

Felix Mendelssohn's Nocturno/Overture, Opus 24: A Study in Context, Composition and Performance

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Article:

Introduction

In 1824, when the popularity of the Harmonie ensemble as a vehicle for court music was waning, the fifteen-year-old Felix Mendelssohn composed what would become an enigmatic staple of the wind band repertoire. Mendelssohn's work, originally composed for the 11-member Harmonie heard at the spa at Bad Doberan but rescored by the composer in 1838 for military band, has been modified to fit modern band instrumentation numerous times, with each subsequent version presenting different performance anomalies. In 2005, urtext performing editions were produced under the expert editorship of Christopher Hogwood and published by Bärenreiter. How can a conductor reconcile these very different editions? Is there a deeper, more meaningful background to this work and what is the significance of its place in Mendelssohn's output? How might some of the challenges of performing this work be solved? In investigating the answers to these questions, this author sought the guidance of two of the world's foremost Mendelssohn scholars, R. Larry Todd and Christopher Hogwood, and he remains indebted to them for their invaluable contributions to this project.

Versions of Mendelssohn's composition have always been an important part of chamber wind, wind ensemble, and concert band repertoire as an example of a work for wind instruments by one of history's most respected composers and a representative of early 19th century compositional style. The following study seeks to broaden the contextual frame of this youthful example of Mendelssohn's gifted style in an attempt to help present informed performances that are free of unnecessary complications.

Biographical and Historical Context

Felix Mendelssohn was a product of the environment in which he was raised, born into one of Germany's most cultured 19th century families. The Mendelssohn home was a gathering place for conservative German intellectuals and philosophers organized by Moses Mendelssohn, Felix's grandfather. His father, Abraham, was a wealthy banker intent on providing his family with the best possible opportunities for education and culture. The Mendelssohn children were tutored at home on a very strict routine in subjects including music, history, Greek, Latin, science, literature, and drawing. Felix formed a particularly strong bond with his older sister, Fanny, who would become a successful composer in her own right.

Mendelssohn's education emphasized correctness, propriety, and formal clarity. His musical models included both the early Romantics of the 19th century (most notably Carl Maria von Weber, who will return to play a role later), but also 18th century masters such as Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven. The primary teachers of Felix and Fanny were all clearly influenced by the foremost figures of the previous era. In 1816-17, during a trip to Paris, they studied with Marie Bigot, a pianist whose technique had been admired by Haydn and Beethoven.¹ In 1818, Felix began studying with Ludwig Berger, a former pupil of Muzio Clementi. Under their tutelage, Mendelssohn advanced rapidly. He was a prodigious talent at the keyboard and a prolific composer at a very young age. He made his public debut as a pianist at age nine in 1818, and the Berlin Singakademie presented

the first public performance of one of his compositions in 1819. That same year, Felix and Fanny began attending rehearsals of the Singakademie, where they were exposed to monumental works of 18th century sacred choral music, especially Bach and Handel. Also in 1819, the siblings began studying with the Singakademie's director, Karl Friedrich Zelter, who instructed them in figured bass, counterpoint, and composition, with emphasis on the works of earlier masters. Felix performed regularly at the Sunday musicales held in the Mendelssohn home, as well as in the salons and drawing rooms of significant political and cultural figures.

An experience of particular significance to Mendelssohn was his attendance at the premiere of Weber's *Der Freischütz* on June 18, 1821, in Berlin. The difference between Weber's romantic opera and the academic counterpoint assigned by Zelter to his pupil must have been overwhelming to the young composer. In a letter dated November 3, 1821, Fanny wrote to her brother, who was in Weimar with Zelter on a trip that would introduce him to Goethe.

When I had just closed my letter recently, [the piano arrangement score] to *Der Freischütz* arrived. I didn't scream for joy - I couldn't (she was ill with a cough) - but crowed. If you had been there we would have had a very pleasant hour. I only enjoyed half of the fun because I was all alone and helpless to sing even one note. . . Yesterday, *Freischütz* was performed again and is said to have been splendid.²

The siblings had been eagerly waiting for this score for months, and even the skeptical Zelter conceded to Goethe that "the music is so good, that the public doesn't find all the nonsense and gunpowder unbearable."³

Some of Mendelssohn's most notable works of this early period are the twelve String Symphonies. According to R. Larry Todd, the composer led these works from, the piano during the regular Sunday afternoon musicales at the Mendelssohn home. He writes, "The archaic character of the string symphony, use of the obsolescent continuo . . . and baroque 'spinning out' of the thematic material all reflect Zelter's conservative guidance. And the 18th century antecedents of the *sinfonie* - admixtures of C.P.E. and J.S. Bach, Mozart, and Haydn - also betray the teacher's tastes."⁴ Mendelssohn's first purely instrumental work that utilized winds in the orchestra was a second version of the String Symphony No. 8 in D Major, written in 1822.

The Mendelssohn family traveled extensively during Felix's youth, including visits to Paris and Switzerland. In 1824, Mendelssohn vacationed with his father at the northern German resort community of Doberan (the prefix "Bad" was added in 1921), where Felix swam in the Baltic Sea, sketched the 13th century cathedral, studied classical literature, and played piano for Friedrich Franz I, the Grand Duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin. He continued work on his opera, *Der Hochzeit des Camacho*, and he enjoyed listening to the Duke's resident wind-band, which played regularly at the spa.⁵

The court of Mecklenburg-Schwerin maintained one of the most renowned orchestras in late 18th century Germany. From the political center of Ludwigslust, Friedrich Franz continued the musical tradition established by his predecessor, his uncle Duke Friedrich "der Fromme." The court orchestra was expanded and they attracted exceptional musicians, financing their activities to his economic limits. Although the vast majority of German and Viennese courts maintained a separate *Harmonie*, there are no records of such an ensemble at Ludwigslust. David Rhodes suggests that the typical *Harmonie* functions (playing *Tafelmusik* and other entertainments) would have been performed by the military oboe-band attached to the Duke's "Leib-Grenadier Regiment."⁶

David Rhodes chronicles the details behind the formation of Friedrich Franz's *Harmonie*. In 1798, four touring wind players, two clarinetists and two bassoonists, visited Ludwigslust and performed there. At that time, there were no clarinetists employed by the court, and records provide no evidence that members of the court orchestra performed as a *Harmonie*. Three of these musicians remained at the court as members of the oboe-band. After hearing several performances by the wind players in his employment, the Duke formed a nine-member *Harmonie* in 1801. Rhodes writes,

The musicians wore a green hunting livery, and were especially active during the summer months when the Duke and his entourage went to the coastal resort of Doberan for the annual "Badezeit." The *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* of 1812 lists the personnel and instrumentation of the ensemble as Richter on flute, Nicolai on oboe, Hammerl and Stüber on clarinet, Haidner and Heller on bassoon, Bode and Theen on horn, Winzer on trumpet and Seipoldsdorf on serpent.⁷

Rhodes suggests the possibility that Richter doubled on oboe in performances of the standard octet repertoire, and that Winzer only played as needed. This instrumentation is very similar to the ensemble that Mendelssohn heard during his visit in 1824. In a letter addressed to Fanny from Doberan, dated July 24, 1824, he wrote: "This Harmoniemusik consists of one flute, two clarinets, two oboes, two bassoons, two horns, one trumpet and one basshorn."⁸ Thus, in the twelve years since the *Zeitung's* list, the ensemble had expanded to include an additional oboe, and the bass voice had been taken by the English bass horn. Following Friedrich Franz's death in 1837, his son Paul Friedrich succeeded him and dissolved the Harmonie in 1839, likely due to both economics and that such ensembles had gone out of fashion by that time.

When Mendelssohn was in Doberan, the wind band played daily concerts, and he took advantage of the learning opportunity by listening attentively, studying the instrumental combinations and sonorities, and then composing his *Nocturno*. In a letter home to Berlin dated July 3, Mendelssohn mentions how he has "not written a note,"⁹ and in a letter to Fanny dated July 24 he writes, "It's twelve o'clock now; time to tidy up and go to the Harmoniemusik"¹⁰ While no definitive date for the first performance of the *Nocturno* has been established, its composition must have taken place during July, 1824.

Mendelssohn was fascinated by the English bass horn, writing to Fanny, "This is a large brass instrument, has a beautiful, deep tone, and looks like a big jug or a stirrup pump."¹¹ While images of Mendelssohn's line drawing of this instrument are readily available both in the Bärenreiter edition's introduction and Reed's article, a more detailed image is provided in a painting by G. Norman Eddy. While nearly obsolete at the time, Mendelssohn also employed the reinforcing bass voice of the English bass horn on his original version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and in several marches for wind instruments written in the mid-1830s. Regarding the instrument, Hogwood relates, "Based upon records of performances of other works using this instrument, Mendelssohn would have substituted either the ophicleide or a third bassoon for the bass horn, though today it is often given to a tuba. It certainly should not be played by a contrabassoon, as the part should not be transposed by the octave."¹²

FIGURE 1 IS OMITTED FROM THIS FORMATTED DOCUMENT

The *Nocturno*, which to the young composer must have seemed only an experiment in writing for winds, recaptures Mendelssohn's attention numerous times in the ensuing years. While no parts or score from the original 1824 version exist (Mendelssohn appears to have either lost or given away the materials), he revisited the work in 1826, and a manuscript survives dated June 27, 1826. Hogwood refers to Mendelssohn as "a great improver,"¹³ a composer who tinkered with his pieces beyond the point of perfection. It is unknown why Mendelssohn returned to work on the *Nocturno* or what his source material was for this second score, but as Hogwood states, "the many small 'composing' alterations in this source indicate that it was certainly a revision rather than a fair copy."¹⁴ Julius Schubring, a pastor from Dessau who would collaborate with Mendelssohn on the libretto for *St. Paul*, recalls,

How he composed, I enjoyed only one opportunity of witnessing. I went one morning into his room, where I found him writing music . . . [Mendelssohn remarked] "I am merely copying out." I remained in consequence, and we talked of all kinds of subjects, he continuing to write the whole time. But he was not copying, for there was no paper but that on which he was writing.

Hogwood makes it clear that Mendelssohn's compositional process involved great reflection and revision, only arriving at a final version after lengthy and diligent effort.¹⁵

In late 1838, Mendelssohn returned to the Nocturno, this time in an attempt to arrange for its publication in several versions. That same year, Wilhelm Wieprecht, who had been a member of the court orchestra in Berlin since 1824, was appointed director-general of the bands of the Prussian Guards. Wieprecht is noted for his developments in valve technology for brass instruments as well as in military music. His appointment to a position of such authority brought with it a demand for repertoire, which led directly to Mendelssohn's revision of his Nocturno. According to R. Larry Todd, Wieprecht's efforts in disseminating military music expanded the presence of larger wind bands at many courts, so that Mendelssohn reworked the piece, expanding the ensemble from eleven to twenty-three players plus Janissary percussion.¹⁶ He retitled the work Overture, Op. 24, and he began corresponding with Simrock about its potential publication in an attempt to create income with the piece. This new version expanded the winds' sonic range and increased their timbral variety. By adding piccolo, a second pair of clarinets in F, Bassett horns, contrabassoon, a second pair of horns, a trumpet, three trombones, and percussion to the original instrumentation, Mendelssohn moved the function and sphere of his music from that of private courtly entertainment (the Nocturno) to music for broad public consumption (the Overture).

Mendelssohn first wrote to Simrock regarding his work for wind instruments in late 1838, offering the Overture and a four-hand piano score for publication. On November 30, 1838, he wrote about the Nocturno, stating, "Should you like to have it, I would be able to procure it for you soon."¹⁷ After Simrock expressed interest, they exchanged further correspondence, in which Mendelssohn admits he is struggling to locate his manuscript to the original version, believing it to be lost in Mecklenburg. On February 6, 1839, Felix wrote to Fanny, asking her if she could seek more information regarding the score on his behalf. Fanny pursued this task diligently, returning her brother's letter on February 26, 1839:

To report that I passed on your instructions with all due dispatch in regard to the Doberan music for wind instruments. It [his request] actually wasn't executed in the refined manner you envisioned, for Herr von Dachroden, the chamberlain and theater intendant, lives in Strelitz and he knows nothing about Schwerin, but the Herr Hofmusikus P. Lappe in Schwerin was instructed to send the music directly to you in Leipzig. If you've already received it, then please let me know, and if you haven't in a short while, then ditto. Then Lappe won't be able to slip through our fingers.¹⁸

The final correspondence with Simrock regarding the potential publication of the Nocturno is dated March 4, 1839, just days after Fanny's letter, and Felix writes optimistically about how he expects the score to appear shortly so it can be forwarded to the publisher. This is the last exchange, however, and Simrock never published the work, leaving us only to conclude that the score never reappeared.¹⁹ In 1839, Simrock published the piano arrangement and the parts to the Overture, Opus 24, and Mendelssohn suggested that a now-lost arrangement for strings be released later. It was very common for works to appear in multiple versions, maximizing their possible consumption.²⁰ The full score to Opus 24 was not published until 1852, five years after the composer's death and thirteen years after the parts were released, circumstances that David Reed suggests testify to the popularity of the work.²¹

Analysis of the Composition and Rehearsal Experiences

Given the number of versions of Mendelssohn's work available today for analysis, including the 1826 and 1839 scores published in 2005 by Bärenreiter in editions by Christopher Hogwood, and several modern arrangements for contemporary wind band, it seems most logical to proceed with an analysis of the piece based upon the earliest available source. The discussion that follows will refer exclusively to the Nocturno, with a few specific comparisons to the 1839 Overture version. Comments regarding modern versions will be reserved for later in this article.

Introduction, mm. 1-67

The Andante introduction begins ambiguously, as the horns reiterate the major 3rd C-E, not until the bassoon and bass horn entrance in m. 2 is the harmony established as C major. There still is no tonal context, however, so when Mendelssohn moves harmonically from C to F minor (the borrowed iv chord) in m. 3, it seems to

clarify a dominant-tonic relationship. Although F minor is not the tonic of the work, it will play a critical role later in the introduction, so its importance is magnified by first presenting it here. The opening phrase tonicizes C Major only in the weakest sense by passing through the borrowed iio - I in mm. 4-5.

FIGURE 2 IS OMITTED FROM THIS FORMATTED DOCUMENT

The timbre shifts dramatically with the entrance of the theme in m. 6 as it moves from the dark combination of horns, bassoons, and bass horn, to the intimate and lighter colors of clarinets and bassoons. The melody is mostly arpeggiation, and the phrase briefly passes harmonically through D minor and A minor as it moves to the dominant of G Major. Thus, in the first sixteen measures of the piece Mendelssohn has presented considerable harmonic instability.

Following a brief linking gesture in mm. 15-16, the theme is restated in m. 18 by nearly the full ensemble, without the trumpet and bass horn. This restatement is a reorchestration of the earlier material, and it elides directly with a contrasting melody in the bassoons and horns in m. 26. Beginning in the dominant of G Major and moving back to C Major at the midpoint of the phrase, this very conjunct melody utilizes suspensions, fermatas, passing tones, and ornamentation to present a more overtly expressive mood. Just as he restated the first theme, the second melodic area is repeated in a new orchestration starting in m. 36. The melody reappears first in the clarinet/bassoon combination (with second horn), then in the same orchestration as m. 18.

The most musically interesting section of the introduction begins with the entrance of the bass horn in m. 48. The mood and timbres turn dark again, with dramatic trumpet calls intruding upon the sinuous chromatic motion of the bass voices and clarinets. To heighten the expressive quality and contrast of this section, Mendelssohn moves the tonal center back to F minor, first heard in m. 3 of the piece. The phrases then sequence through A harmonic minor, C melodic minor, and finally back to C Major, cadencing on the dominant G7. As the four phrases evolve, the texture becomes increasingly full and complex - new voices enter, new rhythm patterns emerge, and the weight of articulation changes from smooth to weighty and accentuated. The dramatic qualities are especially heightened from mm. 56-67, with the entrance of the horns, the sustained oscillating half-step motion in the first oboe, clear contrary motion, and the presence of several 07 harmonies.

Rehearsal Experiences

Throughout the entire introduction, intonation problems abound. Given that most ensembles will be utilizing B-flat clarinets, rather than the C clarinets Mendelssohn specifies, many issues result from the tendencies of the B-flat instrument. Other challenges result primarily from rapidly changing harmonic contexts for given lines, doublings, and voice exchanges.

A most glaring example of changing harmonic contexts begins in m. 3, when the first bassoon and bass horn play A-flat-F-C, outlining an F minor triad. In m. 4, the second bassoon takes over the arpeggiation in an apparent restatement, but they cannot simply match the pitches of the previous measure. Whereas the A-flat of both measures must be raised to be in tune, the F and C have totally different roles. In m. 3 the F is the root and the C the 5th, while in m. 4 the F becomes the lowered 5th, and the C the b7 of a diminished 7th chord. Thus the distance is considerable and uncomfortable between the in-tune lowered C that ends m4 and the raised G that begins m. 5 as the 5th of C Major (see Figure 2 above).

The two near-tutti phrases (mm. 18-25 and mm. 40-48) present numerous doubling-related pitch problems. The most common doubling is between clarinets and bassoons at the octave. The obvious issue would be matching the top-down intonation, but the greater problem arises when voices diverge from and return to doubling one another. An example of this occurs in mm. 40-44.

FIGURE 3 IS OMITTED FROM THIS FORMATTED DOCUMENT

The problem of voice exchanges, where a pitch is established in one voice and is repeated in a different voice shortly thereafter, is pervasive. For example, in m. 21, the first oboe and second bassoon (in octave doubling) move A-G#, followed immediately by the second clarinet taking the G# on the next eighth-note beat. This may be momentary, but the in-tune execution of the exchange will result in a cohesive and refined result.

All of these rehearsal problems converge at the expressive high-point of the introduction, mm. 60/3-63/1, when the harmony is shifting unexpectedly, there is copious doubling, and voice exchanges abound.

FIGURE 4 IS OMITTED FROM THIS FORMATTED DOCUMENT

Players in the ensemble must listen with extreme attentiveness to their role in the harmony, but their ears will likely need guidance in several of these more problematic spots. Fortunately, the clarity of Mendelssohn's textures and part writing helps to alleviate many balance problems, and the natural flow of the phrases encourages expressive playing.

Exposition, mm. 68-112

The exposition of Mendelssohn's Allegro vivace sonata form is extremely concise, lasting only 44 measures. The brief first theme group, mm. 68-71, is fanfare-like in content. It presents a standard harmonic progression, I-IV-I-V7-I, in a repeated two-measure passage. Similar to the opening theme of the entire work, this melody emphasizes arpeggiated motion. Larry Todd draws a clear connection between the sonata form first theme of Mendelssohn's Nocturno and the gypsy march found in the overture to Carl Maria von Weber's Preciosa. This opera premiered in Berlin in 1821, and according to Todd, Mendelssohn certainly was familiar with it. Weber scores his gypsy march for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, and horns, with janissary percussion. The march is centered in C Major, and it opens with a harmonic progression similar to that of the Nocturno: C: I-IV⁶-I⁶⁻⁴ | I-IV. Todd believes this relationship to be more than coincidental.²²

FIGURE 5 IS OMITTED FROM THIS FORMATTED DOCUMENT

Weber's influence seems apparent, especially considering that Mendelssohn returned to the Preciosa march in 1833, writing a set of four-hand piano variations for him to perform in London with his friend Ignaz Moscheles.²³ Mendelssohn immediately launches into the standard three stage transition in m. 72.

The first stage of the transition, mm. 72-75, is characterized by a change of texture with simpler and slower harmonic motion, with two two-measure segments based upon a descending melodic sequence joined by an ascending 16th note scale. The second half of the phrase expands the instrumentation, adding the oboes and bass horn. The second stage of the transition, mm. 76-78, is marked by a change of dynamic (in this case to ff) and character, with the return of the trumpet's dotted-eighth and sixteenth followed by a quarter note rhythmic gesture, now in the tutti ensemble, answered by an extension of the ascending scalar figure. Each occurrence of the scale is reinforced, first presented in one clarinet, then the pair in octaves, and finally joined by the first bassoon in a third octave doubling. Harmonically, this passage begins the move to the dominant by progressing D⁷-G-A⁷-D⁷-G (G: V⁷-I⁶-V⁶⁻⁵-V⁷-I), but without a strong tonal arrival in the new key. That event is delayed until the third stage of the transition, mm. 79-84, which builds in intensity until the arrival of the second theme group in G Major.

The second theme group, mm. 85-96, makes great use of arpeggiation, like much of the thematic material in the work. The dynamic is reduced to piano and the motor accompaniment recalls the rhythmic nature of the first theme group, but it now has receded into the background. The thematic area unfolds in three four-measure subphrases; the first stays in G Major, the second implies C Major, and the third moves back to G Major.

FIGURE 6 IS OMITTED FROM THIS FORMATTED DOCUMENT

The closing section of the exposition, mm. 97-112, recalls melodic material from earlier in the exposition. First, Mendelssohn restates melodic material from the third stage of the transition, now with greater intensity in

scoring, rhythm, and articulation. In m. 105, he clearly states the melody and harmonic motion of the first theme group, still in the dominant, unusual at this point of an exposition. The final cadence begins in m. 109, and it unsurprisingly makes prominent use of arpeggiation at various speeds - an ascending eighth-note gesture in the bass voices, and a rapid rising/falling sixteenth-note exclamation by the clarinets.

Rehearsal Experiences

Whereas many of the intonation problems presented in the introduction remain in the exposition, new issues present themselves as well. The primary concern is phrase contour and lightness of style. The pulse must be quick and rapid, with a very clear sense of stress and release within the measure, the subphrase, and the larger phrase. Playing a series of notes at a constant level of intensity and volume will result in a feeling of stasis and heaviness, rather than ebullient flow. In general, repeated notes and slurs should start strong and emphasized, with clear decay through each figure. Three examples of this style, with corresponding suggestions for performance, would be the bass line of theme group 1 (figure 7a), and the fanfare gestures presented in stage two of the transition (figure 7b) and by the trumpet in m. 105 of the close (figure 7c). Clarifying the tapering back of each phrase and pacing the overall unfolding of the exposition will help control the tendency for the music to stay too loud for too much of the time. The most common dynamic level is *f*, with *ff* preserved for the end of the closing, and *?* for the second theme group. The speed and athletic nature of the writing will cause an overall increase in dynamic unless the markings are clearly attended to and the phrase shaping is deliberately handled.

FIGURE 7 IS OMITTED FROM THIS FORMATTED DOCUMENT

The tempo must be consistently maintained, especially at structural seams, to create lightness and flow. In the author's experience, m. 85 tends to drag, as the players reenter after rests at a softer dynamic. Similarly, m. 92 and m. 95, which are musically parallel, often do not maintain even flow of the tempo. A strong quarter-note pulse that maintains a secondary awareness of the flowing half-note establishes the appropriate rhythmic style.

Development, mm. 113-149

The development unfolds in four distinct sections, all of which make use of the trumpet fanfare motive from the introduction. The first and third sections are based upon contrapuntal statements of the ascending scalar fragment that begins the second theme. The second and fourth sections utilize material from the first theme group, as a diversion from the counterpoint and as the retransition.

The first section of the development progresses with frequent use of imitative entrances and sequencing in an unusual 3+3+2+4 phrase structure, with each phrase modulating to a new harmonic area. The fanfare motive and the *ff/p* dynamic contrasts serve to delineate each subphrase, the shortest of which (mm. 119-120) seems interrupted, as if Mendelssohn added an unexpected outburst before restating and finishing the melodic idea in mm. 121-124. Areas of tonicization include C minor, *?*-flat Major, F minor, and *?*-flat Major. Mendelssohn is clearly referring back to the harmonic tendencies that opened the work, which moved to F minor and established connections between relative Major and minor keys. Following the simple harmonic language of the exposition, the rapid rate of tonal motion is jarring, though seamlessly executed in the chord progressions.

The second section of the development, mm. 125-128, serves as a brief interlude by using thematic material from the first area of the exposition, but by tonicizing E Major, the music is far removed from the original key of C Major. The flute flourish in m. 126 and m. 128 was originally written into the phrase, but later crossed out by the composer. Hogwood's edition includes the passage, with a note directing the performer to refer to the critical commentary. Omitting this line here creates an opportunity for contrast when it returns during the retransition.

The third section is announced by a *ff* fanfare in the brass, followed by the return of the ascending scalar material from the second theme, now presented in *stretto*. The colors of the fanfare motive change, as it moves

from the brass, to flute /oboes, to brass, to bassoons/bass horn, all at p dynamic after the initial statement. During this section, Mendelssohn again creates tonal instability, moving from E major (established in mm. 125-128) to A minor (V-I relationship), through C Major to F Major (another V-I relationship), and finally to D minor (relative minor of F) where a descending chromatic line begins in the bass horn. This unsettled harmony is heightened by dissonances such as the minor 2nd between the oboe and clarinet in m. 134, and the tritone motion that follows.

The retransition, mm. 138-149, gradually moves back to C Major through a protracted series of 07 chords, leading to a German 6 - V7 - I in C. Throughout, intensity builds through steadily increasing dynamics, a faster rate of entrances of the fanfare motive, and ascending chromatic motion in the sustained bassoon line, culminating at the arrival of the Recapitulation.

Rehearsal Experiences

Problems of intonation, balance, and style abound in the development. The four fanfare gestures between mm. 113-121 are difficult to tune due to the multiple octave doublings. Tuning the oboes, second clarinet, bassoons and bass horn and then adding the rest of the ensemble establishes a timbral and pitch center. As the imitative entrances occur, it is important that the highest voice begins softly enough, since each subsequent lower entrance will need to balance up to the first statement. The first oboe is of extreme importance throughout this section, with the sustained lines adding pathos to the music. Attention should be paid to preparing events such as the accented half note in m. 128, which serves to change the expressive mood.

As noted above, the harmonic complexity and dissonance that begins in m. 134 presents several pitch problems, due to dissonant interval relationships and voice exchanges. Converging in tune on the concert \flat at the arrival of the retransition in m. 138 is one of the most subtle and challenging moments in the piece.

FIGURE 8 IS OMITTED FROM THIS FORMATTED DOCUMENT

Recapitulation and Coda, mm. 150-223

The recapitulation, mm. 150-189, follows the formal scheme of the exposition exactly. While it would be redundant to outline every aspect of the recapitulation, there are several differences in this section that are worth highlighting. First, upon the arrival of the recapitulation, Mendelssohn takes one more opportunity to reiterate the fanfare motive in the brass, rather than restating the passage from the exposition verbatim. Second, to maintain interest during the second theme, Mendelssohn reorchestrates the melody, alternating between the flute solo (as in the exposition) and the oboes in thirds. He also quietly recalls the fanfare motive in the trumpet, which was not present in the exposition. The close also presents new orchestration, this time by increasing the amount of doubling to build intensity into the coda. The most structurally significant difference between the exposition and recapitulation (in the Nocturno) is that the final four measures of the closing (mm. 109-112) are omitted from the recapitulation, instead jumping directly into the coda. Upon editing the piece for the 1839 version, Mendelssohn included mm. 109-111 in the recapitulation, stating the close in its entirety.

An unusual $V^{sup} 4-2^{IV}$ harmony and an extended statement of the rhythmic motive from the first theme group announces the coda (mm. 190-223). Following two short cadential phrases, the music takes an unexpected turn, initiated by a deceptively placed E Major chord on beat four of m. 199. Based upon the established progression, the listener's ear certainly expects a C7 harmony at this point. The harmonically complex sequence from mm. 200-209 serves to prepare the strong presentation of C Major that closes the work. This series of 07 chords builds to a melodic idea that will resurface in Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream Overture*, written in August, 1826, just two months after he completed rewriting the score to the *Nocturno*.

FIGURE 9 IS OMITTED FROM THIS FORMATTED DOCUMENT

The work ends with a reference to the closing material from the exposition, followed by an extended culminating fanfare based on C Major arpeggiation. Mendelssohn brings the work full circle in that it began by outlining a C Major harmony, and it ends in similar fashion.

Rehearsal Experiences

Interpretive and rehearsal issues first encountered in the exposition arise throughout the recapitulation. Each phrase must have a clear sense of decay in intensity, with attention paid to details of contour and articulation. In the second theme group, the accompaniment must be carefully balanced to allow the flute solo to float easily on top of the texture. The ensemble may demonstrate a tendency to compress eighth notes as the dynamic increases, especially as the end of the work grows near. This is particularly problematic in the close, where the rhythmic flow must be even and the dynamic must be paced to allow for contrast at the *ff* in m. 184.

The first chord of the coda, beat one of m. 190, is extremely difficult to tune. Since the 7th of the chord is in the bass voices, it may be helpful to rehearse moving into this sonority at a very slow tempo, focusing on the tendencies necessary to play this chord in tune. Another difficult harmony to tune is found on beat 3 of m. 208. This vii04-3/V, approached with the treble voices moving in octaves on an ascending arpeggio and the bassoons playing a leap of a M7, provides a considerable challenge. Tuning these intervals by utilizing octave displacements before playing the written leaps may prove useful. The coda also presents many opportunities to shape phrases with attention to weight placement. The passage mm. 194-199 is an example of the heavy-light emphasis necessary to shape this music effectively. The quarter notes should receive considerable weight, but the subsequent eighth notes should be very light. Similarly, each half note in mm. 200-206 should have an audible decay. The final cadence, mm. 217-223, benefits from tuning the arpeggiated motion slowly against the pedal-point motion in the bass horn. Each note in the higher voices must be tuned by its relationship to this reference point.

Place Within Mendelssohn's Output

Although the Nocturno is often considered a peripheral part of the composer's works, it belongs within a sequence in which he was exploring and developing his skills in writing for wind instruments. R. Larry Todd identified the following set of pieces for comparison and examination.²⁴ As previously mentioned, Mendelssohn's first orchestral work to incorporate a wind section was the second version of his String Symphony No. 8, from November, 1822. The first movement of this work is an Allegro sonata form with an Adagio e grave introduction, a clear, although fairly common, structural similarity to the Nocturno. Both works also acknowledge musical ancestry. In the String Symphony No. 8, he refers to J. S. Bach's A Musical Offering, and Mozart's "Prague" Symphony, K. 504, clearly demonstrating Zelter's strong influence. In the Nocturno, however, Mendelssohn seems to pay homage to Weber, possibly because he was working without his teacher's conservative guidance. Following the second version of the String Symphony No. 8, Mendelssohn would not write for wind instruments until composing the Nocturno in July, 1824.

The Nocturno was followed by the Sinfonie No. 1, Op. 11, written in November, 1824. In addition to the strings, this work utilizes a full complement of winds - 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, and timpani. The manner in which Mendelssohn scores for the wind section, along with the very prominent role they play, indicates that he was continuing to focus on the challenge of writing for wind instruments. Two examples from this work are especially relevant. In the Andante second movement, there is a lengthy passage for winds alone. The solo flute floats on top of a texture of chordal harmonies and a slower moving melody in the oboe and clarinet. The doublings and voice leading are strikingly similar to the opening of the Nocturno.

FIGURE 10 IS OMITTED FROM THIS FORMATTED DOCUMENT

A second excerpt comes from the finale, Allegro con fuoco. This movement, which begins in C minor and ends in C Major (a likely nod to Beethoven), features a chordal exchange between the woodwinds and brass that is

similar to the orchestration of mm. 200-206 in the Nocturno. The wind writing is unrelated to the string passagework.

FIGURE 11 IS OMITTED FROM THIS FORMATTED DOCUMENT

Mendelssohn's next large orchestral work was the Trumpet Overture, written in March, 1826. To the standard pairs of winds and brass the composer adds three trombones, and the wind section continues to assert its independence from the strings. There are several passages where the winds play alone or in dialogue with the strings (i.e.: [C] - [D]), other passages that are compositionally similar to the Nocturno (i.e.: mm. 305-313 compared to mm. 200-203 of Nocturno), and a flute solo (mm. 328-338) that recalls the melodic contours of the Nocturno's second theme.

Following Mendelssohn's revising or rewriting of the score to the Nocturno in June, 1826, he set to work on his overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the most important connection to which was discussed previously. This work, along with his Octet for strings, is widely credited with establishing Mendelssohn's maturity as a composer. He arrived at this point in his development through practical application of different musical situations in the series of works described here. Thus, it could be argued that the Nocturno played a crucial role as he learned to utilize the wind section within the orchestra. While musicologists may view the work as simply providing a learning experience for the young composer, the two versions of Mendelssohn's work hold a much more important place in the wind ensemble repertoire. It is a well crafted work by one of the world's most significant composers, it is one of the last original compositions to emerge as the initial Harmonie tradition in Germany and Austria faded into history, and as such it is a true representative of the 1820s musical aesthetic.

Reconciling Period and Contemporary Versions

The table found in Appendix A compares four versions of the work in question, the 1826 and 1839 versions in two Bärenreiter editions, Felix Greissle's 1948 arrangement for large concert band, and John Boyd's 1981 hybrid arrangement that allows for performances of both of Mendelssohn's versions. Careful examination of orchestration is of greatest importance and interest in discovering how Mendelssohn's work was handled for larger modern forces. Mendelssohn seems to have had a clear strategy behind the expanded orchestration of the 1839 version. He reinforced and doubled lines at both unison and the octave, solving balance problems while expanding the color palette; he recognized that the enlarged number of treble instruments required that he add additional tenor and bass voices (the Bassett horns, contrabassoon and trombones), and he adjusted dynamic markings throughout. If the conductor's intention is to realize the composer's desired musical result as closely as possible, one must critically examine how the modern arranger handled the scoring. How are the saxophones employed? How are the F clarinets, Bassett horns, English bass horn,, etc. accounted for? Since Mendelssohn intended for the work to be performed by one player per part, how might having multiple players create balance problems that Mendelssohn clearly avoided in his own versions? Modern arrangements for wind band present great challenges to authenticity, and the table in the Appendix is intended to objectively examine Mendelssohn's scoring and how it has been translated today. The composer clearly conceived of these two pieces as different from one another - one intimate and private, the other more exuberant and public. The conductor must decide which view will be taken and how it will be successfully executed with the chosen performance materials.

Conclusion

Mendelssohn's Nocturno and Overture, Opus 24 remain enigmatic members of the wind ensemble repertoire. While one can more easily recreate Mendelssohn's original intentions in the Nocturno, especially with the publication of Hogwood's edition, the Opus 24 is much more problematic. Currently, no edition utilizing standard instrumentation for modern band or wind ensemble truly represents the composer's 1839 version as represented in the Bärenreiter score.

To understand Mendelssohn's work is to pay homage to the historical traditions from which it emerged. Mendelssohn was always closely aligned with his musical ancestry, through his training with Zelter and the

strong influences of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and Weber. Accurately and authentically recreating the sonorities, phrase contours, rhythmic inflections, and stylistic inflections of the late-Classical and early-Romantic performance traditions remain the greatest challenges to performers of Mendelssohn's work, regardless of whether urtext editions or contemporary arrangements are utilized.

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Christopher Hogwood is one of the greatest proponents of the early music movement. He is Emeritus Director of the Academy of Ancient Music, the orchestra he founded in 1973, and Conductor Laureate of Boston's Handel & Haydn Society. His current editorial work ranges from the great overtures and symphonies by Mendelssohn to the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book by William Byrd and the complete keyboard works of Purcell.

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