felix Mendelssohn that are today collectively known as *Songs Without Words*. These pieces are featured here as a case study on the pragmatic use of musical typology that includes the participation of commercial forces, in this case, editors and publishing houses, in the chiseling of the public profile of musical works. These piano pieces of varied levels of technical difficulty appeared not only as the result of musical inspiration and invention but also because the piano had at that time become the household musical instrument all over Europe. Therefore, piano pieces that offered both pedagogical and expressive opportunities became a commercially profitable repertoire. However, in the absence of the standard formal designs of the Classic style, the early Romantic formal freedom caused composers to use non-formal categories to facilitate the interaction with both performers and audiences, and, a posteriori, composers, critics, and publishers had to find new terms for emergent genres. These short compositions for the piano descended from two different lineages, namely, pedagogical pieces for hand and fingering training and pieces that depicted in sounds non-musical situations, that is, with programmatic content.

Keyboard Pieces and Musical Typology: The *Handstücke – from Beginner to Virtuoso*

The first lineage, collectively labeled as the *Handstücke* (Kirby 1966: 230), can be traced back to the French *clavecinistes*, such as the eight preludes included in Couperin's *L' Art de Toucher le Clavecin* published in 1716, or to other pedagogical collections such as Bach's *Clavierbüchlein* for

Wilhelm Friedrich Bach. These collections were meant for technical development, not just digital prowess, as well as for the ability to project textures and rhythmic character, which is proven by the prevailing use of dance forms in these collections. The pedagogical nature of these pieces is nowhere better exemplified than in Türk's two volumes of *Handstücke für angehende Klavierspieler* (Handpieces for the Future Pianoplayer), from 1792 and 1795, respectively. This collection featured 120 short pieces titled after the varied technical challenges addressed in each piece. However, the very title of the collection suggests that the player was not yet at the level of public performance, while the previous examples from Couperin and Bach are still heard in public performances, mostly because their technical level is indeed already higher than what a true beginner keyboard player could negotiate. With the development of more complex tone-production recourses for keyboard instruments, especially the different pedals in the pianoforte, these *Handstücke* graduated to *Études*, followed by a split in publications between *Études de mechanisme*, aimed at the mastery of technical issues to be achieved privately, and the *Études lyriques*, meant as performance pieces. Later, in the age of piano virtuosi, a hybrid *Étude* appeared, mixing highly controlled technical mastery with the musical requirements of a performance piece, that is, melodic and harmonic interest. These pieces became known as the great *Études de concerts* in the mid-nineteenth century. This tradition resulted in repertoire "aimed to exploit these new virtuoso capabilities, particularly to provide the performing artist with the opportunity to make a profound impression, a 'hit' on the audience" (Kirby1966: 300). Arguably, the first publication of these virtuosic *études* was the 1801 collection by Anton Reicha, teacher of Franz Liszt (Stone 2001). The inclusion of the words "guided by a new manner" in the title of Reicha's collection *Études ou Exercices pour le Piano-Forté Dirigées d'une Manière Nouvelle* (Etudes or Exercises for the Pianoforte Guided by a New Manner) signals his awareness that he was offering something different than other technical studies of the time.

Keyboard Pieces and Musical Typology: The *Character Piece – Title and Content*

The second lineage of free-standing keyboard pieces stems also from Baroque repertoire, but in this case, works with extra-musical connections. A remarkable example is the collection of keyboard sonatas (now typically referred to as *Biblical Sonatas*) published in 1689/1700 by Johann Kuhnau with the title *Musicalische Vorstellung einiger Biblische Historien* (Musical Presentation of Some Biblical Stories). The preface for each sonata with the complete narration of its respective Biblical story fits the epic model of Romantic programmatic music, even if the term proves too anachronistic here. Moreover, Kuhnau wrote in the music descriptors for localized passages, giving both interpreters and audience a narrative map to follow, as seen in Figure 1, which shows a page of the sonata with the story of Gideon, the hero of the Israelites in the battle with the Midianites.

Meanwhile, in France, harpsichord composers gave their pieces suggestive titles, acknowledging in this manner the mimetic capabilities of instrumental music void of texts. These titles varied from direct descriptions, such

Fig. 1. Kuhnau, Sonata 5: *Der Heyland Israelis Gideon*: the excerpt shows the indication, in Italian, of the when Gideon becomes fearful by seeing the great army of the enemy and his subsequent courageous mood when he hears about the dream of the enemy (digital copy from University of Lodz, IMSLP Petrucci Library).

as *Le réveil-matin* (The Morning Alarm) or *Les abeilles* (The Bees) by François Couperin, to enigmatic nicknames or coded identifications of musical portraits, such as *L'Buillonante* (The Bubbling One) or *La Fidele* (The Faithful One) from Jean-François Dandrieu's first and second books of harpsichord pieces, issued in 1724 and 1728, respectively. We must be careful not to assume that the music portrait in this case was always of a female character, as thoroughly explained by Joshua Walden in his article "Composing Character in Musical Portraits: Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach and L'Aly Rupalich." The feminine article in the French titles is most directly connected to the feminine grammatical gender of the word *pièce*, not to the gender of the person represented in the piece. (Walden 2009: 5). As proof, in the case of the musical portraits composed by C. P. E. Bach, Peter Wollny has identified fourteen of the persons depicted, including mostly male acquaintances of the composer (Wollny 2005: xvii).

These suggestive titles did elicit a good number of conversations about titles for music pieces, such as Marpurg's remark that the title should be "sufficient to guide the hand of the player" in his 1754 *Historisch-Kritische Beytrage* (Berg 1988: 3). This sentence can be read as a criticism of colorful and exoteric titles as well as an acknowledgement that the title is the key to guide the performer into an execution of the work that is within the composer's intentions. Later, in that same essay, Marpurg acknowledges, however, the interaction of an audience with titles when he asks, "Why not give the listener the opportunity to think of something on hearing [music], rather than of nothing? (Walden 2009: 7). With this remark, Marpurg focused on the audience as the ultimate participant and co-creator of the aesthetic experience, thus espousing an aesthetic position that was remarkably ahead of his contemporaries.

No discussion about titles of Romantic instrumental pieces would be complete without mentioning the aesthetic writings of Christian Gottfried Krause, who in 1752 published his *Von der musikalischen Poesie* (Of Musical Poetry), arguably the most direct attempt to reconcile and recast aspects of the Baroque *Affektenlehre* with the needs for expressiveness of the *Sturm und Drang* movement (Marks 1971: 59). Krause was concerned with titles and names given to compositions and, interestingly enough, in the third volume of Marpurg's *Historisch-Kritische Beyträge zur Aufnahme der Musik*, published in 1757-58, a shorter essay by Krause appeared where he gave greater consideration to the proper naming of compositions, more specifically, character pieces. After criticizing some of the French titles that were too obvious in pointing the mimetic nature of the piece, Krause asked composers to add titles that could allow performers and audience to arrive at the affect desired in the piece by awakening the imagination through descriptors

and suggestions (Krause 1752: 534). Once again, this awareness of the power of titles to engage memory and personal connections to musical text documents an increasing psychological understanding of the mechanisms of perception and aesthetic fruition. As a side note, it is also interesting to observe that in this text Krause used the label "character piece" as an already accepted nomenclature that did not necessitate definition or defense.

The character piece also shares a connection to individual movements of keyboard sonatas. As the artistic fashions of the Enlightenment gave way to the aesthetics of Romantic individualism, the sonata, until then the supreme form of keyboard repertoire, started to dissolve and to expand, essentially at the same time. As noted by Elfriede Glusman, the sonata form in the early nineteenth century "was a musical framework which was no longer understood by or suitable to the new generation" (Glusman 1969: 12). This development led both to the addition of a fourth movement to the usual tripartite structure and to the separation of individual movements, especially the fast final rondos or the slow second movements, into pieces that stood alone, referred to in the literature of the time as *pièces detachées* (Tischler and Tischler 1947: 2). Of those, the *nocturne* acquired the fastest fame, sharing a close relationship to slow movements of keyboard sonatas. But even nocturnes eventually succumbed to the commercial forces that demanded the expressive titles extolled by Krause: when published in England, Chopin's *Nocturnes*, Op. 9, appeared as *Murmurs of the Seine* and the subsequent *Nocturnes*, Op. 37, became *The Sighs* (Glusman 1969: 155).

Though typically associated with the nineteenth century, the "character piece" category was well-established already by the end of the eighteenth century, as demonstrated by Füger's publication *12 Charakteristischen Clavierstücke*, issued in 1783/84. As seen in the bilingual German/French title page (Figure 2), each piece had a specific character, that is, emotional content. Subsequently, "character piece" became an umbrella term for piano pieces that can be subdivided into at least three distinct strands: Robert Schumann had already attempted to differentiate between pieces that depicted states of the soul, thus character pieces, and pieces that present states of life, or pictorial pieces. To those two kinds, a third strand was later added, namely lyric pieces with genre names, from the mundane, such as *bagatelle*s, to the mysterious, such as the *nocturnes* (Glusman 1971: 631).

Particularities of these specific strands notwithstanding, all throughout the nineteenth century composers were preoccupied with the question of titles and names for these pieces. In her work mentioned above, Glusman translates a quotation from Robert Schumann which not only defends the use of titles but also refers directly to the controversy surrounding the topic:
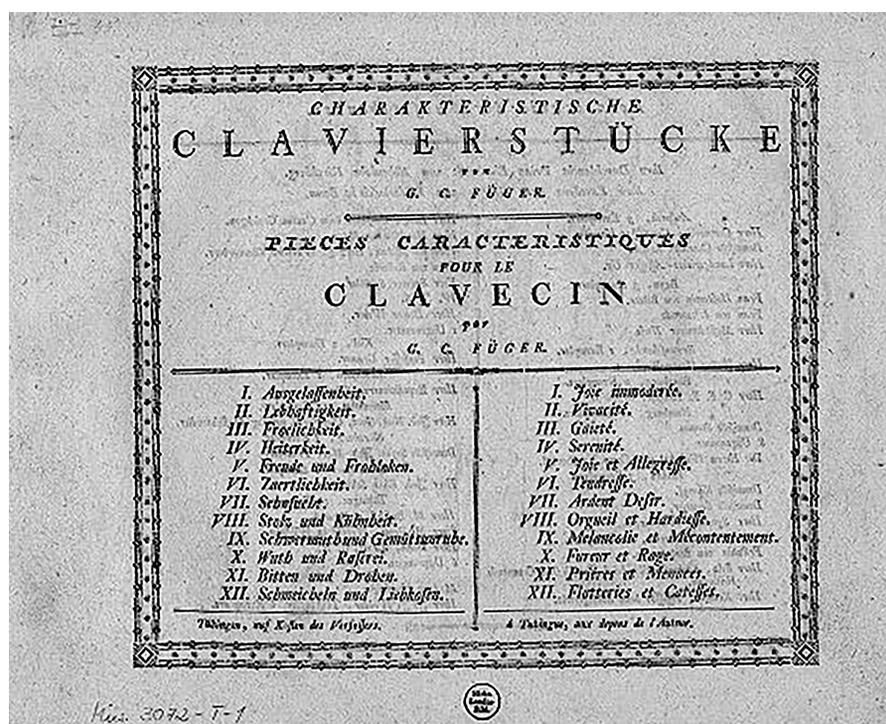
Fig. 2. Title page of Füger's *Charakteristiche Clavierstücke*, 1784 (digital copy from Saxon State and University Library Dresden, IMSLP Petrucci Library).

These titles over musical compositions, which in recent times once again appear so frequently, have now and then been criticized, and it has been said that good music does not need such guides. Certainly not: but it loses thereby just a little of its value, and the composer thereby prevents outright misinterpretation of its character. (Glusman 1971: 632)

According to the extensive study of the character piece category by Willi Kahl, the markers of character pieces create a continuum of title-imposed aesthetical expectations, varying from full poetic verse or epigraph, titles that refer to poetic genres (elegies, eclogues, and romances for example), titles of poetic nature such as *Abendlied* or *Aubade*, and pieces with general titles such as "prelude" or "intermezzo," but that feature "characterizing" tempo or expressions (Kahl 1954: 4). Altogether, these labels encompass more intention than objectivity, while also suggesting mimesis of representation.

The several character pieces for piano composed by Felix Mendelssohn and collectively titled *Songs without Words* are a unique and somehow idiosyncratic exemplar of the genre, not only because the composer left several documents expressing his desire to keep the pieces free from literary and linguistic influence, but because the interferences of editors frequently resulted in assigning programmatic content to them. Therefore, these pieces are used here as a case study for the tensions inherent on the use of musical typology by varied constituencies.

Mendelssohn and His *Songs Without Words* – Idiosyncratic Typology

Felix Mendelssohn's introduction to character pieces is most probably connected to his piano studies with the famous Ludwig Berger, who had been a piano student of Muzio Clementi in St. Petersburg at the same time when John Field took lessons from Clementi (Tischler and Tischler 1957: 2). That pedagogical relationship most certainly led to Mendelssohn's familiarity with the best examples of *nocturnes,* as well as with the works of another of Berger's students, Wilhelm Taubert, whose character pieces first appeared in print in a collection named *An die Geliebte, Minnelieder für das Pianoforte* in 1831, thus a publication that is close in chronology with the composition of the earliest pieces that Mendelssohn eventually called *Songs Without Words.*

Taubert's publication exemplifies well the literary influence on instrumental pieces of the time. Each piece features a full epigraph from a known German poet as seen in Figure 3. Presumably, the piece that follows creates the musical ekphrasis of that epigraph, or at least, the performer must hold those verses in mind as the musical experience takes place. We must wonder, however, if and how an audience would be made aware of these verses. The titles of the pieces are just tempo and expression markings. Perhaps the performer would read the verse aloud before playing each piece, or if

Fig. 3. Taubert, *An die Geliebte – Acht Minnelieder*: No. 5 with a motto from Goethe (digital copy from Universität der Künste, Berlin, IMSLP Petrucci Library).

a printed program was possible, the poetry lines would be printed with the movements to be performed? While anyone in possession of the score could immediately understand the ekphrastic gesture of Taubert, those who only heard the music would lack the literary information given by the composer to foster engagement in the aesthetic process.

The chronological proximity of Taubert's and Mendelssohn's publications caused the musicologist Willi Kahl to create a typological connection between Taubert's *Minnelieder* and Mendelssohn's *Lieder ohne Worte,* with the former influencing the latter. This connection, however, lacks historical and analytical substantiation. Attempts to determine who influenced whom shall remain forever moot, since neither Taubert or Mendelssohn left explicit information about that possible influence. Neither can it be determined beyond a doubt if Mendelssohn's compositions only started after his contact with Taubert's pieces or vice-versa. Glusman, in her article *Taubert and Mendelssohn: opposing Attitudes toward Poetry and Music*, explained the problematic approach of Kahl's argument because it fails to address an important dimension in the use of words on the score: in Taubert's collection, epigraphs taken from poems by the best-known poets of the time, such as Goethe, Heine, and Müller lend non-musical content to individual pieces. (Glusman 1971: 629). In contrast, Mendelssohn's pieces, with very few exceptions, did not bear any title other than

"song" (Lied) and a tempo marking as documented in the holograph of Op. 38, No. 2 given to Mlle. Grabau and today kept in the Library of Congress collection (Figure 4).

To complicate the matter, a letter from Mendelssohn to Taubert, written in Lucerne and dated August 27, 1831, indicates that Taubert looked up to Mendelssohn and had asked for musical instruction. Mendelssohn did not see himself in that position and, instead, asked that Taubert look on him "in the light of a friend, and not write so formally" asking for Mendelssohn's "counsel and teaching" (Selden-Goth 1946: 165). Mendelssohn found in Taubert a kindred spirit and a distinct one in that sense, clearly expressed at an earlier paragraph in the same letter: "What a source of pleasure it is, and how cheering, to know there is another musician in the world who has the same purposes and aspirations, and who follows the same path as one's self." The letter ends with Mendelssohn's recommendations "to our dear friend Berger" (Selden-Goth 1946: 167), that is, Ludwig Berger, the former teacher of both musicians in Berlin. This letter seems to indicate that Taubert was the one who could have been influenced by Mendelssohn's compositional thoughts, a probability reinforced by the fact that Taubert was two years younger than Mendelssohn (Tischler and Tischler 1947: 3). That age difference might also be the reason for the formality in Taubert's writing that bothered Mendelssohn. Either way, the letter establishes
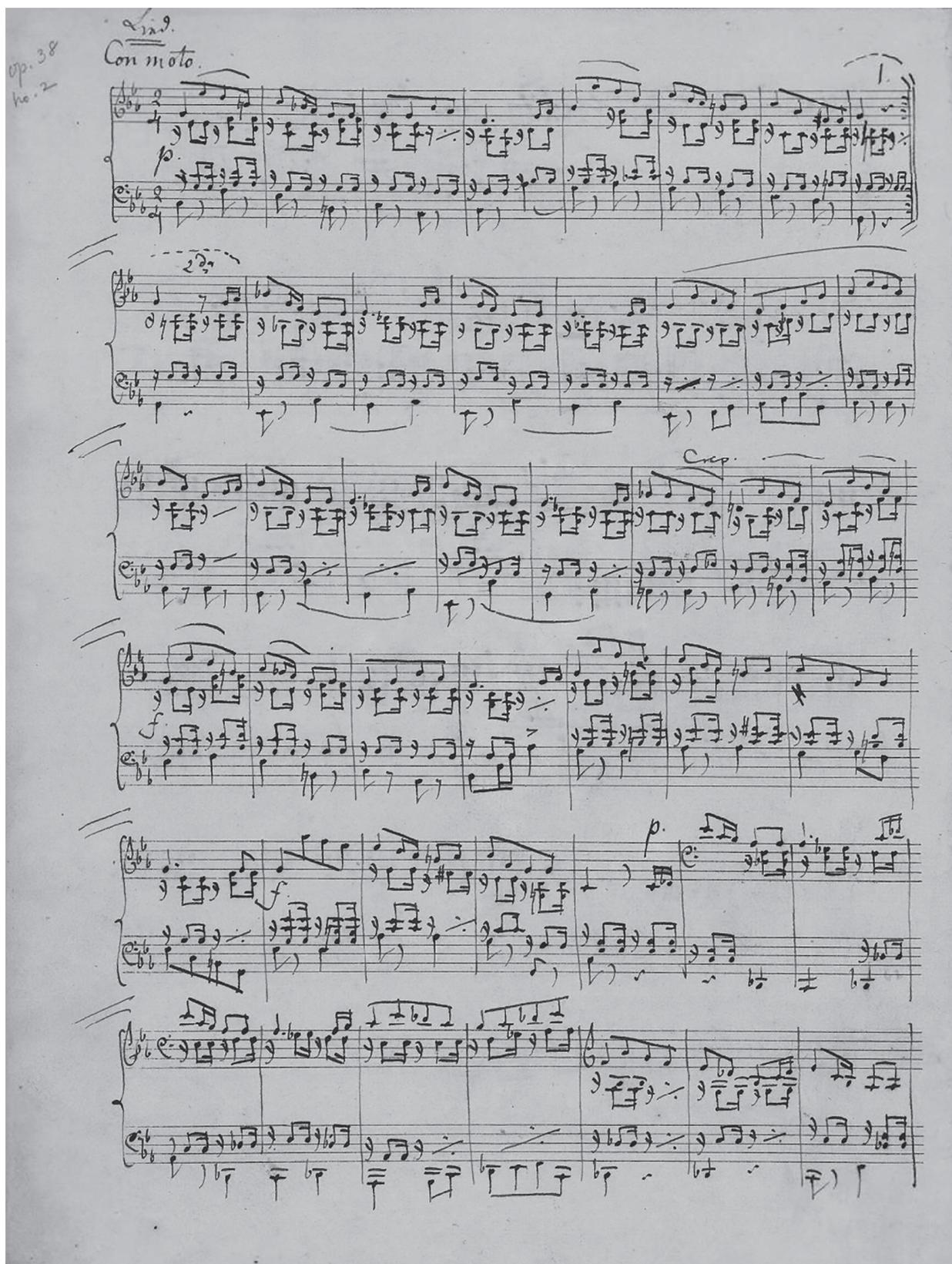
Fig. 4. Mendelssohn, *Lied*, Op. 38, No. 2. Holograph from the Grabau Scrapbook
(digital copy from Library of Congress, https://lccn.loc.gov/2009546915).

that Mendelssohn saw in Taubert the same understanding of the purpose of their artistic creation, thus a proof of correlation but not of causation.

Robert Schumann also compared these works of Taubert and Mendelssohn in his attempt to sort the varied possibilities of the character piece typology. His approach though seems to favor Mendelssohn's choice of title over Taubert's, because *Lieder ohne Worte* eliminates the expectation of a text in the song while *Minnelieder* recalls the vocal delivery of a text, which in Taubert's case was only present in the motto printed on top of each piece (Glusman 1971: 634). If the song abandons the linguistic content, all that is left is pure melodic gesture, an ontological return to the *melus* before it became *cantus.* Such desire for the essence of the aesthetic expression is yet another manifestation of the Romantic yearning for the ineffable. This gravitation towards melody in its essence heralds the aesthetic writings of Edward Hanslick, who in his 1854 publication *Vom Musi-kalisch-Schöne* (On Musical Beauty) declared "melody to be the archetypal configuration of beauty" (Hanslick 1854: 32). At the same time, Mendelssohn's title is congruent with his lack of trust in words and texts as precise expressions of emotions as expressed in a letter to his friend Marc-André Souchay, who in 1842 wanted to write lyrics for the *Songs Without Words*, thus transforming them into real *songs*:

> People often complain that music is ambiguous, that their ideas on the subject always seem so vague, whereas everyone understands words; with me it is exactly the reverse; not merely with regard to entire sentences, but also as to individual words; these, too, seem to me so ambiguous, so vague, so unintelligible when compared with genuine music, which fills the soul with a thousand things better than words. What the music I love expresses to me, is not thought too indefinite to be put into words, but, on the contrary, too definite. I therefore consider every effort to express such thoughts commendable, but still there is something unsatisfactory too in them all, and so it is with yours also. This, however, is not your fault, but that of the poetry, which does not enable you to do better. If you ask me what my idea is, I say—just the song as it stands; and if I have in my mind a definite term or terms with regard to one or more of these songs, I will disclose them to no one, because the words of one person assume a totally different meaning in the mind of another person, because the music of the song alone can awaken the same ideas and the same feelings in one mind as in another,—a feeling which is not, however, expressed by the same words. (Wallace 1863: 299)

Lieder ohne Worte was not the first title used by Mendelssohn to describe these character pieces. The first volume of such pieces was published in England under the title *Original Melodies for the Pianoforte*. This first volume was extremely slow to garner commercial results: almost one

year later, by June of 1833, only forty-eight copies had been sold (Brown 2003: 360). The next volume first appeared in Paris as *6 Romances*, and only from 1835 and thereafter did Mendelssohn settle on the title *Lieder ohne Worte.* Judging by the payments offered by Simrock for the second and the third volumes, the *Lieder ohne Worte* title worked well, for Mendelssohn received 8 Louisdor for the second volume and 24 Louisdor for the third volume, that is, three times the amount for each piece (Tischler and Tischler 1947: 5).

Mendelssohn's rejection of textual programs or even poetic suggestions places him in a lonely position in relation to most of his contemporaries, who saw music as the ultimate step of lyricism but who embraced poetry and visual associations as a strategy to redirect the inherent abstraction of the musical text. Here and there, however, over the publication of all volumes of *Songs Without Words,* Mendelssohn gave descriptive titles to a few pieces in the entire collection, namely the three Venetian Boat songs, the Duet, and the Folksong (Tischler and Tischler 1947: 273). If these titles lack imagination, they stress the importance of the melodic content over programmatic images. Other pieces quickly became known by more colorful titles such as the *Hunting Song*, the *Spinning Song*, the *Funeral March*, and the much-loved *Spring Song.* These monikers most likely originated within the composer's musical sphere of influence, perhaps including his sister, Fanny Hensel. However, the market pressure for textual content was relentless. Karl Christern, an editor from Hamburg, did not hesitate to reissue some of Mendelssohn's pieces with his own texts, which caused Mendelssohn to retain his friend Konrad Schleinitz as a lawyer in a lawsuit against the publisher in 1841 (Todd 2003: 414).

The eight volumes of *Songs Without Words*, each with six pieces grouped, were published between 1832 and 1868 with the final two volumes published well after the composer's death in 1847. A complete panorama of how all these publications came together has not yet been written, and perhaps it cannot be written given the complex scenario on international simultaneous editions. Probably to eschew copyrights problems, Mendelssohn often published his works simultaneously in three different countries: his native Germany, England, and either France or Italy (Herttrich and Elvers 1981: 165). Any research to place together a comprehensive collection of sources and the chronology for the *Songs Without Words* must, by necessity, rely on Mendelssohn's correspondence with his publishers. Here again there is a gap in systematic studies. Mendelssohn's letters had been published and studied already in the nineteenth century, as it is the case of the volume of his letters to Ignaz and Charlotte Moscheles, translated into English and published by their son Felix, Mendelssohn's namesake (Moscheles 1888). Mendelssohn himself started collecting his incoming

letters and binding them into volumes, sometimes including drafts of his own letters. However, there are issues with chronology in these volumes, collectively known as the Green Books, today housed at the Bodleian Library (Crum 1980). Nevertheless, as far as publication-related correspondence, only his letters to German editors have been systematically collected and edited by Rudolf Elvers in the volume *Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy: Briefe and Deutsche Verleger* (Elvers 1968). Other than those, perhaps some of the best-known pieces of his correspondence with or about his foreign editors are his letters that mention the English publisher Vincent Novello (Jones 1992: 246). However, Mendelssohn's business with that publishing house was much more sporadic and not of the same duration as his commercial relation with the German publishers, especially Nikolaus Simrock.

Considering that the earliest reference to these pieces appears in a letter from Fanny Mendelssohn to a family friend, Karl Klingemann in 1828 (Werner 1963: 220), and their last publication during Mendelssohn's lifetime was in 1845, just two years before his death, it is logical to assume that the *Songs Without Words* as a group present a continuous musical portrait of the composer's final seventeen years. Nevertheless, the pieces were not published in chronological order of composition, which defeats any attempt to establish a clear line of compositional development in the genre. Moreover, Mendelssohn seemed to question the validity of these compositions, or at least the need for more of them, as apparent in a letter written in 1839 to his German publisher Simrock, when the composer declared to be done with the genre:

> The manuscripts which I ought to have sent you last year are not yet finished; I wished to make them as perfect as I could; but for this both leisure and good humor were requisite, and during the period of constant concerts these too often failed. Now I hope shortly to complete the pieces, and thus free myself from debt. But they are not "songs without words," for I have no intention of writing any more of that sort, let the Hamburgers say what they will! If there were too many such *animalculæ* between heaven and earth, at last no one would care about them; and there really is quite a mass of piano music composed now in a similar style; another chord should be struck, I say. (Wallace 1863: 166)

Whatever his aesthetics misgivings about *Song Without Words* were, Mendelssohn proceeded to write several more, either because Simrock compelled him to do so by showering him with compliments and gifts or because he saw the commercial appeal of these pieces, or both, as also documented in a letter to Simrock from October 10, 1842:

> If I ever was agreeably surprised by any letter, it was by yours, which I received here yesterday. Your kind and immediate compliance with my request, and also the very handsome present you make me for my "Songs without Words," render it really difficult for me to know how to thank you, and to express the great pleasure you have conferred on me;...What artist, too, would not, at the same time, be highly delighted by the kind manner in which you allude to my compositions, and evince your approbation? Who would not prize and esteem this beyond all other recognition? I ought specially to feel thus, and by hereafter producing better works, strive to deserve the good and friendly feeling shown to me for my present ones. I hope one day, in some degree at least, to succeed in doing so; and if not, you will at all events know that neither goodwill nor earnest efforts were wanting. So I thank you for the fulfilment of my request, I thank you for the flattering and handsome present, and, above all, I thank you for your kindly sentiments about myself and my music. (Wallace 1863: 29)

Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words* as Ekphrasis of Singing

Mendelssohn's criterion for assembling the volumes of *Songs Without Words* seems to rest on arbitrary choices, but this is not to say that a sense of stylistic unity is absent. The overall unity is achieved by a conceptual transfer of vocal models into keyboard language. In this manner, the quintessential melodic core of these piano pieces reveals an intentional proximity to the vocal forms cultivated in his native Berlin around the prolific vocal output of another of his teachers, Carl Friederich Zelter. Indeed, the form and texture of the *Songs Without Words* can be directly connected to three basic models of that vocal repertoire, as first explained in Louise and Hans Tischler's seminal 1947 study of these pieces. The first model was the accompanied solo song, which is the model most often used in these compositions. The second prototype was the accompanied duet, a favorite type in nineteenth-century *soirées* and familiar to Mendelssohn, who wrote a collection of such vocal pieces between the years 1836 and 1844. The third and perhaps most unusual model was the *a cappella* choral song, with its characteristic four-part chordal style (Tischler and Tischler 1947:7). According to Kahl, this third type, the keyboard choral song, can be attributed to Mendelssohn's invention (Kahl 1921: 469).

The transformation of vocal to instrumental structures in this case retains to a great extent the basic three-part form of the generic *Lied*, built on one melodic theme. Of all *Songs Without Words*, fewer than a dozen deviate from those vocal structures. As explained by Elfriede Glusman:

> The process of transferring a vocal genre to the keyboard calls for more than merely "transcribing" the song but instead

requires a reinterpretation of the vocal genre by means of a thorough knowledge of and sensitivity to the lyric possibilities inherent in the piano. (Glusman 1969: 220)

While Mendelssohn must also be remembered for his undeniable skills as a watercolor artist, these pieces are not connected to specific visual representations, which makes it a complex task to analyze the aesthetical approach of his *Song Without Words* as a form of ekphrasis. Even within the most comprehensive and generous use of the concept in Siglind Bruhns recasting of the term as "transmediation" or "the representation in one medium of a text created in another medium" (Bruhns 2020: 346), the absence of any identifiable non-musical content for most of these pieces would, at first glance, place them outside the ekphrastic realm. After all, as already argued by Kahl, the definition of "character" in character pieces seems to shapeshift, more suggestion than description of non-musical content vaguely suggested by a title (Kahl 1954:10). However, the continuous use of vocal models in these pieces, coupled with Mendelssohn's refusal to assign them textual content points to an intentional use of the piano as a voice, a singer that dispenses with words. Under this perspective, we may again claim here that Mendelssohn indeed engaged with the ekphrastic process in these works, using the concept of "interart transfer" developed by Tamar Yacobi as the most universal definition of ekphrasis (Yacobi 2013: 2). By eschewing text and words, or even descriptive titles, Mendelssohn wanted these pieces to transfer to the keyboard the vocal models that he knew could well move the affections of learned audiences and common folk alike. These pieces are not keyboard versions of songs, but songs for the keyboard, thus ekphrasis of singing, lending to the romantic piano the vocal role taken by the violin in earlier times. Perhaps it is helpful here to use the nomenclature for the main categories of ekphrasis as interart transfer proposed by Hans Lund, namely, combination, integration, and transformation (Lund 1992:9). Under this frame, the ekphrasis of the *Songs Without Words* happens as the transformation between the elements of singing and the elements of piano playing, not the content of songs.

Musical Typology and Commercial Interaction: *Songs Without Words* but with Titles

Whatever the composer's attempts to keep his piano pieces as free from words as possible, the Romantic predilection for programmatic forms and overt imposed ekphrasis influenced later editions of the *Songs Without Words* by dressing these pieces with descriptive titles never considered by Mendelssohn. In his 1906 edition published in Boston,

Percy Goetschius acknowledged in his preface that most of the titles were not by Mendelssohn, but by Stephen Heller, the Hungarian piano virtuoso, who died in 1888 (Goetschius 1906: Editor's Preface I). Constantin von Sternberg edited the Schirmer publication of the collection in 1915, maintaining the titles supposedly created by Heller.

If the attribution to Heller is correct, those titles were already circulating in the nineteenth century and were reproduced in many editions of the twentieth century. In these later editions, almost all pieces received a cloyingly dramatic title, such as *Sadness of Soul* and *Delirium*. Faithful to the advice of Krause, these editors coined titles that did not point to a direct mimetic process in the piece but a suggestion of a psychological state. However, we can never ignore the fact that these titles had no historical or musicological provenance, sometimes leading to a paradox between the given title and what is known about the origin of the piece. An especially unfortunate example is the title *Unrest* (Op. 30, No. 2), given to a piece originally written by Mendelssohn as a gift to his sister Fanny on the occasion of the birth of her son, Sebastian Hensel (Todd 2014: 7).

To credit these editorial titles with the success and longevity of Mendelssohn's pieces is without a doubt a precarious judgment. The credit is primarily the result of the quality of his music and the consistent aesthetic appeal of these pieces. An excursion through the sheet music compartment of many piano benches may reveal an enormous number of character pieces with expressive titles that have all but disappeared from the stage and recorded repertoire. The *Songs Without Words*, though also found in those same compartments, have enjoyed a sustained popularity that must also be credited to their pedagogical use. Hans von Bülow, of stellar reputation both as a pianist and a piano pedagogue, wrote to an acquaintance:

> If your son, on his way through here, wants to show me that he has learned a good deal as a pianist, I would ask him for a Mendelssohn Song Without Words, No. 3, 24, or 30 (all in A), namely, in a perfectly correct and, if possible, fine and tasteful execution. (Hinson 1993: 9)

Von Büllow also left an essay on how to play Mendelssohn according to what he understood as the correct Mendelssohn's style. In the preface of his edition of Mendelssohn's *Rondo Capricioso*, Op 14, Von Büllow affirmed that Mendelssohn eschewed sentimentality in music, which might also be the reason why he did not want the individual titles offered to his *Songs Without Words* (Todd 1991: 392). Moreover, perhaps this preface was the first time in which Mendelssohn's aesthetics were linked to Mozart's, a connection that still appears in many program notes today. Von Büllow reported on performance practices that reinforced this non-sentimental approach to Mendelssohn's music:

The master was committed, above all, to the strict observance of meter. He categorically denied himself every *ritardando* that was not prescribed and wanted to see the prescribed ritards restricted to their least possible extent. He despised, furthermore, all arbitrary arpeggiation [...] he permitted the use of the pedal only for certain tonal effects. What subtle caution was to be exercised in this matter can be gleaned from his specification of the appropriate symbols throughout. Finally, he also protested that „thrilling" haste, against the rushing and forcing of his pieces by players who believed that the best way they could meet the charge of "sentimental" interpretation was through this kind of speeded-up, summary behavior. (Todd 1991: 393-394)

Another piano pedagogue's view, in this case Rudolph Breithaupt, pointed to the "singing" demands of the *Songs Without Words*, thus corroborating in an indirect manner the analyses of these pieces as keyboard ekphrasis of the singing gesture. In his seminal work on piano pedagogy *Die natürliche Klaviertechnik*, Breithaupt attempted to define the importance of Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words* by affirming that they were:

The perfect studies for the development of a singing tone and a subtle, most highly differentiated feeling for touch and pressure. (Breithaupt 1921: 525)

Without a doubt, the Schumanns also played a role in the popularization of these pieces. Robert Schumann praised the *Songs Without Words*, and more than once mentioned them in his writings about representational music (Porter 2019: 120). Clara Schumann also expressed her admiration for the *Songs Without Words*. She championed Mendelssohn's compositions in her lessons as well as in her own recitals (Klassen 2011). Mendelssohn retributed Clara's interest in his music by dedicating the fifth volume (Op. 62) to her. This gesture assumes larger proportions because of Clara's role in establishing the canon of Romantic piano repertoire through her own recital repertoire as well as, more significantly, through her influence as the principal piano professor in the Frankfurt Conservatory.

Musical Typology and Aesthetics of Representation

Aesthetics of representation, mimetic or not, are a defining aspect of musical typology. However, the aesthetical, or more precisely, the hermeneutical question here is the amount of control exercised by the creating artist on the aesthetic experience once the composition leaves the composer and acquires an existence of its own. Even more importantly, as much as we might desire purity in the aesthetic experience, and this definition of purity comes with the Romantic emphases placed on the composer as the genius that owns the work of art, we cannot ignore the cultural forces that influence the aesthetic transactions between creator, performer, and audience. Every perceptual experience is charged with subjectivity, since all sentient beings are the agent of their own perception. Hans-Georg Gadamer already affirmed that:

To hear or to see in pure form, i. e., perceptions free of meaning, are dogmatic abstractions that artificially reduce the aesthetic experience, because perception always includes meaning. (Gadamer 2004: 92)

The final meaning of each aesthetic experience results from a mosaic of contributions and references, in a continuum that starts with the composer but passes by many co-performers before it arrives at the listener as just a sparkle that ignites collections of memories and sensations. Expanding on Gadamer's visual metaphor of "seen-together-as" or *mitgesehen*, we may apply here the concept that the musical experience is a "heard-together-as," where the title and the classification of a piece predisposes the listener to a specific collection of associations, thus creating an engaged audience. Within this epistemic frame, whether the classification or title were exactly what the composer had in mind seem to have a relative weight. The wrong titles given to the *Songs Without Words* certainly helped them to stay in the popular repertoire because they furnished the audience with a way to better grasp the musical experience. Bruhns, examining the boundaries of meaning in music, questions "whether a music device presents, in the given context or even in general, inherent or acquired signification" (Bruhns 2020: 358). Perhaps we should expand this question to deconstruct any aesthetic value system that endeavors to place "inherent" above "acquired" because, to return to the essential role that Gadamer assigns the audience in the "seen-together-as" process, no inherent aesthetic meaning can exist without some amount of acquired signification brought into the aesthetic experience by the emotional and intellectual engagement of the audience.

As exemplified by this case study, commercial forces have impacted genre definitions for a long time. It would be a grave mistake to consider musical typology as a product that emanates from scholarly efforts grounded on musical analyses and canonic lineage only. Neither has the composer complete ownership in the use of musical typology. This case study demonstrates how, even within Romantic aesthetics, where the genius of the composer was tied to a sense of dignity in music (Samson 2001), composers compromised on typology to meet commercial pressures. Any discussion of this topic must account for such forces

that influence musical typology beyond the choices made by the composer, as well as for the need for assistance from critics and musicologists to coin vocabulary for expedient handling of artistic production. As late as 1993, when Alfred Publishing issued a pedagogical edition of the *Songs Without Words*, the editor, Maurice Hinson, included the earlier titles used by Constantin von Sternberg for all the songs, though with a faint disclaimer that, given the spurious origin of all titles with the exception of the five songs named by Mendelssohn himself, "the student should not feel compelled to use any of these editorial titles. They are included only as suggestions" (Hinson 1993: 11). That same year, when Ilse Von Alpenheim's 1980 recording of the *Songs Without Words* appeared remastered as CDs under the Phillips Classics label, the listing of the pieces featured the colorful late-Romantic titles, though the controversial *Unrest* title for Op. 30, n. 2 was not used (Von Alpenheim 1993). These examples point to the reality that Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words* have acquired titles, and the audience cannot "unsee" them.

Justin Bieber won the 2021 Grammy for best country song, which he again decried as the wrong classification for his work, and the controversy has helped his popularity. As far as documented in public record, he has not given any monetary refunds to his fans because of the typological mistake. By the same token, we know that Mendelssohn was reticent about publishing so many volumes of these character pieces and certainly resisted the request for poetic titles. It is hard to imagine that he would have resented the widespread popularity of these compositions over the next two centuries, despite the interference of commercial interests that forced the inclusion of descriptive titles, even titles in complete opposition with the origin of the artistic impulse. Thus, musical typology must be seen not only as categories for creation, but as handles that allow all co-participants to hold on to the aesthetic experience.

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Santrauka

Tipologinis skirstymas į kategorijas prasideda nuo dimensijų, atspindinčių euristinio potencialo sąvokas. Tačiau menine kūryba siekiama pateikti unikalius produktus, o unikalumas neretai atsiranda dėl nukrypimų nuo charakteristikų, siejamų su konkrečiu žanru. Pavadinimai ir žanro aprašai, kitaip tariant, muzikos tipologija tiesiogine prasme, veikia kaip tarpininkai tarp partitūros ir atlikėjo bei publikos vaizduotės, jie tampa retoriniu pagrindu atlikėjui renkantis interpretaciją ir kelia publikos asociacijas bei kuria emocinį turinį, individualizuojamą pagal klausytojų skaičių. Muzikos tipologija užima erdvę tarp konceptualių dimensijų ir visumos įrodymų, patvirtinančių koncepcijos egzistavimą materialia forma. Kai menininkai kuria darbus, jau nebeatitinkančius egzistuojančios tipologijos normų, kritikai ir leidėjai gali įsprausti tuos darbus į klasifikacijas, atspindinčias ne visas, o vieną ar kelias vyraujančias charakteristikas. Skirtingai nuo tipologinės analizės gamtos moksluose, muzikos tipologija remiasi ne tik muzikos produkto, t. y. kūrinio, analize; ją veikia autorius, leidėjai, prodiuseriai, kritikai ir publika. Fortepijoninių pjesių repertuaras prasidėjo Baroko epochoje ir eksponentiškai išaugo XIX a., kai fortepijonas tapo namų instrumentu. Tokių kūrinių skirstymas į kategorijas ir pavadinimų suteikimas yra visų minėtų įtakų sankirtos nustatant muzikinės kompozicijos tipą pavyzdžiai. Ypač sudėtingas primetamų etikečių pavyzdys muzikos tipologijoje yra trumpos fortepijoninės pjesės, sukurtos Felixo Mendelssohno ir šiandien bendrai žinomos kaip „Dainos be žodžių". Muzikos kategorijos ir pavadinimai XIX a.

domino ne tik kompozitorius: prie temos vystymo taip pat prisidėjo Friedrichas Marpurgas ir Christianas Krause'ė, rašę muzikos estetikos klausimais. Fortepijoninių pjesių atveju kūrinio pavadinimas ypač galėjo atskleisti muzikinio teksto mimetinį poveikį tiek atlikėjui, tiek publikai. Pavadinimai galėjo padėti atpažinti emocinių būsenų mimezę – kur kas abstraktesnė užduotis nei gamtos mimezė – bei romantizmo menininkų brandinamą estetinį tikslą.

Mendelssohnas nenorėjo suteikti savo fortepijoninėms pjesėms konkrečių pavadinimų ir priešinosi redaktorių bandymams ieškoti tekstų, sietinų su jo fortepijoninėmis dainomis; dėl to galiausiai kilo teisinis ginčas su Karlu Christernu. Nors Mendelssohno ir Wilhelmo Tauberto (abu jie, beje, mokėsi pas tą patį fortepijono pedagogą Ludwigą Bergerį) ryšiai suteikė pagrindą lyginti Tauberto „Minnelieder" (minezingerių stiliaus dainos) ir Mendelssohno „Dainas be žodžių", kūriniams pasirinkta fortepijoninė idioma atsirado dėl skirtingų estetinių prieigų, geriausiai paaiškinamų kaip tiesioginės programinės muzikos ir muzikinės ekfrazės skirtumas. Taubertui norėjosi ryšio su tekstu, kuris pagrįstų jo „dainų" fortepijonui rinkinio pavadinimus, o Mendelssohno „Dainas be žodžių" reikėtų suprasti kaip ekfrastines pastangas dainavimą paversti fortepijonine muzika, ignoruojant tekstus, žodžius ir pavadinimus. Šiuose kūriniuose vyraujantis vokalinių modelių taikymas, vėliau ir pedagoginis jų naudojimas vokalui ugdyti patvirtina šią dainuojamosios ekfrazės sampratą ne konkrečių dainų, o žmogaus vokalinės raiškos atveju. Toks ekfrastinis procesas yra tikėtinas pagal *interart transfer* koncepciją, suformuluotą Tamaros Yacobi, kaip universalų ekfrazės apibrėžimą. Aptariamųjų kūrinių recepcijos istorija susijusi su pagrindinius fortepijoninio repertuaro kanonus formavusiais vardais, tokiais kaip Robertas ir Clara Schumannai ir Hansas von Bülowas.

Mendelssohno gyvenimo ir vėlesniu laikotarpiu pianistai ir leidėjai daugumai jo kūrinių yra davę konkrečius pavadinimus. Šiandien vis dar galima įsigyti šiuolaikinių tokių kūrinių leidimų su suklastotais pavadinimais: fortepijono studentai, profesionalūs pianistai ir publika ir toliau juos naudoja, nors tai tikrai nėra paties kompozitoriaus numatyta estetinė prieiga. Nepaisant to, estetinė patirtis, kaip aiškina Gadameris, nėra iki galo kontroliuojama vien kūrėjo; tai bendros kūrybos, įtraukiančios publiką, ir turinio, kurį kiekvienas klausytojas priskiria kūrinio atlikimui, rezultatas. Be to, komercinės jėgos ilgą laiką taip pat turėjo įtakos žanro apibrėžimams. Todėl būtų klaidinga manyti, kad muzikos tipologija yra produktas, kylantis tik iš mokslinių pastangų, pagrįstų muzikos analize ir kanonine linija. Šis atvejo tyrimas parodo, kaip net romantizmo estetikoje, kai kompozitoriaus genialumas ir autonomija buvo neatsiejami nuo orumo jausmo, muzikos kūrėjai, reaguodami į komercinį spaudimą, ėjo į tipologinius kompromisus.

Mendelssohnas galiausiai davė pavadinimus penkiems iš keturiasdešimt aštuonių kūrinių. Vis dėlto jis nieko nekalbėjo apie kitų fortepijoninių pjesių rinkinių leidimą ir priešinosi prašymams suteikti savo kūriniams pavadinimus ar pridėti tekstus. Nors dėl komercinių interesų buvo stengiamasi pridėti aprašomuosius pavadinimus, netgi pavadinimus, visiškai prieštaraujančius meninio impulso kilmei, kažin ar kompozitorius būtų piktinęsis didžiuliu šių kūrinių populiarumu per ateinančius du šimtmečius? Muzikos tipologijos tarpininkavimas kuria žodyną, skatinantį suprasti ryšius su muzikos tekstu. Taigi muzikos tipologiją derėtų vertinti ne tik kaip kūrybos kategorijas, bet ir kaip savotišką pagalbą visiems kūrybinio proceso dalyviams, išgyvenantiems estetinį potyrį.

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