

The Classical Revolution in Jewish Liturgical Music

by Steven P. Meyer

The Musical Tradition of the Jewish Reform Congregation in Berlin

Hermann Schildberger, Music Director
Tel Aviv: The Feher Jewish Music Center of the
Nahum Goldmann Museum of the Jewish
Diaspora, 1998
2 CDs, with liner notes, \$39.98

The Musical Tradition of the Jewish Reform Congregation in Berlin, is a fitting testimonial to the European Jews who perished in the Holocaust. The two CDs contain a portion of a recording, made in 1928-30, of prayers largely from the works of Cantor Salomon Sulzer of Vienna and choirmaster Louis Lewandowski of Berlin, who had revolutionized the music of the Jewish liturgy by composing in the Classical mode. Also included are Jewish prayers set to religious pieces of Beethoven, Schumann, Schubert, and Handel by Dr. Herman Schildberger, the Congregation's music director. In the recordings, Dr. Schildberger conducts some of Europe's most promising young Lieder and opera soloists, who are accompanied by a professional choir of some 100 people and two organs.

Few copies of the original records were ever pressed or distributed to the synagogues, hospitals, and homes for the elderly, for which they were intended. Instead, the financial crisis and Hitler's rise to power smashed the project. Through providence, Dr. Schildberger (1899-1974), was able to smuggle the master disks past German border guards when he fled his country in 1939. Schildberger emigrated to Australia, but, it was only six years ago that the recordings surfaced, when Rabbi John Levi of Australia presented them and their history

to the Goldmann Museum. Although the disks were damaged by the German border guards, the Feher Jewish Music Center has been able to enhance them through state-of-the-art recording equipment.

The Feher Jewish Music Center issued this recording in 1998 with the assistance of many individuals and organizations: Financial contributors included the Ministry for Arts and Science of the State of Hesse, Wiesbaden, Germany, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany, through its General Consulate in Melbourne, Australia.

A history of the recordings is presented in the liner notes by Rabbi Levi and Prof. George L. Mosse, Professor Emeritus of History, University of Wisconsin-Madison and Hebrew University, Jerusalem. Professor Mosse's father, Hans Lachmann-Mosse (1885-1944), was the moving force behind the recording project which accompanied a new liturgy.

Hans Lachmann-Mosse owned the Rudolf Mosse publishing house in Berlin and the influential *Berliner Tageblatt* newspaper. He was a major patron of the Berlin Philharmonic, which included providing tuxedos for the entire orchestra. His son recalls that dinner table discussions at home revolved almost exclusively around music and art, and that, every year until 1933, his family spent the New Year's holiday with Maestro Wilhelm Furtwängler.

The Reform Congregation of Berlin was also an important part of the Lachmann-Mosse family life. Hans Lachmann-Mosse was the chairman of the commission on liturgy which oversaw the writing of a new liturgy, while Dr. Schildberger, the Congregation's music director, was responsible for selecting and supervising the music. Lachmann-Mosse financed the entire project.

The Tradition of Moses Mendelssohn

The final, revised liturgy for the recording project was steeped in the ideas of the great philosopher and Orthodox Jew, Moses Mendelssohn, much of which can be found in his writing *Jerusalem* (1783). According to Professor Mosse, the liturgy “did not speak about angels, sacrifices, the physical resurrection of the dead or the imminent arrival of the Messiah. God was the supreme Deity. All human beings could praise God. The Torah was given to humanity. The Children of Israel were chosen by destiny to bring the prophetic vision of Torah [the Five Books of Moses, or the Pentateuch] to the world.”

Schildberger was trained in Berlin, where he received a doctorate in music at the age of 20. He became the music director of a festival in Upper Silesia, and served as guest conductor for the Berlin Symphony. To accompany the new liturgy, he chose largely from the Classical compositions of Lewandowski and Sulzer, and integrated pieces from the religious works of the Classical masters: J.S. Bach, Schubert, Haydn, Beethoven, Felix Mendelssohn, Bruckner, and Handel.

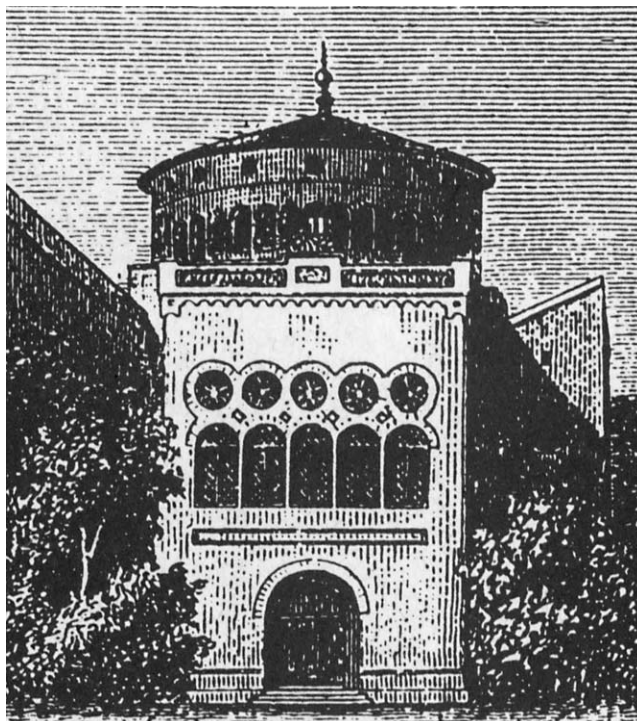
He also chose Classical secular compositions which were to be played to enhance the appropriate mood of the prayer service. Among these, were Bach’s Air on a G String and sections of the Brandenburg Concerti, the Sinfonia from Handel’s *Messiah*, the Andante from Haydn’s “Emperor” Quartet (the theme is familiar to many as the German national anthem), and the slow movements of Felix Mendelssohn’s and Brahms’s violin concerti.

The text for many of the traditional prayers remained in Hebrew, while others were set to German. In its entirety, it was a continuation of the revolution in musical prayer, which began with Bach’s weekly cantatas and continued with Sulzer’s and Lewandowski’s settings; and I believe that there is nothing that meets its greatness of purpose or intended potential effect to this day.

Lachmann-Mosse and Schildberger’s efforts represented a continuation, a great tradition in the Jewish community, which began in the modern period with the renaissance thinker Moses Mendelssohn (1729-86). Known throughout the world as the “Socrates of Berlin,” Mendelssohn sought to develop Classical music and make it available to the general population, explicitly for the qualities inherent in it: the uplifting of man’s soul, and its capacity to foster Reason.

‘Divine Musical Art’

Moses Mendelssohn was trained in Classical music and how to play the clavier by Johann Philip Kirnberger (1721-83), one of J.S. Bach’s (1685-1750) most gifted and devoted students. A selfless individual, Kirnberger devoted his life to teaching Bach’s method of composition and method of playing the clavier, and spent the final years of his life working to have many of Bach’s works published for the first time. He wrote two important works on Bach’s method



The facade of the Johannisstrasse Reform synagogue in Berlin.

for students, which he felt was necessary to carry on his master’s work, because Bach had never written on musical theory.

Mendelssohn treated the art of Classical music, on which he published “Divine Musical Art” in his philosophical treatise *On the Sentiments* (1755), to be most important for the development of the mind. He thoroughly enjoyed attending Classical concerts, and authored a piece on how best to construct a well-tempered clavier (1761).

Sara Itzig Levy (1761-1854), the daughter of Mendelssohn’s close collaborator and early patron, Daniel Itzig, the scion of the Berlin Jewish community, was the only student of Wilhelm Friedemann Bach (1710-1784), J.S. Bach’s eldest son, for the ten years that he lived in Berlin. Her study with him, and her exceptional mastery of both the clavier and Bach’s musical ideas, gave her the unique capability of performing the compositions of Bach and his sons, as they were intended by their composers, which Bach’s first biographer, J.S. Forkel, emphasized had been sorely lacking at Bach’s death.

Beginning in the 1780s, Levy hosted a weekly music salon in her home, at which she performed exclusively the compositions of the Bach family. These performances continued for decades. She played an historic role in the development of Classical music and Classical culture, for she provided Berlin and representatives of the international community an opportunity to hear and understand J.S. Bach, during the decades



From left, Hermann Schildberger, Hans Lachmann-Mosse, and Ilse Schildberger, with members of the Reform Community, listen to the newly pressed recordings of the liturgy. Note the open Torah scroll on the table.

when he was either attacked or ignored. Much of Bach's music had not yet been published, and there were few public performances of his work. Her playing and repertoire became so renowned, that Haydn and Mozart came to hear her.

Levy commissioned many of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach's most difficult late works, and at his death, she provided financial assistance to his widow. She also was the patron of her teacher, Wilhelm Friedemann Bach. She maintained an immense music library of works of all the Bachs and their collaborators, and she performed publicly at the Berlin Singakademie, which was exceptional for a woman in that time.

Her great-nephew Felix Mendelssohn (1809-47), whose mother, Lea Itzig Solomon, had also been trained by Johann Philipp Kirnberger, attended Sara Levy's salon when he was a young boy. It was this intimate relationship to Bach's music which provided young Felix with the inspiration to perform Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* at the Berlin Singakademie in 1829, which launched the great public revival of Bach's music.

Sara Levy's sisters, Fanny von Arnstein (1758-1818) and Cäcilie Eskeles (1760-1836), who considered themselves to be philosophical associates (*maskilim*) of Moses Mendelssohn, also played crucial roles in promoting Classical music where they lived, in Vienna. Both were patrons of Beethoven and intimate friends with his closest collaborators. Fanny von Arnstein started a music society, whose orchestra of amateur musicians played before large audiences of the general public, which was revolutionary. Beethoven chose this orchestra to premier his historic Ninth Symphony. That premier, in Vienna, was intended as a political defense of all the great Classical music, from Bach through Beethoven, which was under savage attack by the Romantics.

Classical Revolution in Liturgy

Both the Arnstein and Eskeles families were patrons of the Vienna Synagogue, whose young Cantor Salomon Sulzer (1804-90) was trained in composition by Beethoven's collaborators. Sulzer, whose magnificent voice was known throughout Europe, was a close friend of Franz Schubert. He mastered and performed Schubert's *Lieder*, whence began a long tradition of great cantors singing opera and *Lieder*.

Sulzer revolutionized the Jewish liturgy, by setting the prayers for the entire year to Classical composition. He took centuries' old melodies and set them in the Classical mode to preserve their historic content, as well as creating entirely new ones. Many of his associates who were not Jewish, contributed to the liturgical music: Schubert, for example,

wrote the music for Psalm 92, which was sung in Hebrew on the Jewish Sabbath. Entitled "Schir Zion," this masterwork was first published in 1839 and revised in 1865. Several of these prayers are included in this recording.

Louis Lewandowski (1823-1894), whose synagogue compositions predominate on this recording, was trained in voice and composition as a young boy through the graces of Alexander Mendelssohn, a grandson of Moses Mendelssohn. Lewandowski composed secular works as well, but is most noted for "Todah W'simrah" (Hebrew), his masterwork comprising the entire year's liturgy. Steeped in the influence of Bach, he used musical ideas and themes of Felix Mendelssohn, including the oratio *Elijah*. He also trained with Sulzer; but, in contrast to Sulzer, he wrote four-part choral pieces (some for cantor and choir, others for choir alone), with organ accompaniment. He was a good friend of the great Jewish violinist Joseph Joachim, Johannes Brahms's close associate.

The Artists

The soloists in this recording are products of this wonderful tradition, and they are outstanding.

Paula Lindberg, alto, was a graduate in mathematics at Heidelberg University and studied singing with, among others, the Bach expert Siegfried Ochs. She sang under the conductors Furtwängler, Walter Klemperer, Bruno Walter, and others. During the 1920s and 1930s she was one of the most famous German concert singers. In 1939, she emigrated to the Netherlands, where she lived in hiding. In May 1943, she and her husband were deported to Westerbork concentration camp, from which they escaped. After the war, she devoted herself to teaching.

Gertrud Baumann is the soprano. There is no biographical material for her in the liner notes.

Frederick Lechner, baritone, studied in Berlin and sang with the Berlin-Charlottenburg Opera. In 1935, he emigrated to New York, where he made his debut in Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*. He became the cantor of Manhattan's Central Synagogue in 1937, and from 1943-48 sang at the Metropolitan Opera.

Herman Schey, baritone, studied at the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin. He became a naturalized citizen of the Netherlands. He was mainly a concert and Lieder singer, who specialized in the German repertoire, and also sang under the conductors Furtwängler, Klemperer, and Walter, among others. He became a renowned singing teacher.

Joseph Schmidt, tenor, trained as a cantor in Romania, studied music at the Berlin Conservatory. He began singing on the radio in 1928, and became one of Europe's most popular tenors. In 1938 he sang at Carnegie Hall. He made nine movies and over 200 records. When the Nazis invaded France, he escaped to Switzerland, where he was placed in an internment camp near Zurich. He perished there of medical neglect, in 1942.

Hermann Schildberger, the music director of the project and conductor of the recording, fled Germany in 1939 and emigrated to Melbourne, Australia. He became the music director of the Liberal Synagogue of Australia and New Zealand, founded several choirs, and was the conductor of the Victoria State Services Orchestra, the Victoria National Theatre Opera Company, and was music director of the National Theatre Opera school.

A Fitting Testimonial

My favorite selections from these CDs are from the music of Lewandowski and Sulzer, which I loved as a youth. Through good fortune, I attended a Conservative synagogue in Newark, New Jersey, where the prayer service was sung by a "Berlin operatic" cantor, who maintained this wonderful tradition. Among them—there are too many to list—are the Hebrew "Mi El Kamocha" ("Now Let Us Praise"), a responsive included in this recording, sung by Lindberg, Lechner, and Baumann. And, I found just as wonderful, the congregational hymn welcoming the Sabbath, which is set to a Lied by Robert Schumann and sung by soprano Gertrud Baumann; and "This Is My Covenant," composed as part of Beethoven's "Six Songs by Gellert," and sung by alto Paula Lindberg (see accompanying article).

The recording's *pièce de résistance* is the traditional "Sh'ma Yisra'el" ("Hear, O Israel"), which is sung to conclude the service for Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the holiest day in the Jewish religion. After a day of fasting and atoning for one's sins, the individual supplicant asks of God to be placed in the Book of Life for the coming year. At the conclusion, the final Sh'ma is sung, declaring that there is but one God in the heavens. In this recording, in the ultimate

refrain, the voice of tenor Joseph Schmidt soars above the congregation, proclaiming allegiance to God for himself, the children of Israel, and for all mankind.

Celebrating God's Universal Creation

by Susan W. Bowen

Hermann Schildberger's recording project, out of which emerged this wonderful 2 CD set, is a real eye-opener for students of 20th-century European history and culture. His great enterprise, to record the Sabbath and Holiday services for the Jewish community, was designed for posterity, of course, but its stated purpose was more specifically the spreading of great Classical culture, far and wide, through the most beautiful music, to rural regions in Germany, where Jews had no access to great singers or organ music. In these religious services, Schildberger successfully included secular instrumental works of Bach and other Classical masters, as a means to engage and elevate the minds of his congregants, and he incorporated some of the most profound works of their religious repertoire into the Jewish prayer service as well.

It is striking to hear Schildberger's setting of the Sanctus from Franz Schubert's German Mass (D. 872). "Holy, Holy, Holy" (or the Kedusha, in Hebrew) which was sung in German as part of the Yom Kippur service, the Day of Atonement, the highest of Holy Days. Changing but a few words referring to Christ, Schildberger lets Schubert's musical composition, whose prayer praises the holiness of God, speak for itself, proving the universality of the language of music.

Such great music served to inspire congregations while in prayer, and for those who would take part in these services on a weekly basis, it had an even more profound effect. It also served to disseminate the principles of Classical composition. Schildberger's skillful employment of the Classical Lied, or song form, indicates not only the high level of culture that the Berlin Jewish community shared with its Christian counterparts, but that the culture itself was clearly based upon an ecumenical idea. But even more beautiful, is that it speaks to the polemical assertion that Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr. has made over many years, often to incredulous audiences of our postwar culture, that German Classical culture, which he identified as the most developed in poetry and music, and Jewish culture in Germany (and that of the Yiddish Renaissance to the East) were actually the same.

'God Is My Song'

The following example gives us a glimpse of that process of Classical composition employed by Schildberger, which

LaRouche, like the poet Friedrich Schiller, insists is an intelligible one. Schildberger employed two different versions of a Lied by Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) “Gottes Macht und Vorsehung,” (“God’s Power and Providence”). It is commonly known today as “God Is My Song,” the fifth in his song cycle “Six Songs by Gellert” Op. 48, composed in 1803.

Schildberger’s first use of Beethoven’s Lied was meant to follow the weekly reading from the Bible, during the Sabbath (Friday) evening service. Performed here by alto soloist Paula Lindberg with organ accompaniment, she sings the text of Isaiah 59:21, “Dies ist Mein Bund” or “This Is My Covenant.”

This is My covenant with them, saith the Lord. My spirit that is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, nor out of the mouth of your seed, nor out of the mouth of your children’s children, said the Lord, from henceforth and forever.

The same Lied appears again on the second CD, this time as a three-strophe choral setting for the morning service of the New Year, Rosh Hashanah. It begins with the text “Gott Ist Mein Lied” (“God Is my Song”), the same text that Beethoven chose for his “Gottes Macht und Vorsehung” setting, from Gellert’s poem. At this point, we need to make a brief digression to look at the Gellert poems themselves, in order to understand the context for Schildberger’s setting.

‘Six Songs by Gellert’

Christian Fürchtegott Gellert (1715-69), a contemporary of Johann Sebastian Bach, wrote many religious poems which were set to music by several composers, including Carl Philipp Emmanuel Bach and Joseph Haydn. Beethoven chose six of Gellert’s poems, and set them in a *Liederkreis*, or song cycle, in which the songs were conceptualized as a unit, and hence, sung in succession. Since a well-composed poem is already a musical score, through vowel harmonies and meter, as well as poetic idea, Beethoven named his composition, *Six Songs by Gellert*. The composer, in setting poetry to music, must be able to wield musical metaphor to add another dimension to the poet’s work, by utilizing vocal registration, coloration, polyphony (multiple voices), and by lawfully developing and resolving existing and new ironies.

Working through the six songs of the Gellert cycle, is designed to uplift the mind, to a more profound experiencing of the ideas of *imago viva Dei* and *capax Dei*, those unique qualities of man that define him as “the living image of God” and “participating in God”: The first song, “Bitten” (“Prayer”) opens a dialogue with the Creator, to prepare the mind for prayer. The second song, “Die Liebe des Nächsten” (“Love of Thy Neighbor”) argues that anyone who claims to love God, but hates his brother, is making a mockery of God’s love. That is followed by the tension of “Vom Tode” (“Concerning Death”), in F-sharp minor, which forces our mind to reflect on man’s mortality, and how we live our lives. This heralds

the major change that next occurs: The fourth song of glory and exaltation, “Die Ehre Gottes aus der Natur” (“The Celebration of God by Nature”), comes after the question of the meaning of life and death is posed, and this fourth song begins to resolve the question. But, it is not until the fifth song, “Gottes Macht und Vorsehung,” that the concept of God is internalized, and becomes no longer something outside of ourselves. Indeed, if we are to truly sing “God Is My Song,” we must, of course “sing”—i.e., *participate*—in the Creator and the process. Beethoven’s instructions are that it be sung “*mit Kraft und Feuer*” (with strength and ardor) preparing the mind for the final, sixth Lied. The “Busslied” (“Song of Atonement”) is, again, a beautiful dialogue with God, which revisits the entire process of the sinner’s transformation through to its joyful, concluding atonement.

The cycle, as with Brahms’s *Four Serious Songs*, addresses the individual’s cognitive development, which the composers understood to be of utmost importance for the ennoblement of society as a whole. This is associated with the concept of *agapē*, the Greek term for sacred love, which is best known through its use in the Epistles of St. Paul.

Beethoven’s Gellert song cycle was well known in Germany, and it would have been familiar to many of the Berlin Jewish Reform Congregation. It was common practice for Lieder to be rearranged to accommodate religious or secular choral singing, as, for example, with Beethoven’s Gellert song number four, “Die Ehre Gottes aus der Natur”; or, as in these recordings, “Begrüsst,” a Lied by Robert Schumann, freely adapted by Schildberger, arranged here for solo voice, choir, and organ, as performed well by soprano Gertrud Bauman.

Classical Composition

A closer look at Schildberger’s use for Rosh Hashanah of Beethoven’s Lied, allows us to examine the nature of a Classical composition. What makes a musical composition “Classical,” is not simply that the melody line comes from a great composer, but rather, that it is characterized by the principle of transformation through the process of resolving both poetical and musical paradoxes.

In the relatively simple setting presented in these recordings, Schildberger chose 3 stanzas from the 15 in Gellert’s poem, including the first and last stanzas. And, although he retained the idea that flows through Gellert’s poem, Schildberger altered the text of the last stanza slightly. (The translation below is *EIR*’s translation from Schildberger’s text.) The choir sings the familiar score of “Gott ist Mein Lied,” with the piano accompaniment adapted for organ, and the vocal score rearranged for four choral sections (rather than one singer), with the alto, tenor, and bass sections singing the voices from the piano accompaniment.

God is my Song, He is the God of Strength.
Lord is His Name, and great are His works,
and all the Heavens are His realm.

He knows my supplication
 And all the deliberations of my soul.
 He knows how often I do good, and fail to do it.
 He hastens to stand with me in mercy.

If my God is my shield,
 If God will become my savior,
 Then I ask nothing from heaven or earth
 And I stand willing to face any calamity.

The first stanza is sung *forte* and joyfully, as if a declaration. There is a dramatic shift at the second stanza, where the poetic idea changes to become more internalized. It moves from describing the greatness of God—i.e., how I know God—in the first stanza, to the more reflective concept, that God knows my thoughts, and “all the deliberations of my soul”—i.e., how God knows me. This implies another process—being able to reflect on both conditions (I know God knows me), and the unfolding of the process of reflection.

This change is expressed clearly in the music, as the density of singularities increases: It is more polyphonic, the entrances are staggered, each sectional voice is singing its own clearly distinguishable part, and the vocal color changes. The choir communicates, and the mind hears, that something more intense is going on here. There is a change in the idea, which, even knowing nothing about music, no listener can miss.

For the third stanza, “If my God is my shield,” the choir sings what appears to be a repeat of the more unison form of the first stanza. But, because of the knowledge of the idea developed in the second verse, and because of the experience of having gone through hearing (and singing) the changes that take place in all aspects of the piece, the mind is ennobled, and, now hears it differently. Thus, the last stanza is not a simple repeat at all, beyond the slight variation in the line itself; it is a reflection of the whole process just experienced, sung and understood from a higher standpoint.

This is emphasized further in the majestic organ postlude, which repeats the accompaniment, twice, before it concludes, to assist the mind in contemplating what just came before; the postlude is composed, with its repeats, to enable the participants to more deeply reflect on the entire foregoing process.

Keeping in mind that the original idea of the recording project—to take advantage of the new technology of the phonograph to spread Classical culture everywhere, through the Jewish prayer services using the most beautiful music, especially in less-developed areas of Germany—there is much more here than the oligarchy today would like people to know. For a person steeped in the old traditional melodies of the synagogue, listening to this recording is uplifting, as it enables the listener, be he or she in the Europe in the 1930s, or presently in the United States or elsewhere, to hear these melodies transformed into polyphony. Today, it is enjoyable for anyone, of whatever background, religion, or nation, to hear this Classically composed religious music; through it, there are a

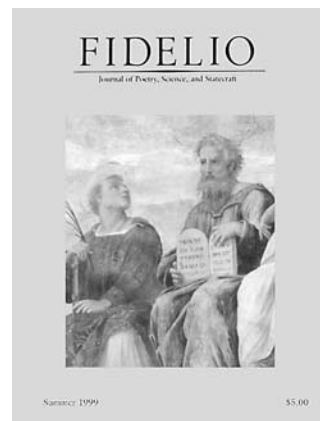
The Mendelssohn Renaissance

The Summer 1999 issue of the Schiller Institute’s *Fidelio* magazine features the work of Moses Mendelssohn, providing extensive documentation of his political, philosophical, and cultural role in shaping the German Classics and the Yiddish Renaissance. Articles include “What It Takes To Be a

World-Historical Leader Today,” a speech by Helga Zepp-LaRouche on Feb. 14, 1999; “Philosophical Vignettes from the Political Life of Moses Mendelssohn,” by David Shavin; and “Moses Mendelssohn and the Bach Tradition,” by Steven P. Meyer.

Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr. characterized the issue: “The only way to free Germany to act as a nation, once again, is to give long overdue recognition of the loss to all humanity of that Yiddish Renaissance set into motion by the collaboration of Lessing and Mendelssohn around the heritage of Leibniz and Bach. It was the Jewish bearers of that noble legacy, in Poland and elsewhere, who were the true victims of Hitler. This horror killed Germany and Poland, especially Germany, as much as it killed those Jews who typified the bearers of that Yiddish Renaissance tradition.

“The new *Fidelio*, as a package, puts that issue into the only right choice of perspective. To do justice to the victims of Nazism, one must restore that German Classic which Mendelssohn and his collaborators contributed so much to building.”



number of valuable lessons to be learned.

What a bittersweet irony it is for the world today, so Hobbesian, a half-century after the end of World War II, to see that it was entirely natural in the Germany of 1928-30, when the recordings were made, for the religious poems of a fundamentalist Protestant, Christian Fürchtegott Gellert, to be set to music by a Catholic composer, Ludwig van Beethoven, and then to become incorporated with such facility into the Jewish prayer service, adding beauty and depth to the celebration of God’s universal creation.