



Goethe and Zelter: Musical Dialogues

By Lorraine Byrne Bodley

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Goethe and Zelter spent a staggering 33 years corresponding or in the case of each artist, over two thirds of their lives. Zelter's position as director of the Sing-Akademie zu Berlin and Goethe's location in Weimar resulted in a wide-ranging correspondence. Goethe's letters offer a chronicle of his musical development, from the time of his journey to Italy to the final months of his life. Zelter's letters retrace his path as stonemason to Professor of Music in Berlin. The 891 letters that passed between these artists provide an important musical record of the music performed in public concerts in Berlin and in the private and semi-public soirées of the Weimar court. Their letters are those of men actively engaged in the musical developments of their time. The legacy contains a wide spectrum of letters, casual and thoughtfully composed, spontaneous and written for publication, rich with the details of Goethe's and Zelter's musical lives. Through Zelter, Goethe gained access to the professional music world he craved and became acquainted with the prodigious talent of Felix Mendelssohn. A single letter from Zelter might bear a letter from Felix Mendelssohn to another recipient of the same family, reflecting a certain community in the Mendelssohn household where letters were not considered private but shared with others in a circle of friends or family. Goethe recognized the value of such correspondence: he complains when his friend is slow to send letters in return for those written to him by the poet, a complaint common in this written culture where letters provided news, introductions, literary and musical works. This famous correspondence contains a medley of many issues in literature, art, and science; but the main focus of this translation is the music dialogues of these artists.

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Editorial Review

Review

'...an excellent translation, and discussion, of Goethe and composer Carl Friedrich Zelter's correspondence about music...makes a major contribution to understanding both men...Bodley's rich, far-reaching documentation includes details about their few personal encounters. Opening new avenues to scholars of music and the humanities, this title will certainly stimulate further research...Highly recommended. All readers.' Choice 'Lorraine Byrne Bodley provides for the first time the complete musical correspondence between Goethe and Zelter. Hitherto there has never been a published monograph on the musical dialogues between the poet and man of letters in Weimar and the composer and pedagogue in Berlin, neither in English nor in German. The correspondence now shows us a wider picture of their moving friendship and of their sensitive thinking and imaginative observations on music. The quality of the translation is remarkable. To borrow from the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic reflexions on language: 'there is actually no translation but replacement'. From this standpoint the 'translator' becomes an interpreter who is to elucidate the meaning of the texts. Particularly in discussions on technical musical details this hermeneutical claim has been convincingly achieved.' Dr Claus Canisius, author of the seminal study *Goethe und die Musik* (1998) 'The Goethe-Zelter correspondence belongs among the richest and most illuminating documents of German cultural history in the early nineteenth century. Lorraine Byrne Bodley's fine translation, expert annotation, and contextual discussion of this 35-year-long dialogue between a literary hero and one of the leading, most seminal, yet much underestimated musical figures of the time brings to life a fascinating and colorful period of musical life and thought that helped shape the future.' Professor Christoph Wolff, Adams University Professor, Department of Music, Harvard University, USA 'Lorraine Byrne Bodley has translated all this material into an idiomatic modern English which is internally consistent in style. Above all, her versions capture the intellectual animation which sustained the two interlocutors for so long... Students are also indebted to the translator and publisher for a prodigious number of references and explanatory glosses. ... English readers have access at last to a dialogue of outstanding musical import, indeed - in fulfilment of Goethe's growing hopes for it - one of the great correspondences in European literature.' Musical Times 'The Goethe-Zelter Correspondence is a treasure-trove of information and Lorraine Byrne Bodley is to be congratulated on her sensitively idiomatic translations of letters that not only add to our knowledge of Goethe, one of the truly great figures in German literature, but also have so much to reveal about musical thought at the time. At the very least it will help to set the record straight and enable us to gain a truer and deeper appreciation of Zelter...' The Schubertian '... an informative introduction, and, in the numerous footnotes, a body of detailed research into the background...' Modern Language Review 'By far the largest edition of these letters in English translation... For musicologists and cultural historians alike, the letters offer invaluable insights into [a] crucial period of transition...' Music and Letters

About the Author

Dr Lorraine Byrne Bodley is Lecturer in the Department of Music at the National University of Ireland Maynooth.

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