Profile

Sara Levy was one of the most important promoters of the cultivation of Bach's music in Berlin. She set up one of the most significant music collections of her time, primarily comprising instrumental music of Johann Sebastian Bach and his sons but also earlier composers, thus laying a cornerstone for the creation of an awareness of music history. As a subscriber of demanding harpsichord and chamber music in particular, she encouraged contemporary composers, such as Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, whom she met in Hamburg in the 1780s and from whom she commissioned compositions. She organised musical soirées and circles, with which she had an effect on the formation of repertoire. As a harpsichordist, she performed at concerts of the Berliner Singakademie to which she made available, already during her lifetime, material from her extensive music collection, bequeathing it to this institution after her death. The copy of Johann Sebastian Bach's St. Matthew Passion that she gave to her great-nephew Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy and his sister Fanny (later Hensel) for Christmas in 1825 was probably also from her collection. This gift ushered in the Bach Renaissance of the 19th century with the performance of the Passion by the Berliner Singakademie conducted by Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy in April 1829.

Cities and countries

Sara Levy lived in Berlin and was also active there. Her extensive collection of music was scattered all over the world after her death.

Biography

As the daughter of the "financial entrepreneur" of Frederick the Great, Sara Levy was born in 1761 into a family that had the highest ranking position of Jewish families in the Prussian state. At the same time, the house of her parents Daniel Itzig (1723–1799) and Miriam, née Wulff (1727–1788) was a place of the Haskalah, of the Jewish Enlightenment, which was not least evident in the outstanding education of their 16 children. In particular, the cultivation of music in the Itzig household was of the highest level. It is documented by several sources that the music of Johann Sebastian Bach and his sons, especially Carl Philipp Emmanuel Bach, was at the centre of focus.

1840s, about the then over 80-year-old hostess and her dinner party. In: Fanny Lewald, Meine Lebensgeschichte, Bd. 3, Befreiung und Wanderleben, edited by Ulrike Helmer, Frankfurt/Main 1989, p. 90 ff.)

"They were all once 'à la tête de la jeune phalange' at the forefront of the movement. It was these frail women whose spirit and education broke through the barriers of the caste spirit, who were victorious, out of their own absolute power, over the power of prejudice in Berlin. These old ladies and their kindred spirits, these Jews, were the ones who rose up from the pariah status of their people in order to represent education as the highest valid nobility; they thus knew how to bring about a liberation and a culture of the spirit in their native city that the narrower minds of their progeny were not able to maintain.”

(Fanny Lewald, who was a guest of Sara Levy during the
Sara Levy's harpsichord teachers possibly included Johann Philipp Kirnberger (1721–1783) and in all probability Wilhelm Friedemann Bach (1710–1784). Starting in 1779 it is documented that Sara Levy was a subscriber of mostly demanding harpsichord music by representatives of the Bach family. During the course of her life, she set up a collection of music manuscripts and printed works that was one of the most extensive of her time. Probably after her marriage in 1783, she began organising musical circles, for which she most likely also commissioned new works. She was one of the first members of the Berliner Singakademie founded in 1791 by Carl Friedrich Fasch (1730–1800) and taken over after his death by Carl Friedrich Zelter (1758–1832), and was active in the accompanying Ripperschule as a harpsichordist. During the 1790s, Sara Levy appeared a number of times as a soloist at the so-called "Fliess Concerts" – organised by her sister Hannah, later Fliess (1748–1801) – at concerts of the Singakademie. During her lifetime, Sara Levy made large portions of her music collection available to the Singakademie. The remaining parts of her collection, scattered throughout the world today, were by order of her will to Justus Amadeus Lecerf, August Wilhelm Bach and Zelter's successor Carl Friedrich Rungenhagen. Sara Levy's long life spanned the time from the second half of the reign of Frederick the Great until after the Revolution of 1848. She survived her great-nephew Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1809–1847) and his sister Fanny Hensel (1805–1847) (see also the multimedia presentation on "Fanny Hensel - Correspondences in Music": http://mugi.hfmt-hamburg.de/Hensel_Korrespondenzen/)

Sara Levy cultivated musical circles and soirées until the end of her life. She died in Berlin in 1854 at the age of 92.

More on Biography

Sara Levy was born on 19 June 1761 as the tenth of sixteen children and the sixth of twelve daughters of Daniel Itzig (1723–1799) and his wife Miriam, née Wulff (1727–1788). Her father was the financial entrepreneur of Frederick the Great and thus occupied the highest office attainable for a Jew in the Prussian state. In 1797, two years before his death, Daniel Itzig even obtained full civil rights, for himself, his children and grandchildren. Thus this extraordinary position within the Jewish community also applied to his daughter Sara, who became a Prussian citizen without having to abandon her Jewish faith. The position of the financial entrepreneur accompanied, on the one hand, very close contacts to the court; on the other hand, Daniel Itzig maintained close ties to the Jewish community. Thus, the Itzigs' house on Burgstraße 6 – in the immediate vicinity of the Berlin City Palace – had its own synagogue as well as a roof construction that could be folded out for the Feast of Tabernacles (Nicolai, p. 852). Like the houses of the other "Jews under special protection" among which it occupied an outstanding position, the house of Daniel Itzig became during the 18th century a location of the Haskalah movement, the Jewish Enlightenment. Like its Christian pendant, this movement searched for a compatibility between reason and religion. Connected with the hope for a co-existence on equal footing between the Christian and Jewish religions, the Haskalah movement simultaneously became the starting point for Jewish acculturation. The proximity of Sara Levy's parents' house to the court on the one hand, and its privileged position within the Jewish community on the other hand, was reflected in an extraordinary promotion of culture that transported ideas of tolerance. Symbolic of this is Friedrich Nicolai's description of Daniel Itzig's extensive collection of paintings including both Jewish and Christian subjects (Nicolai, p. 839).

Alongside an excellent general education, music education at the highest level also belonged to the enlightened understanding of culture in the house of Daniel Itzig and Miriam Wulff. Thus Johann Friedrich Reichardt, who visited the Itzigs' house in the early 1770s reported as follows: "Music was executed in the purest, noblest sense, Sebastian and Emanuel Bach were performed with an understanding not to be found elsewhere. The best harpsichord teacher was rewarded with an annual pension like the other outstanding teachers, so that the beautiful, numerous children of the family could partake in instruction in all good and desirable subjects entirely according to their instincts and pleasure (cited from Schletterer, Johann Friedrich Reichardt, 1865, p. 99 ff). Adolf Weismann also wrote subsequently about a "literal Sebastian and Emanuel Bach cult" at the Itzigs' house (Weissmann, Berlin als Musikstadt, p. 36). Possibly Sara Levy, like her elder sister Bella, the grandmother of Fanny and Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, received instruction from Johann Philipp Kirnberger (see also Werner, Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy in neuer Sicht, p. 26), and another teacher was very probably Wilhelm Friedemann Bach. It cannot be proven, but can be assumed due to the proximity of the Itzigs' house to the Prussian court, that Sara Levy saw a model for her own cultivation of music in both the soirées and the collecting activities of Princess Anna Amalie of Prussia. Thus Sara Levy's music collection
was very similar to that of the Prussian Princess – except that, for obvious reasons, it contained hardly any sacred vocal music (see Wollny, "Ein förmlicher Sebastian und Philipp Emanuel Bach-Kultus". 1999, p. 220). The main area of focus of the collection of Sara Levy, today scattered in libraries all over the world, is on demanding instrumental music of Johann Sebastian Bach and his sons, as well as by composers from the environs of the Berlin court chapel, including Johann Gottlieb Graun (1703–1771) and Carl Heinrich Graun (1703/1704–1759), Johann Gottlieb Janitsch (1708–1763) as well as by lesser-known Berlin composers and by Johann Adolph Hasse (1699?–1783). In the area of chamber music, alongside works of the composers already mentioned, she also possessed music of Georg Friedrich Händel (1685–1759) and Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (1710–1736). Starting in 1779, Sara Levy can be found on the lists of subscriptions and/or prenumerations of demanding harpsichord music (see Wollny, "Ein förmlicher Sebastian und Philipp Emanuel Bach-Kultus". 1999, p. 242). This procedure of more or less "pre-financing" printed music was especially widespread during the last third of the 18th century and was one of the means of funding contemporary composers (see Hortschansky).

Sara Levy's musical circles and soirées have been handed down from the literature of remembrance from a 19th-century vantage point. There are no reports about the early musical circles at her house, but it can be assumed that she cultivated several musical soirées at the latest since her marriage to the banker Samuel Salomon Levy on 2 June 1783, for which Wilhelm Friedemann Bach most probably composed his wedding song "Cantilena nuptiarum consolatoria" ("Heart, My Heart, Stay Calm" - Falck, Thematic Catalogue, p. 30, Fk 97; see, Wollny, "Ein förmlicher Sebastian und Philipp Emanuel Bach-Kultus". 1999, p. 230). The musical soirées of her elder sister Hanna, later Flies (1748–1801) probably had a model function for these; Sara Levy is also documented as having played the harpsichord at her sister's events ("Berlinische Musikalische Zeitung", 1793, see Wollny, "Ein förmlicher Sebastian und Philipp Emanuel Bach-Kultus". 1999, p. 221). Whereas the "Flies Concerts" had an admission fee, however, one was invited by Sara Levy or belonged to her "circle". The Viennese pianist and composer Maria Theresia Paradis (1759–1824) was probably also one of the guests at Sara Levy's early circles when she travelled during her grand artistic tour from Hamburg to Berlin in order to perform there; it can be gathered from her family register that she found acceptan-

cce at the Itzig family's residence (see Ullrich, Maria Theresia Paradis, p. 136). The regular guests at her soirées during the 19th century included, amongst others, Henriette Herz, the authors E.T.A. Hoffmann and Ludwig Börne, Karl August Varnhagen and Rahel Varnhagen, Bettina von Arnim, Carl Friedrich Zelter, the historian Gustav Droysen, Paul Heyse, most probably Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, the wife of councilor Uhden, Sara Levy's niece Lea Mendelssohn and later her great-nephew Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy and his sister Fanny (see also Wilhelmy-Dollinger, Der Berliner Salon im 19. Jahrhundert, p. 720–722, as well as ibid, Musikalische Salons, p. 20–22, and Wollny, "Ein förmlicher Sebastian und Philipp Emanuel Bach-Kultus". 1999, p. 218).

Conclusions concerning the early times of her soirées can be drawn from her music collection, as well as from several works most probably commissioned by her. It can thus be assumed, due to the extensive - in some cases - performance materials in her possession, that she performed not only chamber music, but also concertos. The large number of works for two harpsichords in her collection, including adaptations of the organ trio sonatas of Johann Sebastian Bach, allow us to assume a corresponding musical practice. We may assume that one of her sisters was the soloist in these cases. Via visits to Elise and Sophie Reimarus – the daughter and daughter-in-law of the famous Hamburg philosopher Hermann Samuel Reimarus – Sara Levy apparently became personally acquainted with Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, who had held the post as Hamburg musical director since 1768. From a letter to Sara Levy written by his widow Johanna Marie Bach shortly after his death, we learn that Levy had commissioned works from him, most probably including the three Quartets for flute, viola, double bass and harpsichord (Wq 93–95) written in 1788, the year of the composer's death, and the Double Concerto for harpsichord and fortepiano (Wq 47).

Sara Levy was one of the first members of the Berliner Singakademie founded in 1791 by Carl Friedrich Fasch (1736–1800) and continued by his pupil Carl Friedrich Zelter (1758–1832), and performed as harpsichordist at performances of Zelter's Ripschule. She is documented as the soloist, in the years 1807 and 1808, of the Harpsichord Concerto in D minor, BWV 1052 and the Brandenburg Concerto No. 5, BWV 1050 of Johann Sebastian Bach (Schünemann, Bachpflege, p. 720–722, as well as ibid, Musikalische Salons, p. 20–22, and Wollny, "Ein förmlicher Sebastian und Philipp Emanuel Bach-Kultus". 1999, p. 218).
Levy, Sara

kalische Zeitung", Jg. 13, 1811, H. 12, Sp. 204) at the jubilee concert of the Patzig Institute in 1811.

Also most probably in her collection was the copy of the St. Matthew Passion of Johann Sebastian Bach that Felix and Fanny Mendelssohn Bartholdy received as a Christmas present in 1825 and the performance of which, under the direction of the 20-year-old Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, ushered in the Bach Renaissance of the 19th century. Already during her lifetime, Sara Levy donated a large portion of her music collection to the Berliner Singakademie and thus had an influence on the formation of the repertoire in this respect as well.

Sara Levy lived at the Berlin address "Hinter dem Packhof 3" on the Museum Island of today. Her marriage remained childless, but she brought up three orphaned nephews. She survived her husband by four years. Still during her lifetime, Friedrich Wilhelm IV wanted to have the new museum built on her property, also claiming a wing of her house for this purpose. She insisted on keeping her property, however, giving only part of her garden. Sara Levy invited guests to tea and dinner until shortly before her death. Only after 1854, when she died at the age of almost 93, had her house and garden completely given way to the buildings of the Berlin museum.

Appreciation

Sara Levy was not only an outstanding harpsichordist who performed demanding works of Johann Sebastian Bach and his sons at privately organised concerts. She also set up one of the most extensive and important collections of music manuscripts and printed scores of the 18th and early 19th centuries and employed several copyists for this. The main focus of her collection, today scattered in libraries all over the world, was challenging instrumental music of Johann Sebastian Bach and his sons as well as of Johann Adolph Hasse (1699–1783) and music of Berlin composers. Thus she owned numerous symphonies of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach and other composers from the environs of the Berlin court chapel, including Johann Gottlieb Graun (1703–1771), Johann Gottlieb Janitsch (1708–1763), harpsichord concertos of Wilhelm Friedemann and Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, violin, viola and viola da gamba concertos of Johann Gottlieb Graun and flute concertos of Johann Joachim Quantz (1697–1773), the flute teacher of Frederick the Great. Her chamber music collection comprised, alongside works by the composers already mentioned, music of Georg Friedrich Händel (1685–1759) and Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (1710–1736). She owned precious autogra-

ph manuscripts of the rarely played works of Wilhelm Friedemann Bach and she succeeded in compiling almost all of the instrumental music of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach. As a subscriber of demanding harpsichord and chamber music, she promoted contemporary composers such as Carl Philipp Emanuel and Wilhelm Friedemann Bach. She did not restrict her cultivation of music to the preservation and collection of existing music, however, but also took an active part in the current musical scene by commissioning new works. Thus the three Quartets for flute, viola, double bass and harpsichord (Wq 93–95) composed by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach in 1788, the year of his death, and probably commissioned by Sara Levy for performance and discussion at her soirées, are amongst the most profound and subtle chamber works by this composer (see Krummacher, Kontinuität und Experiment). The same is true of his Double Concerto for harpsichord and fortepiano in E-flat major (Wq 47). This was probably a commissioned work as well, and virtually addressed by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach to the commissioner of the work. It is related to the Concerto for two harpsichords in the same key by Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, also in Sara Levy’s collection, creating a connection between the “old” and the “new” in its “novel” scoring and manner of writing that was characteristic of the commissioner. Joseph Haydn was also amongst the composers who were commissioned by Sara Levy to compose works.

With her musical soirées, she had a strong influence on musical taste in Berlin during her time. As a preserver of “older music” that gauged contemporary musical developments according to the highest standards of the 18th century, Sara Levy became a key figure in the Bach Renaissance of the 19th century (see Wollny, "Ein förmlicher Sebastian und Philipp Emanuel Bach-Kultus", 1999).

Reception

The cultivation of music, for which the house of Sara Levy’s parents was formative, was continued in the form of musical soirées during the next generation. Her sister Fanny, three years older, who in 1776 married Nathan Arnstein, the son of the Viennese financial entrepreneur, became renowned for the brilliant circles that she began organising in Vienna around the turn of the century, and which became the basis for the founding of the Wiener Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde (Society of Friends of Music in Vienna). Fanny von Arnstein frequently visited her Berlin relatives, and amongst her musical materials are

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examples documented to have been in the collection of her sister Sara Levy. The circles of Sara Levy’s niece Lea Mendelssohn starting in 1821 must also be mentioned, as well as the Sunday music sessions of her great-niece Fanny Hensel (see also the multimedia presentation on "Fanny Hensel - Correspondences in Music": http://mugi.hfmt-hamburg.de/Hensel_Korrespondenzen/) on Leipziger Straße 3 beginning in 1831. Although all these social interactions pursued completely different aims and had different points of emphasis, they were in the tradition of "private-public" cultivation of music in the house of Daniel Itzig and his wife Miriam Wulff, continued most lastingly and distinctively by Sara Levy. Not least due to the unclear body of source material, musical life in private houses - about which reviews were written only in exceptional cases - became increasingly forgotten with the proliferation of public musical life during the course of the 19th century. Sara Levy’s influence on the repertoire of the Berliner Singakademie – possibly due to the anti-Semitic tendencies dominating there – remained unmentioned for a long time. Carl Friedrich Zelter’s rather less pronounced sense of order, too, probably led to the fact that musical components originally belonging to Sara Levy’s collection were no longer recognisable as such. A reference to the extraordinary music collection of Sara Levy was not found until 1931, made by Ernst Fritz Schmid (Schmid, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, 1931). There was the additional difficulty, after 1945, that the archive of the Berliner Singakademie evacuated during the war was considered missing for years until it turned up again in the Ukraine in 2001 and was handed over to the Berlin Municipal Library. It was not until 1986, through Peter Wollny’s reconstruction of her music collection, today scattered in libraries all over the world, that Sara Levy’s great significance for the Berlin cultivation of Bach and her influence on the formation of the repertoire became known (Wollny, Sara Levy and the Making of Musical Taste, 1993). In 2002 the Leipzig Bach Archive and the International Mendelssohn Foundation organised an exhibition about Sara Levy and her activity as a music collector.

**Repertoire**

Sara Levy’s extensive and demanding repertoire as a harpsichordist can be gathered from her music collection, which included harpsichord concertos of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, Wilhelm Friedemann Bach as well as the Berlin composers Christoph Schaffrath (1709–1763), August Kohn and Carl Gottlieb Richter. From the large number of works in the corresponding scoring in her collection, one may draw the conclusion that Sara Levy – probably together with one of her sisters – was fond of playing music for two harpsichords. Amongst these works are Wilhelm Friedemann Bach’s Concerto for two harpsichords in E-flat major (Fk 46) and arrangements of the six Organ Trio Sonatas (BWV 525–530) of Johann Sebastian Bach for two harpsichords. Sara Levy is documented as soloist in the Harpsichord Concerto in D minor, BWV 1052 and the Brandenburg Concerto No. 5, BWV 1050 at concerts of the Singakademie. She must also have participated in performances of numerous chamber works from her collection, such as the Quartets for flute, viola, double bass and harpsichord of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (Wq 93–95), probably composed for her. The same applies to his Concerto for harpsichord and fortepiano (Wq 47) also commissioned by her.

**Research**

Today, the collection of Sara Levy is scattered in various libraries all over the world. The music items can be recognised as belonging to her collection by their cipher and/or stamp (not always assigned, however) for items that had entered the stocks of the Singakademie. Overviews of the various libraries and the stocks of the collections are found in Wollny: Sara Levy and the Making of Musical Taste, 1993 and in Wollny: “Ein förmlicher Sebastian und Philipp Emanuel Bach-Kultus”, 1999 as well as (for the parts of the collection that came into the archive of the Singakademie) in Henzel, Die Musikalien der Sing-Akademie, 2002.

**Need for Research**

The area of research that is most desirable includes Sara Levy’s contact with the salon of Anna Amalia of Prussia and the question of the extent to which this salon, as well as the Prussian Princess’s cultivation of music, actually had a model function. The early years of her musical circles can, so far, only be gathered from her collecting activities and her commissions from composers; the later years have been primarily handed down from the remembrance literature of the later 19th century – additional research findings and/or an evaluation of already existing sources, e.g. from the orbit of the Mendelssohn family would be desirable for this. Also of interest would be an analysis of the works commissioned by Sara Levy, especially those of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, as regards the following aspect: to what extent the works' having been addressed to the commis-
sioner had an impact on their composition.

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