

ELIJAH, Op. 70 (1846)	Libretto: Julius Schubring English Translation: William Bartholomew	Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1809-1847)
PART ONE	The Biblical tale of Elijah dates from c. 800 BCE. The core narrative is found in the Book of Kings (I and II), with minor references elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. The Haggadah supplements the scriptural account with a number of colorful legends about the prophet's life and works. After Moses, Abraham and David, Elijah is the Old Testament character mentioned most in the New Testament. The Qu'uran also numbers Elijah (Ilyas) among the major prophets of Islam. Elijah's name is commonly translated to mean "Yahweh is my God."	"In fact I imagined Elijah as a real prophet through and through, of the kind we could really do with today: Strong, zealous and, yes, even bad-tempered, angry and brooding — in contrast to the riff-raff, whether of the court or the people, and indeed in contrast to almost the whole world — and yet borne aloft as if on angels' wings." – Felix Mendelssohn, 1838 (letter to Julius Schubring, <i>Elijah's</i> librettist)
PROLOGUE: Elijah's Curse		
<i>Introduction: Recitative — Elijah</i> As God the Lord of Israel liveth, before whom I stand: There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word. <i>(I Kings 17:1)</i>	Elijah materializes before Ahab, king of the Israelites, to deliver a bitter curse: Three years of drought as punishment for the apostasy of Ahab and his court. The prophet's appearance is a jarring interruption, a point where the writer of the Book of Kings drops the main story to focus intently on a sudden, divine intervention. Elijah's penchant for appearing out of the blue (even in disguise) as a warning messenger will become a common theme in scripture.	Four dark-hued chords spring out of nowhere, grippingly setting the stage for confrontation. ¹ With the opening sentence, Mendelssohn introduces two major musical motives that will serve as unifying gestures throughout the oratorio: The first, a rising triad (D-F-A-D) on the words "As God the Lord...". The second, a grating series of descending tritones ² (C-F#, G-C#, D-G#), signifying a rupture between the God of Israel and his chosen people. This wake-up call is scored for woodwind and brass instruments in their darker registers. A trombone blast at the final tritone interval

¹ The opening chord progression is a direct musical quotation from Schubert's "Death and the Maiden" (1815), a song depicting the famous medieval legend.

² The tritone (or augmented fourth) is the most distant interval from the endpoints of the diatonic scale – equidistant from either end of the octave. Called the *diabolus in musica* ("devil in music"), it was incomprehensible to the modal system of music that predated the modern era, and composers would do almost anything to avoid its occurrence. It retains its symbolism in Western music, where its dissonance is used to signify strife, danger, separation, anxiety, almost any negative emotion.

		amplifies the ill omen. A quiet roll from the timpani completes the feeling of dread.
<i>Overture</i>	Elijah's curse is followed by a scene that is as ambitious dramatically as it is musically. The full famine episode consists of an instrumental overture, an opening chorus, a choral recitative and a duet with chorus – an unrelenting narrative that stretches a full ten minutes.	Mendelssohn initially resisted the customary instrumental overture: Anything he could use to precede Elijah's curse would only dull its impact. His English librettist, William Bartholomew, who recognized the need to connect Elijah's dark incantation to the suffering of the people, came up with the novel idea of placing the overture <i>after</i> the curse. The fugal subject begins in the murky shadows of the cellos and basses, and borrows a tritone from the opening curse. After the theme is fully explored by the strings, a faster and more insistent rhythmical pattern takes hold, gathering the force necessary to propel us into the chorus that follows. The effect is one of a pang of hunger that starts small, in the pit of the stomach, but rapidly intensifies into a general crisis.
SCENE ONE: The Famine		
<p>1. Chorus — <i>The People</i> Help, Lord! Wilt thou quite destroy us? The harvest now is over, the summer days are gone; and yet no power cometh to help us. Will then the Lord be no more God in Zion?</p> <p>(<i>Jeremiah 8:19, 20</i>)</p>	Julius Schubring, the German cleric, friend of Mendelssohn and <i>Elijah</i> librettist, chose for the opening chorus a text from Jeremiah – the so-called “broken-hearted prophet” – whose works are divided between the Books of Jeremiah and Lamentations.	The scrim lifts, the lights come up, and we are hurled headlong into a riotous demonstration against the famine. The opening shouts, “Help, Lord! Wilt thou quite destroy us?” give way to another fugue on the text, “The harvest now is over, the summer days are gone”. ³ The “curse theme” –descending fourths and tritones – recurs in the bass and soprano lines at measures 55-56 as the chorus draws to a close.

³ With its multiple entrances, or voices, the fugue as a musical form is often seen as an allusion to the organic nature of the human community – individuals expressing many views that are incorporated into a larger body of opinion. Its use is often reserved in sacred music for when the composer wants to make a serious point, or for openings (see the Mozart *Requiem*) or closings (traditionally, the final “Cum Sancto Spiritu” section of the Gloria of the Mass Ordinary is set to a fugue).

<p><i>Recitative Chorus</i> The deeps afford no water, and the rivers are exhausted! The suckling's tongue now cleaveth for thirst to his mouth; The infant children ask for bread, and there is no one breaketh it to feed them!</p> <p>(1 Kings 17:7; Lamentations 4:4)</p>	<p>Here again, text from the works of the prophet Jeremiah, this time from Lamentations. The imagery is searing: Imagine thirst and dehydration so acute you literally can't open your mouth.</p>	<p>A notable feature of <i>Elijah</i> is the flexible use of the chorus to represent, at turns, the people, the priests of Baal, the angels, and the number of different styles (4-part, 8-part, mixed solo/choral) Mendelssohn chooses to fill out each of these roles. The choral recitative that connects the opening chorus and the duet functions both as a transition and an expression of an authentic public emotion.</p>
<p>2. <i>Duet with Chorus</i> — <i>The People</i> Lord, bow thine ear to our pray'r. — <i>Soprano and alto duet</i> Zion spreadeth her hands for aid; and there is neither help nor comfort.</p> <p>(Psalm 86:1, 6; Lamentations 1:17)</p>		<p>Our eye is drawn to a pocket of domestic suffering within the larger frame: Two women take up a mournful lament, doubled by two lowly clarinets and a repetitive, workaday string accompaniment – perhaps a spinning song. In the background, the chorus intones a simple prayer. The piece is in A minor, but the chant is in a haunting modal style, centered on E. The specter of hunger is conveyed with ghostly evanescence.</p>
<p>3. <i>Recitative — Obadiah (tenor)</i> Ye people, rend your hearts, and not your garments; For your transgressions the prophet Elijah hath sealed the heavens through the word of God. I therefore say to ye, forsake your idols, return to God; for He is slow to anger, and merciful, and kind and gracious, and repenteth Him of the evil.</p> <p>(Joel 2:12, 13)</p>	<p>Obadiah, a tangential figure in the Biblical story of Elijah, is given greater prominence in the Schubring libretto. As Ahab's royal chamberlain, Obadiah uses his wealth and influence to shield Jehovah's prophets against persecution. In the oratorio, he is also the bearer of a message of hope and encouragement that balances Elijah's severity. By exhorting the people to "rend your hearts, and not your garments," he tells us to look within, and not in the trappings of ritual, for redemption – a message that hits home with full force in Part Two.</p>	<p>Mendelssohn completed <i>Elijah</i> in response to a commission from the Birmingham Choral Festival. Its rapturously received <i>premiere</i> in 1846 showed that Mendelssohn knew his English public well. In the first of a number of nods to <i>Messiah</i>, soon to be joined by <i>Elijah</i> atop the pedestal of greatest oratorios, Mendelssohn sets the first major recitative and aria for a tenor soloist, as Handel did with "Comfort ye my people/Ev'ry valley shall be exalted." The message is similar.</p>
<p>4. <i>Air — Obadiah</i> "If with all your hearts ye truly seek me, ye shall ever surely find me." Thus saith our God. Oh! that I knew where I</p>		<p>Mendelssohn's gift for melody is almost unmatched in the annals of Western music. A peerless writer of songs – with and without words – Felix adorns <i>Elijah</i> with some of the</p>

<p>might find Him, that I might even come before His presence!</p> <p>(Deuteronomy 4:29; Job 23:3; Jeremiah 29:13)</p>		<p>most heartfelt tunes in his entire <i>oeuvre</i>. Felix's older sister, Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel appropriated the tune to "If with all your hearts" for her Piano Trio in D minor (Op. 11).⁴</p>
<p>5. Chorus — <i>The People</i> Yet doth the Lord see it not: He mocketh at us; His curse hath fallen down upon us; His wrath will pursue us till He destroy us!</p> <p>For He, the Lord our God, He is a jealous God: and He visiteth all the fathers' sins on the children to the third and the fourth generation of them that hate him.</p> <p>His mercies on thousands fall, fall on all them that love Him and keep His commandments.</p>	<p>Texts chosen from the Pentateuch – the "law" part of the both the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament – close the famine scene. The begrudging Lord is cursed in return for turning a blind eye to his chosen people: He causes the drought, then mocks the people by placing the power to end it in the hands of a stern and unyielding prophet. Only later in the Bible does the idea of a transcendent God emerge; the God of Abraham is, at this point in the narrative, still a vindictive player in real life events.</p> <p>But hope remains for those who love the Lord and follow the law and the prophets. Elijah later uses this love to "turn the heart of the</p>	<p>The strictness of the law is depicted with great verve in a chorus redolent of the Passions of J.S. Bach.⁵ The two principal themes of the introduction – the rising triad ("yet doth the Lord see it not") and the descending tritone series ("His curse hath fallen down upon us) – are woven together into a tense <i>fugato</i> ("in the style of a fugue," <i>i.e.</i> not fully developed), punctuated by outbursts from horns and timpani, and a buzzing string tremolo at the opening that represents the agitation of the people.</p> <p>At measure 67, Mendelssohn interjects a chorale-style transition, again harking to a Baroque (and earlier) form while retaining his</p>

⁴ A composer and virtuoso pianist in her own right, Fanny was revered by her younger brother as his "Minerva." They were inseparable as youths; though they both made happy marriages, they remained intellectual soulmates as adults. Possessing every bit as much native talent as Felix – her aunt remarked on how Fanny as a baby "had Bach fugue fingers" – Fanny was born into a family of wealth and position and thus barred from the unladylike pursuit of a profession. Though hers was largely a private career, she was a tireless advocate behind the scenes for Felix's work, and he for hers (he played her art songs for Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, with full attribution). Later in life, and with Felix's sincere encouragement, Fanny began to publish collections of *lieder* and chamber music. Shattered by Fanny's death, at age 41, Felix never recovered and was himself dead, at age 38, within the year. She lived to see him become the greatest living composer; he lived to see her realize the lifelong dream of finding her own voice.

⁵ There is scant room in this space to recount Mendelssohn's famous restoration of Bach's *Saint Matthew Passion* (Berlin, 1829), except to note the uncommon initiative and ability shown in such a splendid achievement by a boy aged 20. Mendelssohn was given the score as a gift by his great-aunt, Sara Levy, who ran the greatest *salon* in Berlin and was a pupil of Friedemann Bach, Sebastian Bach's eldest surviving son. Felix's illustrious male ancestors are well-known; his father Abraham founded the Mendelssohn family bank, an institution that endured until it was seized by the Nazis in the 1930s, and his grandfather Moses (born Moses ben Mendel Dessau) was one of the foremost philosophers of the German Enlightenment, the man who is said to have "led the Jews out of the ghetto." But Felix also owed a great debt to his maternal ancestors and relatives: Daniel Itzig, his maternal great-grandfather, was the Prussian court banker and through his daughter Bella Salomon and her daughter Lea (Mendelssohn's mother) contributed the core of the family fortune. Itzig and his family were among the first fully emancipated Jews in Germany and in an unusual development this "general privilege" was extended to his descendants as well. The women in Felix's life, from his learned mother and great-aunt to his sister Fanny and wife Cecile, shared fully in the intellectual life of the family and in the shaping of Felix's world view.

<p>(Deuteronomy 28:15, 22; Exodus 20:5,6)</p>	<p>fathers to their children” (see No. 40).</p>	<p>own authority as a composer. The composer wrote to a friend that wanted certain moments in the work to be <i>like</i> a chorale without actually <i>being</i> a chorale.</p> <p>This brooding interlude suddenly gives way to a moment of transparent glory: On the text “His mercies on thousands fall,” the tonality changes from C minor to C major, a key used elsewhere in the oratorio to represent God; the orchestration completely changes color too. The augmented choir of brass instruments (trombones doubling the voices) lend richness and nobility over a firmly grounded pedal point in the timpani and bass instruments. The strings are freed from their role of doubling the voices, instead supplying a harmonic wash of rising, buoyant chords.⁶ The chorus floats above into the firmament, taking us along for the ride.</p> <p>This chorus bears the imprint of Mendelssohn’s fully mature compositional voice. In a fitting gesture for a text that speaks of a dialogue between the generations, he evokes (but does not imitate) two ancient forms – the fugue and the chorale – to acknowledge his scholarly debt to the masters who have gone before. But where in earlier works like the <i>Lobgesang</i>, “Reformation” Symphony and <i>Saint Paul</i>, Mendelssohn was content to use actual chorales in outright mimicry of earlier forms, here they are subordinated to his own vision, a vision that takes joyous flight in the chorus’s hymn-like</p>
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⁶ Atmospheric string writing such as this would come to dominate the Romantic style. In vocal music before Mendelssohn, strings were used either to double the voices or to add touches of *chiaroscuro* (the buzz of the flies in Handel’s *Israel in Egypt*). Along with the early Romantics – Schumann, Berlioz – Mendelssohn freed the violins of the orchestra to explore their potential, a potential that was to be given luminous expression in the later works of Wagner, Mahler and Strauss and in the shimmering Impressionism of composers like Ravel and Debussy. With the growth in size of the orchestra and the increasing dominance of the brass, the strings needed a distinct role in the three-dimensionality of sound.

		<p>conclusion.</p> <p>With this moment, we witness the triumph of authenticity over brilliance.</p>
SCENE TWO: The Widow		
<p>6. <i>Recitative — An Angel (alto)</i> Elijah, get thee hence, Elijah: depart and turn thee eastward, thither hide thee by Cherith's brook. There shalt thou drink its waters; and the Lord thy God hath commanded the ravens to feed thee there; so do according unto His word.</p> <p>(1 Kings 17:3-5)</p>	<p>Elijah is hounded by the people for seeming to cause the drought, and things become too dangerous for him to remain in Israel. He is sent East of the Jordan, across the frontier, where he is miraculously fed by ravens.</p> <p>This recitative and the chorus that follows mark the first major appearance of the angels in the work.</p>	<p>Mendelssohn was a man of effortless social graces. The English contralto Helen Dolby, who was to join the London <i>premiere</i> of <i>Elijah</i> as a soloist, leaves us a charming illustration of Felix's wit: "Preoccupied with preliminary work on <i>Elijah</i>, Felix arrived late one evening for a dinner party.... When Felix blamed his tardiness on the contralto part of the oratorio, Miss Dolby exclaimed, "do tell me what that will be like, because I am specially interested in that part.' 'Never fear,' he quipped, 'it will suit you very well, for it is a true woman's part – half an angel, half a devil,'" revealing the part's division between angelic voices and Queen Jezebel." (Related in R. Larry Todd, <i>Mendelssohn: A Life in Music</i>)</p>
<p>7. <i>Double Chorus — The Angels</i> For He shall give His angels charge over thee; that they shall protect thee in all the ways thou goest; that their hands shall uphold and guide thee, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.</p> <p>(Psalm 91:11, 12)</p>	<p>The Bible is replete with instances where God sends angels to give safe passage to his servants on earth. Angels are curious figures, appearing in scripture with virtually no background; extra-Biblical legends have filled in details on the orders and ranks of the angelic host. The Eastern Orthodox church views angels as figures of perfect calm and serenity.</p>	<p>This sparkling double chorus was originally a free-standing composition, the only such re-working in the whole oratorio. (Bach and Handel were copious top-drawer composers, to the point where large sections of their greatest works were pressed into service from previous lives.)</p> <p>When Friedrich Wilhelm IV, king of Prussia and one of Mendelssohn's patrons, survived an assassination attempt in 1844, Mendelssohn was moved to compose this chorus of thanksgiving. Recalling the works of Palestrina and the early masters, Mendelssohn adopted "the ideal of 'pure,' contemplative church music favored by the king, with antiphonal blocks of euphony,</p>

		<p>clear syllabic declamation of the text, and careful control of dissonances.”</p> <p>In translating the chorus to <i>Elijah</i>, Mendelssohn added simple orchestration – wind chords for color and body, a jaunty bass line, and a rising string figuration reminiscent of the buoyant ending of No. 5, almost as if the angels are beating their wings.</p>
<p><i>Recitative — An Angel (alto)</i> Now Cherith’s brook is dried up; Elijah, arise and depart, and get thee to Zarepath; thither abide; for the Lord hath commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee; and the barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth.</p> <p>(1 Kings 17:7, 9, 14)</p>	<p>God dries up the brook and turns away the ravens, sending Elijah off to Zarepath, a city far to the north, in the pagan lands of Jezebel’s fathers. There, he appears to a widow, and commands her to give him the last of her food; as a reward for her hospitality, the food miraculously replenishes itself. An analogous miracle would later be attributed to Jesus of Nazareth.</p>	
<p>8. <i>Recitative, Air and Duet</i> — <i>The Widow (soprano)</i> What have I to do with thee, O man of God? Art thou come to me, to call my sin unto remembrance? To slay my son art thou come hither?</p> <p>Help me, man of God, my son is sick! and his sickness is so sore that there is no breath left in him! I go mourning all the day long, I lie down and weep at night! See mine affliction! Be thou the orphan’s helper! Help my son! There is no breath left in him!</p> <p>— <i>Elijah</i> Give me thy son.</p> <p>Turn unto her, O Lord, my God; O</p>	<p>The widow scene bursts upon us with a frantic plea from the young mother, who seems to accuse Elijah of caring more about the niceties of sin and the law than actual human suffering. “Am I going to get another lecture from you,” she seems to say,” or are you actually here to help? My son’s dying, and all I get from you is another lousy sermon!”</p> <p>The widow’s words seem to strike a nerve. Elijah takes the lifeless child in his arms, perhaps because he is genuinely affected, perhaps to demonstrate once and for all to this unbeliever the power of prayer.</p> <p>Three times Elijah calls on God. On the third try, the boy, like Lazarus, is miraculously restored.</p> <p>The woman offers a sacrifice in an effort to</p>	<p>Mendelssohn searched all his adult life for the perfect opera libretto, one that would fit with his project of uniting the public in a common morality through music. By the end of his life, he had found the <i>prima donna</i> to give voice to his operatic aspirations, the “Swedish Nightingale” Jenny Lind. Sadly, the libretto for <i>Lorelei</i> arrived too late and in the words of one of his friends Felix “sank into his grave” along with what was to have been his most ambitious project to date.</p> <p>The widow scene in <i>Elijah</i> may be as close a clue as we have to how Mendelssohn’s operatic voice might have sounded. Marked <i>Andante agitato</i>, it opens restlessly, in an ungrounded E minor set to 6/8 time, conveying rootless urgency and unease as the widow rails at the unfeeling Elijah. The vocal writing for the soprano is at times</p>

<p>turn in mercy, in mercy help this widow's son; for Thou art gracious, and full of compassion and plenteous in mercy and truth. Lord, my God, let the spirit of this child return, that he again may live!</p> <p>— <i>Widow</i> Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? There is no breath in him.</p> <p>— <i>Elijah</i> Lord, my God, let the spirit of this child return, that he again may live!</p> <p>— <i>Widow</i> Shall the dead arise and praise Thee?</p> <p>— <i>Elijah</i> Lord, my God, let the spirit of this child return, that he again may live!</p> <p>— <i>Widow</i> The Lord hath heard thy prayer; the soul of my son reviveth!</p> <p>— <i>Elijah</i> Now behold, thy son liveth!</p> <p>— <i>Widow</i> Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that His word in thy mouth is the truth: What shall I render to the Lord, render for all His benefits to me?</p> <p>— <i>Both</i> Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, love Him with all thine heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy might. O, blessed are they who fear Him!</p> <p><i>(I Kings 17:17-19, 21-4; Job 10:15; Psalms 38:6, 6:6, 10:14, 86:15, 16; 88:10; 116:12;</i></p>	<p>repay God's mercy. In a foreshadowing of his confrontation with the priests of Baal, Elijah delivers a tender reminder that the only sacrifice required to access God's mercy is an internal one, the sacrifice of belief.</p> <p>Elijah works two miracles in this scene: first, restoring life to the boy, and second, restoring the widow's faith.</p>	<p>random and directionless, with leaps of dissonance, befitting the widow's distracted mental state.</p> <p>The prophet's vocal entrance (at measure 66) brings the first really confident cadence to the primary tonality of E – four measures of E in the bass, to be precise, but this time in a major mode; the music, like the prophet, radiates steadfastness and security. After further dialogue (prayer on his part, disbelief on hers), Elijah summons all his energy for a third try: At measure 109, three blocked chords for the full choir of brass instruments mark the miracle – a truly Wagnerian flourish.</p> <p>The boy lives, and a short duet between Elijah and the widow meditates on the restorative power of prayer.</p> <p>An obsessive re-composer, Mendelssohn revised the widow scene right up through the printing deadline for the first Simrock piano-vocal score (February 1847).</p>
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<i>Deuteronomy 6:5; Psalm 128:1)</i>		
<p>9. <i>Chorus</i> Blessed are the men who fear Him; they ever walk in the ways of peace. Through darkness riseth light to the upright. He is gracious, compassionate; He is righteous.</p> <p>(<i>Psalm 128:1; 112:1, 4</i>)</p>	<p>The Psalms of David have been the muse of composers from the beginnings of Western music. The first organized choral singing (and indeed the first organized instrumental accompaniment) took place at the Temple in Jerusalem, where the high priests of Israel chanted the Psalms. Still used in the liturgy of most synagogues and Christian sects, the Psalms form a body of work that can be generalized to almost any occasion or human emotion. In <i>Elijah</i>, Schubring draws on the Psalms to express feelings of lamentation (No. 3), security and watchfulness (No. 7), encouragement (No. 9), vengeance (No. 17), celebration (No. 20), hope (No. 22), the presence of God (Nos. 28-29) and patience (No. 31).</p>	<p>“Blessed are the men who fear Him” is the signature Mendelssohn oratorio chorus, an example of the use of the choral ensemble not to advance the action or express a character (the priests, the people), but to sublimate the mental state of the characters and the meaning of events.</p> <p>Like its counterpart in Part Two, “He watching over Israel”, and also like the famous “There shall a star from Jacob come forth” in his unfinished oratorio <i>Christus</i>, the structure follows a typically Mendelssohnian formula:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) an A section that introduces a tuneful primary theme (“Blessed are the men who fear Him”); leading to 2) a B section in the dominant key (here D major) that explores an equally strong second theme (“Through darkness riseth light to the upright”) and culminates in a point of tension; followed by 3) a suave modulation back to the tonic; and 4) an A¹ section spurred by a hidden entrance in one of the inner voices (here the tenor line in measure 44), which then skillfully interweaves the first and second themes toward a satisfying conclusion. <p>In another tip of his cap to the sensibilities of his English public, Mendelssohn draws clear parallels to the <i>Messiah</i> chorus “For unto us a child is born”, with the key of the piece (G major), the structure of the first theme and the acclamations in the middle (“He is gracious, compassionate” = “Wonderful, Counsellor”). Contributing to internal coherence, the second</p>

		<p>theme recalls the ascending triadic theme from the opening of the oratorio, this time in a major mode.</p> <p>As popular as choruses like this were for their mid-century listeners, they came to be thought of as so much excess baggage as society moved on. By the 1880s, George Bernard Shaw, that eloquent scourge of Victorian mores, would denounce Mendelssohn's "despicable oratorio mongering" and "kid-glove gentility." Richard Wagner, who was astute enough to recognize the visionary in Mendelssohn but either too proud or too insecure to acknowledge the depth of his influence, scorned the oratorios as "sexless opera-embryos." Others would dismiss Mendelssohn as a composer for the "quilted piano bench" of the parlor and not the concert hall, a mere curator of Bach and Handel, an unworthy heir to Mozart and Haydn, an overpolished veneer beneath which lurked, in Wagner's words, "a veritable abyss of superficiality".</p> <p>Mendelssohn undoubtedly looked to the past as prologue for his music; he saw himself as standing on the shoulders of giants. He was notably reticent in his personal dealings with luminaries like Wagner, Berlioz, Liszt – the hotheaded Romantics whose values he did not share and whose motives (with good reason, in Wagner's case) he did not trust. (This reticence may account for the fact that Wagner, unlike nearly every other person who knew Mendelssohn personally, found him something of a cold fish.)</p> <p>But Mendelssohn's mission was every bit as sincere and universal as theirs: To create clear, intelligible music from which the listener could extract meaning and, in the case of vocal music,</p>
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		the text. What some disdained as pandering to the listener can also be viewed as respecting the listener's intelligence enough to seek a thoughtful dialogue.
SCENE THREE: Clash of the Gods		
<p>10. <i>Recitative — Elijah, Ahab and Chorus</i></p> <p>— <i>Elijah</i> As God the Lord of Sabaoth liveth, before whom I stand, three years this day fulfilled, I will show myself unto Ahab; and the Lord will then send rain again upon the earth.</p> <p>— <i>Ahab (tenor)</i> Art thou Elijah? Art thou he that troubleth Israel?</p> <p>— <i>The People</i> Thou art Elijah, he that troubleth Israel!</p> <p>— <i>Elijah</i> I never troubled Israel's peace; it is thou, Ahab, and all thy father's house. Ye have forsaken God's command; and thou hast followed Baalim! Now send and gather to me the whole of Israel unto Mount Carmel; There summon the prophets of Baal, and also the prophets of the groves who are feasted at Jezebel's table. Then we shall see whose god is the Lord.</p> <p>— <i>The People</i> And then we shall see whose god is</p>	<p>Elijah contrives a competition between the God of Abraham and the earth-god Baal⁷, designed to reinforce to the people of Israel that Jehovah is the one and only true God. Time and again in the Hebrew Bible this lesson is forgotten by the people and by rulers who are willing to trade purity of worship for wealth and political advantage. Prophets like Moses and Elijah are sent in to reverse the decay, clean out the rot and restore the people to their sacred covenant.</p> <p>Such is the case with Ahab: He has married the Phoenician princess Jezebel, whose dowry brings him wealth and a secure border to the North. In return, she has been allowed to construct a temple to Baal alongside Jehovah's temple. While Moses faced the relatively simple task of deposing a Golden Calf that the people were worshipping <i>instead</i> of Jehovah, Elijah faces the rather more problematic task of dissuading the people from worshipping both Baal and Jehovah <i>at the same time</i> – the sin is one of relativism, not apostasy. Elijah thus enjoins Ahab and his fallen people with the question, "How long do ye halt on both knees?" or in another translation, "How long do you waver between two opinions?"</p>	<p>To begin another extraordinarily ambitious scene, Mendelssohn repeats the same portentous chords that herald Elijah's first appearance to Ahab, this time using a richly sonorous E-flat major (not the spartan D minor of the opening). (E-flat is associated throughout the oratorio with the positive side of Elijah – Obadiah's message in "If with all your hearts ye truly seek him," the celebrational "Thanks be to God," and most importantly and directly, the aria that is the centerpiece of this scene. It is also the classic "sacerdotal" key, prominently figured in Mozart's <i>Die Zauberflöte</i>.)</p> <p>Here, the chorus is cast in the role of "The People," in classic Bachian fashion, echoing the king's challenge to Elijah and vice versa.</p> <p>Mendelssohn's musical rhetoric neatly tracks Elijah's own confrontational style, as the "curse" theme (Eb-A-C-F#) is used in Elijah's rejoinder to the king ("I never troubled Israel's peace" at measure 32).</p> <p>The "God" key (C major – first exhibited in No. 5 on the text "His mercies on thousands fall") returns as the People shout "and then we shall see whose god is God the Lord."</p>

⁷ The "forest gods and mountain deities" who comprise Baal – a collective/generic reference to several animist earth spirits – have deep roots in the ancient Near East. Some were eventually syncretized by early Christianity as part of that creed's marketing approach; there are those who believe that the cult of Mary is a direct transference from an ancient pagan earth goddess.

<p>God the Lord. — <i>Elijah</i> Rise then, ye priests of Baal; select and slay a bullock, and put no fire under it; uplift your voices, and call the god ye worship; and I then will call on the Lord Jehovah and the god who by fire shall answer, let Him be God. — <i>The People</i> Yea: and the god who by fire shall answer, let Him be God. — <i>Elijah</i> Call first upon your god; your numbers are many; I, even I, only remain, one prophet of the Lord! Invoke your forest gods and mountain deities. <i>(I Kings 18:1, 15, 17-19, 21-5)</i></p>	<p>Elijah has Ahab assemble the priests of Baal – all 450 of them – at the Western shore of the kingdom, where he proposes a task: “You and I will each sacrifice a bull, and rather than set fire to it in the usual fashion, each will call on his god to consume the sacrifice.”⁸</p> <p>Elijah’s rhetoric is calculated: He knows that only prayer, the inner voice, can summon God’s power. By challenging Baal’s priests to come forward with an outward demonstration of divine power – spontaneous combustion – Elijah will not only show his God in triumph, but theirs in ignominious failure. He will beat them at their own game.</p>	<p>Trombones, horns and trumpets in the orchestra evoke the regal surroundings in which Elijah finds himself.</p>
<p><i>II. Chorus — Priests of Baal</i> Baal, we cry to thee; hear and answer us! Heed the sacrifice we offer! Baal, O hear us, and answer us! Hear us, Baal! Hear, mighty god! Baal, O answer us! Baal, let thy flames fall and extirpate the foe! Baal, O hear us!</p>	<p>All morning, the priests of Baal prepare the sacrifice with elaborate ceremony, pulling out every stop to please their god. Every stop, that is, except the required fire.</p>	<p>Mendelssohn’s superb gift for color and texture is vividly displayed by this famous chorus. Two choirs in eight parts declaim the power of Baal from every corner of the arena; trombones complement the richly hued male voices (the melody doubled by cellos), while brighter instruments – oboes, clarinets, bassoons, trumpet – bolster the brilliant sound of the sopranos and altos.</p> <p>A repetitive and intensifying round dance follows this impressive introduction. Held in reserve up to that point, the strings (with divided violas) create a sensational backdrop of pomp and ceremony with cascades of eighth-</p>

⁸ The Haggadah contains a delicious parable of the two bulls who were actually selected for the divine bake-off. Brothers from the same litter, both bulls were brought forth. Elijah’s proceeded serenely to his altar, but his brother balked and, to everyone’s astonishment, spoke out in protest. “Why should I be sacrificed on Baal’s altar while my brother will have the honor of being sacrificed to the true God?” Only when Elijah assured him that God would accept both sacrifices did the recalcitrant bull agree to go through with it.

		notes. With writing of almost garish magnificence, Mendelssohn sharpens the contrast between the richly bedecked priests of Baal and the oddly plain Elijah.
<p>12. <i>Recitative — Elijah</i> Call him louder, for he is a god! He talketh; or he is pursuing; or he is on a journey; or, peradventure, he sleepeth; so awaken him; call him louder. (<i>I Kings 18:27</i>) <i>Chorus — Priests of Baal</i> Hear our cry, O Baal! Now arise! Wherefore slumber?</p>	<p>Having set them up for a spectacular failure, Elijah mocks the priests: Perhaps Baal is so bored with their ministrations that he's taken a brief intermission, or even a nap.</p> <p>With increasing anxiety, the priests call on Baal a second time. Dusk approaches. Still no fire. Still no Baal.</p>	<p>As Elijah mocks the priests with words, Mendelssohn mocks them with a screech of woodwinds, as flutes, clarinets and bassoons repeat (at measure 2) the "HEAR US!" figure so earnestly chanted at the end of the preceding chorus. A nervous flutter of eighth-notes, marked <i>fortissimo</i> in all parts, overtakes the orchestra as the voices, doubled by trombones, knock more insistently at their master's gate.</p>
<p>13. <i>Recitative — Elijah</i> Call him louder! He heareth not. With knives and lancets cut yourselves after your manner; Leap upon the altar ye have made; call him and prophesy! Not a voice will answer you; none will listen, none heed you! <i>Chorus — Priests of Baal</i> Hear and answer, Baal! Mark how the scorner derideth us! <i>Hear and answer!</i> (<i>I Kings 18:26-9</i>)</p>	<p>Things turn from just plain embarrassing to rather desperate for the priests of Baal. Elijah turns more aggressive this time, urging them to mutilate themselves before their god in an effort to gain his attention.</p> <p>The followers of Baal make one last frenzied appeal, but the final supplication collapses, to stunned silence: For extra insurance, Elijah has dampened all surrounding noise from the wind, the birds and the trees, so no one can falsely claim any natural sound to be the oncoming voice of Baal.</p>	<p>As Elijah's baiting rises to fever pitch, so does the music, as Mendelssohn sets "Call him louder!" up a half step from the piece before; the rising chords in measures 8-11 follow that thought as well.</p> <p>Mendelssohn, who supervised the English libretto with, in Bartholomew's words, "attention to detail which might be termed microscopic," personally intervened to preserve the phrase "with knives and lancets cut yourselves after your manner" in favor of a less violent translation.</p> <p>Stomping brass and woodwind chords are combined with a skittering string figure to accompany the priests' final attempt. The conclusion – two stark <i>a cappella</i> outbursts on the text "hear and answer!" – is one of the most arresting moments in all of music. (Benjamin Britten paid it a fond <i>hommage</i> in his opera <i>Peter Grimes</i>.)</p>
14. <i>Recitative and Air — Elijah</i>	Into this silence, Elijah bears a simple prayer:	For this pivotal moment, Mendelssohn sets

<p>Draw near, all ye people; come to me! Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel! This day let it be known that Thou art God; and I am Thy servant! O show to all this people that I have done these things according to Thy word! O hear me Lord and answer me; and show this people that Thou art Lord God; and let their hearts again be turned!</p> <p><i>(1 Kings 18:30, 36, 37)</i></p>	<p>“Your servant is calling. I need your help. Show everyone that all my harshness has only been to serve your purpose. Show them a sign, that they may again be filled with goodness.”</p>	<p>music as unadorned as Elijah’s message. The simplicity of “Lord God of Abraham” stands in irony against the gaudy display offered by the priests of Baal. Violas, the most humble of orchestral instruments, introduce the melody with their characteristic honeyed color. The orchestral accompaniment neither doubles nor competes with Elijah’s own melody, a lesson in gentle reinforcement. The composer’s songwriting skill was seldom as surefooted.</p>
<p><i>15. Chorale — Angels</i> Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee. He never will suffer the righteous to fall; He is at thy right hand. Thy mercy, Lord, is great; and far above the heavens. Let none be made ashamed that wait upon Thee.</p> <p><i>(Psalms 55:22, 16:8, 108:4, 25:3)</i></p>	<p>While the angels pray above him, Elijah goes about dousing his altar and the moat around it with water, to heighten the difficulty of his task. The words of the Psalm “let none be made ashamed that wait upon Thee” foretell a success.</p>	<p>Into this meditative space, Mendelssohn ushers an <i>a cappella</i> chorus of angel-voices. In the only such instance in the work, the tune can be traced to a 17th century chorale (“O Gott, du frommer Gott”). But as elsewhere, the composer subordinates the ancient allusion to his own dramatic needs: The text is different, and the setting follows organically from the aria. At the very end, circles back to it as the orchestra repeats the “Lord God of Abraham” melody. It is a live whisper in our ear, not a cold artifact staring us in the face. The first violins create a “halo” over each strophe of text, the same gesture with which Bach adorned the words of Jesus in the Passions.</p>
<p><i>16. Recitative — Elijah</i> O Thou, who makest Thine angels spirits; Thou, whose ministers are flaming fires, let them now descend!</p> <p><i>(Psalm 104:4)</i></p> <p><i>Chorus — The People</i> The fire descends from heaven; the flames consume his offering! Before Him upon your faces fall!</p> <p>The Lord is God; O Israel, hear! Our</p>	<p>With his humble prayer, Elijah conjures a fire like nothing the world has ever seen. This is no ordinary spontaneous combustion.</p> <p>The fire seems to rain down from the sky, in a display far beyond what even the priests of Baal attempted.</p> <p>The awestruck people fall down, bearing witness to the most important (for Elijah at least) of the commandments, the two that establish the identity and primacy of Jehovah as the God of Israel: <i>Sh'ma Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai</i></p>	<p>Mendelssohn’s color palette turns as red-hot as his chosen topic – marked <i>Allegro con fuoco</i> (literally, “with fire”). A thunderclap in the timpani announces the rain of fire from above, and the strings busily portray the flames that lick the sacrifice.</p> <p>To a dark, almost archaic sounding “chorale,” the entire throng (at measure 42) acclaim the awesome demonstration.</p> <p>From measure 59, the timpani leaps out of the orchestral texture, continuing an ominous roll</p>

<p>God is one Lord; And we will have no other gods before the Lord!</p> <p><i>(1 Kings 18:38, 39; Deuteronomy 5:7, 6:4)</i></p> <p><i>Recitative — Elijah</i> Take all the prophets of Baal; and let not one of them escape you; bring them down to Kishon's brook, and there let them be slain.</p> <p><i>Chorus — The People</i> Take all the prophets of Baal; and let not one of them escape us; bring all, and slay them!</p> <p><i>(1 Kings 18:40)</i></p>	<p><i>Ehad.</i></p> <p>Elijah skillfully diverts the people's newfound zeal, turning the arena of sacrifice into a killing field. The priests of Baal are put to the sword. No one survives.</p>	<p>as Elijah transforms awe into rage. It is a moment of pure, atavistic energy.</p>
<p><i>17. Air — Elijah</i> Is not His word like a fire; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock into pieces? For God is angry with the wicked every day; and if the wicked turn not, the Lord will whet His sword; and He hath bent His bow, and made it ready.</p> <p><i>(Jeremiah 23:29; Psalm 7:11, 12)</i></p>	<p>Lest the people forget, Elijah reminds them that God is ever-watchful and ever-vengeful, poised to strike without warning. He is "angry with the wicked every day," not just when a prophet comes along to clean house.</p> <p>Schubring here establishes another link to <i>Messiah</i>, specifically to the famous aria that precedes the "Hallelujah" chorus ("Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel").</p>	<p>Elijah's "rage" aria further extends the range of emotion called on for the baritone soloist in this huge and unbroken scene. Confrontation, argument, sarcasm, humility, tenderness, and now a purifying zeal. The orchestration is sparing – clarinets, horns, strings – and a walking bass line depicts the footsteps of the wicked scurrying to avoid God's wrath.</p>
<p><i>18. Arioso (alto)</i> Woe unto them who forsake Him! Destruction shall fall upon them, for they have transgressed against Him. Though they are by Him redeemed, yet have they spoken falsely against Him; from Him have they fled.</p> <p><i>(Hosea 7:13)</i></p>	<p>Drawn from an obscure corner of scripture, "Woe unto them" ends the Baal scene with an unexpected note of pathos. Having been given a ringside seat to the slaughter, we are not allowed to close our eyes to the aftermath.</p> <p>The unavoidable image here is that of a solitary widow searching the battlefield for a dead or dying husband or son, perhaps pausing to nurse the wounded she encounters along the way.</p>	<p>The alto soloist is accompanied only by strings – plain as sackcloth and ashes. The descending sixth of the opening springs from the postlude of Elijah's rage aria. An ambiguous series of chords at the end settles us into E-major as the next number opens with hope. With characteristic seamlessness, Mendelssohn uses the arioso both as the end of one scene and the beginning of the next.</p> <p>The Baal scene is nearly an oratorio within an</p>

		oratorio. Mendelssohn stretches a canvas larger than he used for the famine, and on it paints kings and prophets, sneering idolators, an angelic chorus, earthly vengeance, and an unearthly fire.
SCENE 4: Elijah Lifts the Drought		
<p>19. <i>Recitative — Obadiah, Elijah, Youth, Chorus</i></p> <p>— <i>Obadiah</i> O man of God, help thy people! Among the idols of the Gentiles, are there any that can command the rain, or cause the heavens to give their showers? The Lord our God alone can do these things.</p> <p>— <i>Elijah</i> O Lord, Thou hast overthrown Thine enemies and destroyed them. Look down on us from heaven, O Lord; regard the distress of Thy people; open the heavens and send us relief; help, help Thy servant now, O God!</p> <p>— <i>The People</i> Open the heavens and send us relief; help, help Thy servant now, O God!</p> <p>— <i>Elijah</i> Go up now, child, and look toward the sea. Hath my prayer been heard by the Lord?</p> <p>— <i>The Youth (treble)</i> There is nothing. The heavens are as brass, they are as brass above me.</p> <p>— <i>Elijah</i> When the heavens are closed up because they have sinned against Thee, yet if they pray and confess Thy Name, and turn from their sin when Thou</p>	<p>Just as the widow (in an earlier scene) had to jerk Elijah back to reality to help her dying son, so Obadiah needs to re-focus the prophet's attention to matters at hand. Having disposed of the Baal-worshippers, Elijah is now called upon finally to lift the drought and bring an end to Israel's suffering.</p> <p>Elijah takes a young servant with him to the top of Mount Carmel to search for signs of God's mercy. Three times the prophet prays, using the words of Solomon at the consecration of the Temple ("when the heavens are closed up <i>etc.</i>"). Twice the youth sees nothing – the heavens are as brass, the earth is as iron – sealed with dryness.</p> <p>The third time, the youth spies a cloud on the horizon, "like a man's hand." The cloud billows into a monsoon, and a torrent of rain ends the famine. Elijah has sealed the breach between God and his chosen people.</p>	<p>The opening of the recitative follows directly from the alto arioso. Elijah's prayers (see measure 13) are set to an earthbound A-flat major accompaniment of all the low-pitched orchestral instruments – bassoons, horns, divided violas and cellos, and basses. The youth's impatient status reports are accompanied by an oboe, held insistently on a C, as Mendelssohn skillfully draws out the suspense.</p> <p>At the third prayer (measure 56, marked <i>piu animato</i>), the violas and cellos begin to roil impatiently. At measure 66, attended by powerful, blocked entrances from the trombones and horns – the priestly instruments, Elijah stands majestically astride his "rock" and addresses God one last time. It is the same gesture Mendelssohn used to herald Elijah's revival of the boy in No. 8.</p> <p>Mendelssohn draws out the tension yet further, over a sustained 22-bar crescendo: One by one, the instruments of the orchestra enter, from highest to lowest – the strings on a suspenseful tremolo – then the chorus (at measure 81), then the trumpets and drums, until we attain E-flat major at measure 91, but only in an inversion; the listener's patience will be amply rewarded in the cadence that leads to the next chorus.</p>

didst afflict them; then hear from
heaven, and forgive the sin! Help! send
Thy servant help, O God!

— *The People*

Then hear from heaven, and forgive
the sin! Help! send Thy servant help, O
Lord!

— *Elijah*

Go up again, and still look toward the
sea.

— *The Youth*

There is nothing. The earth is as iron
under me!

— *Elijah*

Hearest thou no sound of rain? — seest
thou nothing arise from the deep?

— *The Youth*

No; there is nothing.

— *Elijah*

Have respect to the prayer of Thy
servant, O Lord, my God! Unto Thee I
will cry, Lord, my rock; be not silent to
me; and Thy great mercies remember,
Lord!

— *The Youth*

Behold, a little cloud ariseth now from
the waters; it is like a man's hand! The
heavens are black with clouds and
wind; the storm rusheth louder and
louder!

— *The People*

Thanks be to God, for all His mercies!

— *Elijah*

Thanks be to God, for He is gracious,
and His mercy endureth forevermore!

<p>20. Chorus — <i>The People</i> Thanks be to God! He laveth the thirsty land! The waters gather, they rush along; they are lifting their voices! The stormy billows are high, their fury is mighty. But the Lord is above them, and Almighty!</p> <p><i>(Jeremiah 14:22; II Chronicles 6:19, 26, 27; Deuteronomy 28:23; Psalms 28:1, 106:1; I Kings 18:43-5; Psalm 93:3-4)</i></p>	<p>Mendelssohn again personally intervened to rescue the words, “but the Lord is above them, and almighty,” in preference to the weaker “but the Lord is the highest, and almighty.” The words “<u>above them</u>” are double-underscored in one of his letters to Bartholomew - a solid literary choice to reinforce the idea that God is above the fray. This idea will be more fully explored in Part Two.</p>	<p>The opening bar of the chorus (No. 20 – “Thanks be to God”) jauntily recalls, in the strings, the rising triadic theme that opened Part One. The violin arpeggios depict the rushing waters; the timpani is given a free part, with rolling crescendos to depict the thunder.</p> <p>Not content with mere jubilation, Mendelssohn introduces profundity with an astonishing modulation at the words “but the Lord is above them, and Almighty.” (The transition from E-flat to D-flat major also occurs (No. 14, measure 22) to mark the return of the “A section” in Elijah’s big aria.)</p> <p>At measures 77, 79 and 81, the full force of the brass is unleashed – three powerful blasts of the principal theme – before we are returned in an ascending chromatic series to the opening key. An extended B-flat pedal point (seen in the bass part of the chorus at measures 114-120) sets us up for a powerful and immensely satisfying conclusion to Part One.</p>
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PART TWO		
PROLOGUE: Be Not Afraid		
<p>21. Air (soprano) Hear ye, Israel; hear what the Lord speaketh: “Oh, hadst thou heeded my commandments!” Who hath believed our report; to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?</p> <p>Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and His Holy One, to him oppressed by tyrants; thus saith the Lord: “I am He that comforteth; be not afraid, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee. Say, who art thou, that thou art afraid of a man that shall die; and forgettest the Lord thy Maker, who hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the earth’s foundations? Be not afraid, for I, thy God, will strengthen thee.”</p> <p>(Isaiah 48:1, 18, 53:1, 49:7, 41:10, 51:12, 13)</p>	<p>The first half of <i>Elijah</i> shows us the public impact of some of the prophet’s greatest deeds. The second half shows the character of Elijah in an acutely personal light, as he struggles against feelings of isolation, futility and the ingratitude of the people on whose behalf he has intervened. For the prologue, Schubring looks to a text designed to create the sort of strong underpinning of faith and trust necessary to carry the listener through the anxiety that lies ahead.</p> <p>Through his crisis of conscience, Elijah emerges as the classic figure of Jewish legend: Ubiquitous, unannounced, wandering the world to test the piety and hospitality of God’s chosen people, and above all their guardian and watchtower, even tending the open door at every Passover Seder.</p> <p>By opening Part Two with a text from Isaiah, Schubring and Mendelssohn also set up a parallel between the figure of Elijah and the tradition of Messianic prophecy. The prophet Isaiah is of central importance to the Christian reading of the Old Testament, foretelling the appearance of John the Baptist (“the voice of him that crieth in the wilderness”) and Jesus himself. The rhetorical question, “who art thou, that thou art afraid of a man who shall die?” stimulates a reference to resurrection of Jesus.</p>	<p>Part Two begins with a soprano showcase of immense style and substance. Mendelssohn almost certainly composed the two-part bravura piece with Jenny Lind⁹ in mind; the effortless high F-sharp that bowled him over in one of her early recitals is enshrined as the opening tone of this piece.</p> <p>Unfortunately, the festival-provided soloist for <i>Elijah</i>’s 1846 premiere, Maria Caradori-Allan, proved to be a poor substitute for Mendelssohn’s “Swedish Nightingale.” Insisting that “Hear ye, Israel” was not a “lady’s song,” the <i>prima donna</i> asked the composer to transpose it down whole step; he refused, she relented. Mendelssohn’s disappointment with her treacherous interpretation was recorded soon afterwards: “Everything about it was so dainty,” he wrote, “so complaisant, so elegant, so badly done, so soulless and, what is more, so brainless, and the music was given a kind of amiable expression that I still get furious when I think about it.”</p> <p>The aria is in two parts: A doleful lament in B minor, followed by a resolute and uplifting B major section that segues with great flair into the chorus. Horns and trumpets strengthen the sound with dotted figures (a little “ta-da” motif - see measures 71-72), a puckish echo of those used to accompany Eijah’s great miracles in Part One. Strings introduce a dotted rhythm that</p>

⁹ Jenny Lind sang the piece in her first New York tour, the opening concert of which took place on September 11, 1850. P. T. Barnum, who promoted the tour, was also known in New York society circles for arranging the wedding – at Grace Church – of his famous sideshow attraction, General Tom Thumb.

	The voice of Isaiah and related Biblical authors, even the Gospels, will dominate Part Two, and the Elijah-Christ analogy will be driven home in the oratorio’s powerful conclusion.	continues into the next number.
<p>22. <i>Chorus</i> “Be not afraid!” saith God the Lord. “Be not afraid!” thy help is near. God, the Lord thy God, sayeth unto thee, “Be not afraid!” Though thousands languish and fall beside thee, and tens of thousands around thee perish, yet still it shall not come nigh thee.</p> <p>(<i>Isaiah 51:10; Psalm 91:7</i>)</p>	<p>The Psalm text reinforces Isaiah’s message: We will remain inviolate as long as our faith holds out, even as everyone else falls away. The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.</p> <p>In scale and grandeur, the tripartite opening aria-and-chorus proves an effective counterweight to the chorus-quartet-chorus that brings an end to Part Two.</p>	<p>The chorus and full orchestra enter to a brass fanfare that follows directly from the aria, as the triple meter shifts into a march. This is the quintessential English choral festival set piece, one that may as well have been written for the closing night of the Proms. Its grandiose strains prompt us to imagine what it might have been like to experience <i>Elijah</i> for the first time, as 271 choristers, 125 players, 2,000 audience members and Mendelssohn himself squeezed, brimming with anticipation, into the Neoclassical Birmingham Town Hall on August 26, 1846 – the same year Grace Church moved into a splendid new “uptown” church at Broadway and Tenth Street.</p> <p>The chorus itself follows a straightforward A-B-A plan, two march sections bracketing a faster, lighter “trio” on the text “though thousands languish and fall beside thee.” In the final bars, Mendelssohn quotes the “curse” theme from the opening of Part One, but this time with descending fourths instead of tritones (see the bass line at measure 111 ff.). With this gesture, he stitches the chorus into the fabric of the oratorio without detracting from its freestanding transformative message.</p>
SCENE ONE: Elijah Goes Too Far		
<p>23. <i>Recitative — Elijah</i> The Lord hath exalted thee from among the people; and o’er His people Israel hath made thee king. But, thou, Ahab, hast done evil to provoke Him to anger</p>	<p>We are thrust back into the action. Elijah appears again at court, this time with a direct indictment of Ahab’s kingship. By “walking in the sins of Jeroboam,” Ahab has cast doubt on his legitimacy as a ruler and, like the “righteous”</p>	<p>Mendelssohn was perhaps the most gifted visual artist among all the great composers; the rustling string tremolo that accompanies Elijah’s recitative nicely depicts the reed “shaken in the</p>

<p>above all that were before thee; as if it had been a light thing for thee to walk in the sins of Jeroboam. Thou hast made a grove and an altar to Baal, and served him and worshipped him. Thou hast killed the righteous, and also taken possession. And the Lord shall smite all Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water; and He shall give Israel up, and thou shalt know He is the Lord. (<i>1 Kings 14:7, 9, 15, 16, 16:30-3, 21:19</i>)</p> <p><i>Recitative with Chorus</i> — <i>Jezebel (alto)</i>¹⁰ Have ye not heard he hath prophesied against all Israel? — <i>Chorus — The People</i> We heard it with our ears. — <i>Jezebel</i> Hath he not prophesied also against the king of Israel? — <i>The People</i> We heard it with our ears. — <i>Jezebel</i> And why hath he spoken in the name of the Lord? Doth Ahab govern the kingdom of Israel while Elijah's power is greater than the king's? The gods do so to me, and more; if, by tomorrow about this time, I make not his life as the life of one of them whom he hath sacrificed at the brook of Kishon! — <i>The People</i> He shall perish!</p>	<p>he has cast out of the Temple, himself deserves to be dispossessed.</p> <p>But Jezebel, incandescent on hearing the news of the rout of her priests at Mount Carmel, now sees that the prophet has gone too far. Elijah's effrontery gives her the opening she needs to make him out as the true "troubler of Israel's peace," one who has not only committed treason (asserting power "greater than the king's") but blasphemy ("why hath he spoken in the name of the Lord"). To further inflame opinion against Elijah, she reminds her audience that he was the one responsible for the drought.</p>	<p>water."</p> <p>With Jezebel's entrance, the music slowly builds. What begins with whispered gossip ("we heard it with our ears") grows in intensity as Mendelssohn begins to work in both the text and thematic material of the follow number. A roll of the timpani creates tension as the wicked queen winds up the crowd to do battle.</p>
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¹⁰ There is a bit of backstory to Jezebel's hostility: Elijah's feud with the house of Ahab had already taken on personal overtones. The prophet foretold horrible deaths for the renegade monarch and his kin, those who in his words "pisseth against the wall" of the Temple. Those who died without the city walls would have their carcasses picked apart by ravens, those within, devoured by dogs. In the end, Ahab was killed in battle (his body never found) and Jezebel was assassinated by the palace guard, her body defenestrated and dined on by the waiting strays.

<p>— <i>Jezebel</i> Hath he not destroyed Baal’s prophets? — <i>The People</i> He shall perish! — <i>Jezebel</i> Yea, by the sword he destroyed them all! — <i>The People</i> He destroyed them all! — <i>Jezebel</i> He also closed the heavens... — <i>The People</i> He also closed the heavens... — <i>Jezebel</i> ... and called down a famine upon the land. — <i>The People</i> ... and called down a famine upon the land. — <i>Jezebel</i> So go ye forth and seize Elijah, for he is worthy to die; slaughter him! Do unto him as he hath done!</p>		
<p>24. <i>Chorus — The People</i> Woe to him, he shall perish; for he closed the heavens! And why hath he spoken in the Name of the Lord? Let the guilty prophet perish! He hath spoken falsely against our land and us, as we have heard with our ears. So go ye forth; seize on him! He shall die! <i>(Jeremiah 26:9, 11; I Kings 18:10, 19:2, 21:7; Ecclesiasticus 48:2, 3)</i></p>	<p>Incited by Jezebel, the mob sets upon Elijah with a fury equal to that earlier directed at the priests of Baal. Having overplayed his hand, Elijah flees.</p>	<p>Using the same key – A minor - as Elijah’s “rage aria” from Part One (“Is not his word like a fire?”), Mendelssohn takes a page out of the great <i>turbe</i>, or crowd, scenes from the Baroque Passions. The syncopated figure – “Woe to him!” – is set above a busy sixteenth-note string accompaniment that depicts the angry mob. The text at measures 18-25 – “let the guilty prophet perish” – represents one major loss in the German-English translation: In the original language, the sibilant consonants in the phrase “dieser ist das Todes schuldig” sound for all the world like hissing snakes. As the crowd disperses, Mendelssohn subtracts the instruments of the orchestra one by one, leaving only a furtive pizzicato in the bass.</p>

SCENE TWO: The Wilderness		
<p>25. <i>Recitative — Obadiah</i> Man of God, now let my words be precious in thy sight. Thus saith Jezebel: “Elijah is worthy to die.” So the mighty gather against thee, and they have prepared a net for thy steps; that they may seize thee, that they may slay thee. Arise, then, and hasten for thy life; to the wilderness journey. The Lord thy God doth go with thee; He will not fail thee. He will not forsake thee. Now begone, and bless me also.</p> <p>— <i>Elijah</i> Though stricken, they have not grieved! Tarry here, my servant; the Lord be with thee. I journey hence to the wilderness.</p> <p><i>(II Kings 1:13; Jeremiah 5:3, 26:11; Psalm 59:3; I Kings 19:3, 4; Deuteronomy 31:6; Exodus 2:32; I Samuel 17:37)</i></p>	<p>Elijah is given safe conduct by Obadiah to the edge of the kingdom. Unbeknownst to anyone, Obadiah has hidden one hundred of Jehovah’s followers in caves – dividing them up to increase the chance that at least some will survive Jezebel’s putsch.</p> <p>Leaving his servant behind, Elijah slips away to the desert.</p>	<p>Obadiah’s recitative not only advances the plot, but lends an emotional context to Elijah’s despair. While the prophet believes his teachings have fallen on deaf ears, Obadiah reminds him that at least one remains who believes that the Lord “will not fail”. The four-bar introduction to the aria was added at the last minute, suggesting the heavy footsteps that lead the prophet into exile.</p>
<p>26. <i>Air — Elijah</i> It is enough; O Lord, now take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers! I desire to live no longer; now let me die, for my days are but vanity! I have been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts! For the children of Israel have broken Thy covenant, and thrown</p>	<p>The citation to the Book of Job at this bleakest moment in the oratorio is obvious enough. Like Job, Elijah experiences his suffering as a personal test of faith. Having been insulated by God from the effects of the drought and famine, he now experiences hunger of a different sort – the spiritual hollowness of abandonment. The broken covenant cited by Elijah here will later</p>	<p>“It is enough” (German – “Es ist genug”) is modeled on J.S. Bach’s “Es ist vollbracht” (“it is finished”), the last words of Christ on the cross¹¹ as related in the <i>Saint John Passion</i>. The same isolated key – F# minor, the same mournful cello solo, and the same ternary structure (with an intense, agitated middle section). Wordlessly, commanding only the expressive</p>

¹¹ According to one of the gospel writers, other words uttered by Jesus during the Crucifixion – “Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani!” (Father, Father, why have You forsaken me?) – were at first mistaken for a cry for Elijah to come to his aid – “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take Him down” (Mark 15:36). Given what has been said earlier about Elijah’s role in Hebrew legend – that of protector of the faithful – it would not have been a difficult mistake to make.

<p>down Thine altars, and slain all Thy prophets — slain them with the sword; and I, even I, only am left; and they seek my life to take it away.</p> <p><i>(Job 7:16; I Kings 19:4, 10)</i></p>	<p>be mended with God’s appearance to the prophet.</p>	<p>power of music, Mendelssohn illuminates the Christological aspect of Elijah’s suffering.¹²</p>
<p>27. <i>Recitative — An Angel (tenor)</i> See, now he sleepeth beneath a juniper tree in the wilderness; and there the angels of the Lord encamp around about all them that fear Him.</p> <p><i>(I Kings 19:5; Psalm 34:7)</i></p>	<p>The angels continue to watch over Elijah as he sinks into a dejected sleep.</p>	<p>In a seamless transition, the same low cello F# that ends the aria begins the tenor recitative.</p>
<p>28. <i>Soprano and Alto Chorus — The Angels</i> Lift thine eyes to the mountains, whence cometh help. Thy help cometh from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. He hath said, thy foot shall not be moved; thy Keeper will never slumber.</p> <p><i>(Psalm 121:1-3)</i></p>	<p>Under a canopy of stars, the librettist turns to the Psalms for words of solace and inspiration.</p>	<p>“Lift thine eyes” was originally written as a solo duet with orchestral accompaniment. Fresh from the premiere of the oratorio, Mendelssohn decided to take some exercise, leading a group of his friends to the banks of the Birmingham industrial canal, “bordered by coal and slag heaps. There, on the towing-path between the bridges, they walked for more than an hour discussing the new oratorio. According to [one of them], it was then and there, amidst the scenery of the cinder heaps, that a sudden thought struck Mendelssohn to change ‘Lift thine eyes’ from a duet into a trio.”</p>
<p>29. <i>Chorus — The Angels</i> He, watching over Israel, slumbers not, nor sleeps. Shouldst thou, walking in grief, languish, He will quicken thee.</p>	<p>The angel-voices remind us that, while Baal may doze off during the service, the God of Israel is ever vigilant. As Todd observes, “Felix’s friend Karl Klingemann viewed [choruses such as this]</p>	<p>“He watching over Israel” is, in structure and dramatic function, an exact counterpart to “Blessed are the men who fear Him” in Part One (see No. 9 above). Strings supply a rocking triplet</p>

¹² At a deeper level, the Elijah-Christ dialectic has been seen as evidence of Mendelssohn’s effort to build bridges between Judaism and Christianity. In the words of his biographer, R. Larry Todd, “though all evidence suggests Felix was a sincere, devout Protestant, in the eyes of his own contemporaries at some level a ‘Jewish identity had been etched indelibly into his being, character and life.’ By forging links in *Elijah* between that identity and an adopted Lutheran worldview,” the composer achieved a form of reconciliation. For him, assimilation was not merely a matter of “going along to get along,” but assimilation in the active sense, an opportunity to seek out common ground and develop a larger moral framework. In the words of that great historian of ideas, Peter Gay, each creed was, in this rationalist outlook, “the incomplete incarnation of a larger truth.”

<p>(<i>Psalms 121:4, 138:7</i>)</p>	<p>as ‘resting points’ that, like a Greek chorus, ‘drew the attention from the individual occurrence to the general law,’ and diffused ‘calmness throughout the whole.’”</p>	<p>figure, while <i>sotto voce</i> timpani rolls gently suggesting a distant thunderstorm. The serenity of the outer sections is only briefly ruffled by the second theme (“shouldst thou, walking in grief, languish”). The key is D major, the “home key” of the oratorio (beginning in D minor, ending in D major). The <i>a cappella</i> ending is another signature Mendelssohn touch.</p>
<p>30. <i>Recitative — An Angel (alto)</i> Arise, Elijah, for thou hast a long journey before thee. Forty days and forty nights shalt thou go to Horeb, the mount of God. <i>(I Kings 19:7, 8)</i> <i>— Elijah</i> O Lord, I have laboured in vain; yea, I have spent my strength for nought! O that Thou wouldst rend the heavens, that thou wouldst come down; that the mountains would flow down at Thy presence, to make Thy name known to Thine adversaries, through the wonders of Thy works! O Lord, why hast Thou made them to err from Thy ways, and hardened their hearts that they do not fear Thee? O that I now might die! <i>(Isaiah 49:4, 64:1, 2, 63:17; I Kings 19:4)</i></p>	<p>Elijah is roused by another angel who directs him to go to Mount Horeb – the same place where God revealed the Ten Commandments to Moses. (Jesus also sojourned in the wilderness for days and forty nights – Bible-speak for “a really long time.”) Still frustrated, Elijah lashes out in unduly personal fashion towards his God, beseeching him to make another great demonstration to the people, wishing he were dead.</p>	<p>Elijah’s ravings are set to a jagged series of brass chords – trombones, horns – the same device used to convey his power, now reduced to a mere stutter. We begin to worry a bit about our hero.</p>
<p>31. <i>Air — An Angel (alto)</i> O rest in the Lord; wait patiently for Him, and He shall give thee thy heart’s desires. Commit thy way unto Him, and trust in Him, and fret not thyself because of evil doers. <i>(Psalm 37:1, 4-7)</i></p>	<p>The angel counsels sorely needed patience, as Elijah must prepare himself for the revelation that lies in store.</p>	<p>Mendelssohn nearly cut this aria, now one of the most famous in the work, when it was drawn to his attention that the tune was similar to an English beer-hall ballad. It did not help matters that the alto soloist “dared introduce an extraneous trill” at the end during the first rehearsals; Mendelssohn admonished her that, having given the ornament to the flute, he did</p>

		<p>not require it from her as well. After altering the tune to eliminate the potentially embarrassing drinking song reference, he included it in the authorized score published shortly before his death.</p> <p>Like the alto aria in Part One (“Woe unto him”), “O rest in the Lord” is simply orchestrated (strings and solo flute). It draws the listener in with a more intimate approach that both softens Elijah’s rough edges and makes the monumental subject matter of the oratorio more accessible.</p>
<p>32. <i>Chorus</i> He that shall endure to the end, shall be saved. <i>(Matthew 24:13)</i></p>	<p>The Gospel of Matthew contributes the first New Testament citation in the oratorio.</p>	<p>Once again, Mendelssohn addresses us in the idiom of a chorale, that most inclusive of musical forms. The simplicity of the setting, with instruments doubling the voices throughout, masks harmonic complexity, as the tune undergoes a rich process of modulation, featuring hidden entrances worthy of Bach.</p> <p>The great Mozart biographer Otto Jahn, who attended one of <i>Elijah’s</i> earliest performances, touted this chorus as an example of “the advantages of free, symbolic composition. Here one cannot speak of any particular action; there is only portrayal of the inner emotional state of Elijah. He, himself, however, does not merely express this to us.” Instead, the composer expresses it with music that “assum[es] the character of a higher truth that transcends the individual. Because this expression of the general is occasioned by the portrayal of an individual, and refers to and transfigures that individual, it appears not as something abstract but as integrally necessary and truly living, and in this way perfects the artistic portrayal.”</p>

SCENE THREE: Elijah Transfigured		
<p>33. <i>Recitative — Elijah</i> Night falleth round me, O Lord! Be Thou not far from me! Hide not Thy face, O Lord, from me; my soul is thirsting for Thee, as a thirsty land. — <i>An Angel (soprano)</i> Arise, now! get thee without, stand on the mount before the Lord; for there His glory will appear and shine on thee! Thy face must be veiled, for He draweth near. (<i>Psalms 22:19, 143:6, 7; I Kings 19:11, 13</i>)</p>		<p>The “famine” theme (“the harvest now is over, the summer days are gone”) from the opening of the work is deftly quoted by the clarinets (measures 8-9) on Elijah’s words “my soul is thirsting for Thee, as a thirsty land.”</p>
<p>34. <i>Chorus</i> Behold! God the Lord passed by!¹³ And a mighty wind rent the mountains around; brake in pieces the rocks, brake them before the Lord; but yet the Lord was not in the tempest.</p> <p>Behold! God the Lord passed by! And the sea was upheaved, and the earth was shaken; but yet the Lord was not in the earthquake.</p> <p>And after the earthquake there came a fire; but yet the Lord was not in the fire.</p> <p>And after the fire there came a still</p>	<p>The natural world clamors at the approach of the Divine. But in the tumult, His true voice is not to be found. In this vitally important scene, we witness an evolutionary moment in the Biblical conception of God, away from the petulant, worldly God of the Pentateuch to a transcendent deity. God is immanent – “above them, and almighty” – in the words of one commentator, “best known in the intellectual world of revelation, the ‘still small voice.’”</p> <p>In poignant testimony to the power of these words for Mendelssohn, his listeners, and his rationalist outlook, his brother-in-law and friend, Wilhelm Hensel, inscribed a pencil sketch of the composer, in death, with the</p>	<p>Mendelssohn depicts all this commotion with the expressive certainty of the great landscape artist he surely was. An instrumental scherzo – a surging string crescendo at the opening, building to a great blast from the winds – underscores each successive natural phenomenon. The voices play an almost instrumental function, enhancing rather than dominating the orchestration. We hear the rush of the wind, the growl of the earthquake, the bright clap of the thunder; a string tremolo adumbrates the words “was shaken”: As Leon Botstein rightly points out, “Wagner learned from Mendelssohn how to make music narrate independent of text.”</p>

¹³ One commentator argues that Mendelssohn lifted the dramatic choral entrance (“Behold, God the Lord passed by!”) from the Melody of Thirteen Divine Attributes, sung since the 15th century on the High Holy Days in German synagogues. While there is no evidence Mendelssohn ever set foot in a synagogue, the similarities to the opening “Adonai, Adonai” of the Hebrew chant are hard to ignore. Its ancient strains could reasonably have been encountered by the composer through the non-converted members of his extended family. Mendelssohn used the same motive (A-D-B flat-A) to open his stirring motet “Richte mich, Gott” (Op. 78, No. 2).

<p>small voice; and in that still voice, onward came the Lord. <i>(1 Kings 19:11, 12)</i></p>	<p>closing words of this chorus. There could be no more fitting epitaph for a composer of such modest eloquence.</p>	<p>Reaching back to one of his earliest – and greatest – successes, Mendelssohn scores the movement in the same E minor key used for the famous overture to <i>A Midsummer Night’s Dream</i>. (One can almost visualize the sprites and pixies.) The spiky string figure at the outset recalls the scherzo from the Octet, Mendelssohn’s most famous chamber work (composed at the age of 16!). At the shift to E major, the strings introduce (at measure 121) an arpeggiated figure that will later be used in No. 41 (“But the God from the north hath raised one”) to represent an onrushing sense of revelation. Mendelssohn ornaments the “still small voice” with a flute solo at measures 179-182, rendering with music that which cannot be expressed in words.</p> <p>The music ends perched on a high series of woodwind chords – another delightful quotation from the opening of <i>Midsummer Night’s Dream</i>: We have crossed into a magical space.</p>
<p>35. <i>Recitative, Quartet and Chorus</i> — <i>An Angel</i> Above Him stood the Seraphim, and one cried to another: — <i>The Angelic Host</i> Holy, holy, holy is God the Lord — the Lord Sabaoth! Now His glory hath filled all the earth. <i>(Isaiah 6:2, 3)</i></p>	<p>The words of the Sanctus – the angelic acclamation used to herald the appearance of God – are used throughout scripture and in virtually every Christian liturgy, including the Catholic Mass Ordinary and the liturgy of the Anglican and Lutheran churches. (The Hebrew word “Sabaoth” means “hosts” or “armies” – not a place or a day of the week.)</p>	<p>The composer chooses the “God key” of the oratorio – C major (prominently featured in No. 5 on the text “His mercies on thousands fall”) – for the actual appearance of the Divine. With hymnlike calm and perfect serenity, the angelic host enfolds the listener with 8-part choral writing (the 4-part angel voices, to almost blindingly bright woodwind voicings, alternating with the rest of the choir, set in the lower registers). At one point the orchestra drops out entirely, leaving the basses of the choir to support the structure of sound – a technique that conveys a sense of otherworldliness. Thus, in Leon Botstein’s words, “Mendelssohn perfects the use of music to create the illusion of three-dimensionality.”</p>

<p>36. <i>Chorus— Angels</i> Go, return upon thy way! For the Lord yet hath left Him seven thousand in Israel, knees which have not bowed to Baal. Go, return upon thy way; thus the Lord commandeth. (1 Kings 19:15, 18)</p> <p><i>Recitative — Elijah</i> I go on my way in the strength of the Lord. For Thou art my Lord; and I will suffer for Thy sake. My heart is therefore glad, my glory rejoiceth, and my flesh shall also rest in hope. (Psalms 71:16, 16:2, 9)</p>	<p>God reveals himself in perfect silence, speaking through the angels to convey a message to Elijah: The prophet learns that seven thousand loyal followers remain in Israel, that he is not alone, and that he must once again return to the path. This idea that God will preserve a “faithful remnant” crops up time and again in scripture.</p> <p>The reference to “knees which have not bowed to Baal” ties us neatly back to Elijah’s earlier injunction to the people at Mount Carmel – “How long do ye halt on both knees?”</p>	<p>The rising triadic theme appears once again, this time in C major, as the male chorus of angels intone God’s word. Taken up by the divided sopranos and altos, the stark strains of the original theme are transformed into a rich wall of sound – 8-part chorus, full orchestra – as Elijah’s heart is replenished.</p> <p>The cascading string chords that accompany the recitative (overscoring the words “I go on my way”) quote directly from the string motif at the very opening of No. 1 (“Help, Lord!”), this time in a major key, as the breach of covenant has been repaired.</p>
<p>37. <i>Arioso — Elijah</i> For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but Thy kindness shall not depart from me, neither shall the covenant of Thy peace be removed. (Isaiah 54:10)</p>	<p>Brimming over from the encounter, Elijah sets out with fresh focus and purpose. His parting words refer to the covenant between God and his people: A covenant which he earlier saw as irretrievably broken (in No. 26, “It is enough”) has now been manifestly, and personally, restored.</p>	<p>Mendelssohn sets Elijah’s final words simply, in a chaconne whose bass line of descending fourths (F-C, D-A) recalls the descending tritone “curse theme,” this time replacing dissonance with consonance. A solo oboe colors the vocal solo with warmth and sincerity.</p> <p>With this kind-hearted arioso, Elijah withdraws from the plane of action. The rest of the oratorio will contemplate the meaning and example of his life and work.</p>
<p>38. <i>Chorus</i> Then did Elijah the prophet break forth like a fire; his words appeared like burning torches. Mighty kings by him were overthrown. He stood on the mount of Sinai, and heard the judgments of the future; and in Horeb, its vengeance. And when the Lord would take him away to heaven, Lo! there came a fiery chariot, with fiery horses; and he went by a whirlwind to</p>	<p>Schubring compresses the rest of the story using two fiery texts. Throughout the oratorio, Elijah has been likened to this most magical of elements; the “blazing torches” reference is of a piece with the use of fire and light both textually and musically in the Baal scene, and the blinding light of God’s appearance.</p> <p>As the tale goes, Elijah and his disciple Elisha journeyed together to the banks of the Jordan. Elijah smote the waters with his cloak so that the two might cross over. The waters parted, but as</p>	<p>The F-minor opening of this stirring chorus follows from the F-major arioso. With rampant energy, the basses of the choir introduce the phrase “mighty kings by him were overthrown” as the key shifts to A-flat, the relative major; a regal string accompaniment complements the text. Dramatic energy builds as the choir, <i>a cappella</i>, sings the words “and when the Lord would take him away to heaven” on the rising triad theme.</p> <p>“Lo!” – just as suddenly as the burning chariot</p>

<p>heaven. (<i>Ecclesiasticus 48:1, 6, 7; II Kings 2:1, 11</i>)</p>	<p>Elisha began the crossing, a chariot of fire materialized, separating them and whisking the prophet off into the heavens. As suddenly as he first appeared to Ahab, Elijah was gone, leaving behind a “double portion” of his power (in Hebrew tradition, the amount of property that passed to the eldest son) as his mantle fell from the sky and landed on his young apprentice.</p> <p>Elijah’s ascension into heaven prefigures the ascension of Jesus, strengthening the Elijah-Christ correspondence in the second half of the work. But the episode also harks back to Moses, who parted the Red Sea to lead the people of Israel out of exile. Moses, Elijah and Jesus would be united later in the New Testament, at the Transfiguration: According to every account of this pivotal episode, Jesus’s divine nature is revealed, with a burning white light, and flanked by Moses and Elijah, representing the Law and the Prophets, respectively, hanging on the “love commandment” embodied by Christ. The witnesses – Peter, James and John – are amazed, but (importantly) not surprised.</p>	<p>appears, Mendelssohn stuns us with A-major – a musical bolt from the blue. The orchestration intensifies, as violins commence a fiery triplet figure, the heavy brass enters, with the trumpets triple-tonguing (“ta-ka-ta-TA, ta-ka-ta-TA”) as flames lick the edges of the scene. The orchestra comes in <i>tutta forza</i> at measure 48, beginning a drawn out climax over an E-flat pedal tone that sets up a grand cadence into the next movement.</p> <p>With this chorus, Mendelssohn shows us one heck of an exciting way to get from F-minor to its relative major (A-flat)!</p>
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<p>39. <i>Air (tenor)</i> Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in their heavenly Father's realm.</p> <p>Joy on their head shall be for everlasting, and all sorrow and mourning shall flee away forever.</p> <p>(<i>Matthew 13:43; Isaiah 51:11</i>)</p>	<p>Fire of a different sort – the shining of the sun – illuminates the remainder of the oratorio. The citation from the Gospel of Matthew is the final line of the famous “parable of the weeds”: The oratorio has sown the word, the listener is impliedly the “good seed.”</p> <p>Johannes Brahms, who deeply respected Mendelssohn's work and shared his musical historicism, would use identical texts two decades hence in the <i>Deutsches Requiem</i>.</p>	<p>Mendelssohn places a tenor aria immediately before the final choral scene, just as he used one to follow the opening (No. 4, “If with all your hearts ye truly seek him”). The structure of the oratorio thus advances, at every turn, the composer's commitment to the “classical attributes of poise, balance and clarity.”</p>
<p>Epilogue: Judgments of the Future</p>		
<p>40. <i>Recitative (soprano)</i> Behold, God hath sent Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children unto their fathers; lest the Lord shall come and smite the earth with a curse.</p> <p>(<i>Malachi 4:5, 6</i>)</p>	<p>Christians often misconstrue the “Old Testament” as merely the existing Hebrew Bible, to which was appended a “New Testament” consisting of the gospels, the acts of the apostles, the epistles and the revelation of St. John the Divine. In fact, the Old Testament rearranges of the books of the Tanakh, so as to stage-manage the coming of the Messiah and, with His return, the end of the world.</p> <p>The Book of Malachi is the last to appear in this restructured narrative. Its prophecy of Elijah's return figures prominently in the New Testament. John the Baptist, with his severe demeanor and antiquated attire, is thought by some to be either an echo or reincarnation of Elijah, as is Jesus himself. In the cottage industry of Revelation commentary, Elijah is understood to be one of the “Two Witnesses” who herald the Apocalypse, and die fighting for the Kingdom of God.</p>	<p>The music for this brief but meaning-laden recitative is spare – a solitary trumpet (<i>pace</i> Handel) proclaims the Last Judgment, a clarion call from a solo soprano. Here is one of the “judgments of the future” referred to earlier, in No. 38.</p> <p>Earlier in the oratorio (in No. 5), we were shown a “jealous God” who “visits all the fathers' sins on the children.” Here, the hearts of fathers and sons are reconciled with a thoughtful scriptural reference.</p> <p>The recitative here originally was followed by yet another epic chorus, entitled “He shall open blind eyes.” A keen judge of proportionality, Mendelssohn chose to cut it in favor of the taut triptych that follows.</p>

<p><i>41. Chorus</i> But the Lord from the north hath raised One, Who from the rising of the sun shall call upon His Name and come on princes. Behold, my Servant and mine Elect, in whom My soul delighteth! On Him the spirit of God shall rest; the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of might and of counsel, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord: "I have raised One from the north, Who from the rising, on My Name shall call." <i>(Isaiah 41:25, 42:1, 11:2)</i></p>	<p>A final Elijah-Christ parallel kicks off the oratorio's concluding scene-complex: Jesus will appear at the Last Judgment to the kings of the earth, just as Elijah appeared to Ahab. This "one from the north" (Jesus, like Elijah, came from the remote northern fringes of the Holy Land) will be God's new "elect."</p>	<p>Mendelssohn returns us to the "home key" of D for the oratorio's stirring conclusion. Wind instruments introduce the piece with an ambiguous open octave (soon filled in by a glorious major chord), a direct rhythmical and instrumental reference to page one of the oratorio. The divided men's and women's choruses recall the speech of the angels in No. 36 ("Go, return upon thy way!"), adding to the movement's valedictory quality.</p> <p>The episode at measures 13-23 redeploys the excitement-creating techniques used earlier in the oratorio, most notably in the transition before No. 20, "Thanks be to God." With four primary musical elements – an extended pedal tone in the bass, progressive addition of instruments, an accumulation of choral entrances, and a rising string ostinato – the composer ramps up tension in an extended crescendo, the cadence (here occurring on the text "Shall call upon His Name") withheld as long as possible so as to heighten its impact.</p> <p>Material from the "scherzo" movement (No. 34, "Behold, God the Lord passed by") is also forcefully reconveyed: The billowing string figure at measure 8 relates back to the underscoring for the text "and in that still voice onward came the Lord", as does the solo flute above the fray. The writing is thus fully consistent with Romantic symphonic technique of restating, especially in the finale, thematic material from prior movements in a grand unifying gesture.</p>
<p><i>41a. Quartet</i> O come everyone that thirsteth, O come to the waters; O come unto Him.</p>	<p>The prophet Isaiah supplies a text that both inspires the listener and completes the dramatic arc of the libretto. We began the evening with</p>	<p>A solo quartet in the related key of B-flat major, a pastoral key much favored by Haydn, delivers spiritual bounty, in stark contrast to the dry</p>

<p>O hear, and your souls shall live forever.</p> <p>(Isaiah 55:1, 3)</p>	<p>an image of a barren land cracked with drought. Beckoned to the waters, as we were at the end of Part One, our thirst is now satisfied.</p>	<p>harvest of the opening movements. It comes to glorious fruition with one of Mendelssohn's trademark <i>a cappella</i> moments.</p>
<p>42. <i>Chorus</i> And then shall your light break forth as the light of the morning breaketh; and your health shall speedily spring forth then; and the glory of the Lord ever shall reward you.</p> <p>Lord, our Creator, how excellent Thy Name is in all the nations! Thou fillest heaven with thy glory. Amen.</p> <p>(Isaiah 58:8; Psalm 8:1)</p>	<p>Light, morning, health – bright, wholesome images to send us from the theater. The <i>Schlusschor</i>, or final chorus, is an occasion for a general thanksgiving and for the composer to attribute the work to divine inspiration. Bach and Handel subscribed all their works with the initials “S.D.G.” – <i>soli Deo Gloria</i> – to the glory of God alone. Beethoven’s <i>Missa Solemnis</i> bore the epigraph “from the heart – may it go to the heart.” Mendelssohn’s textual and musical conclusion is no less eloquent.</p>	<p>A brisk string flourish ushers in the final chorus, a majestic and uplifting fugue to balance the sorrowful one (No. 1) that opened the oratorio. The subject of the fugue follows approximately the outline of the famous Amen fugue from Handel’s <i>Messiah</i>, in a nod both to Mendelssohn’s English listeners and the composer’s own debt to the master.</p> <p>At the Amen (measures 112-118) Mendelssohn restates the “curse theme” in the bass voices and instruments – D-G#, A-D#, E-A# – but this time adds a deeply satisfying musical resolution to match our collective spiritual victory. With this magnificent utterance, the curtain falls.</p>
<p>Elijah remains one of the most compelling figures in all of scripture. In the words of one commentator, “his sudden, mysterious appearances remained a symbol of the unfettered initiative of God in history. The remote austerity of his life was an impressive testimony to other-worldly values, just as his being taken to heaven showed Israel the possibility of a life beyond this. His work may also be regarded as a protest against every effort to find religious experience in self-induced ecstasy and sensual frenzy rather than in a faith linked with reason and morality.” As sincere a protector of God’s chosen people as he is unstinting in exposing their rulers’ decadence and error, Elijah delivers a</p>	<p>In the eyes of the great Mendelssohn scholar R. Larry Todd, <i>Elijah</i> “was the crowning achievement of Felix’s career. Standing upon the shoulders of <i>St. Paul</i>, <i>Elijah</i> reflects Felix’s lifelong love of Handel and Bach through a historicism now blended subtly into the composer’s mature style. ... [U]nlike <i>St. Paul</i>, <i>Elijah</i> does not employ the traditional narrator to advance the action; rather, the principal characters serve this purpose, lending the oratorio the dramatic immediacy of opera and partially fulfilling Felix’s lifelong quest to achieve a large-scale dramatic conception.”</p> <p>Mendelssohn’s “historicism” should not in any event be mistaken for a mere curatorial exercise. On hearing <i>Elijah</i>, we hear the results of a profound intellectual engagement between the composer and his musical forebears, not a rehashing. Haydn’s achievement in <i>The Creation</i> bears the closest relationship to Mendelssohn’s masterpiece. In Handel’s hands, the oratorio often descended to the netherworld of <i>ersatz</i> opera. Beethoven never grasped the form at all, leaving behind only the problematic and unsatisfying <i>Christus am Oelberge</i>. Even Bach, with his sometimes awkward, pre-Enlightenment pietism, was guilty of a disjointed and blocky style that rarely achieved a true dramatic synthesis.</p> <p>With <i>Elijah</i>, Mendelssohn gave the oratorio a coherence and propulsive energy so often lacking in the genre, without sacrificing a shred of the required dignity. Felix said he was attracted as an artist to the “pure, mild and vast power” of the music of Bach, the “transparency of its depths.” But could it be that the “pure, mild and vast power” Mendelssohn heard in the music of Bach was in fact the</p>	

<p>restorative justice whose impact goes deeper than pure vengeance. With great cogency, Mendelssohn and his librettists, Schubring and Bartholomew, supply a literary-musical portrait every bit his equal.</p>	<p>clarion call of his own mature compositional voice?</p> <p>One thing is certain: The oratorio form would never again approach the erudition and popular success of <i>Elijah</i>. Felix's achievement died with him. The oratorio form would go into abeyance in favor of the grand synthesis of the arts advanced by Wagner and his partisans. Still, this oratorio to end all oratorios offers us a no less valid synthesis that links faith and reason through the use of universal, classical forms. It endures as a resounding – and deeply personal – argument against philistinism in any age.</p>
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For the Choral Society and Orchestra of Grace Church in New York

March 7, 2006, updated July 27, 2015

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