

Mark Kroll, *Ignaz Moscheles and the Changing World of Musical Europe*. Boydell Press, 2014, 410 pages. ISBN: 9781843839354. Hardback £40.00.

Taking off the book jacket with its portrait of the handsome Ignaz Moscheles in order not to scratch it during the reading, I absentmindedly never noticed the full title of the book, half of which was in smaller and darker letters. Throughout my reading, the same thought returned: the book is only half about Moscheles; it is no less, if not even more, about his epoch, culture, contemporaries, his entire music world spanning more than five decades of the nineteenth century. Why did I not find this in the title? My fault. The title clearly reads: *Ignaz Moscheles and the Changing World of Musical Europe*. Exactly! Only by reading the book to the end, can one can appreciate the accuracy of its title. Now that my only critical argument, maintained throughout my reading, has been erased, can I properly discuss this remarkable work and enumerate its merits.

Moscheles's name always reproachfully disturbed me for my passive acceptance of his far from elite standing in the official pantheon of nineteenth-century music. Encountering his name in mid-nineteenth-century Russian concert programs, the contradiction between real life and historiographical hierarchy always caused some discomfort. Mark Kroll's book was a good opportunity to fill this lacuna with updated and high-standard study by an author who once again proved his remarkable ability to highlight figures who have been unjustly pushed into the sidelines of history. Mark Kroll knows how to restore their reputation, to show their contribution to the culture within which we ourselves grew, and continue to convey it further. The author had already done it successfully, especially with Hummel in his five-hundred page *Johann Nepomuk Hummel: A Musician's Life and World* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2007), and he did it again with Moscheles.

The general structure of the book is biographical in its first part, and interpretative in the second. In fact, however, these spheres are inseparable, and, indeed, the narrative is homogenous, so that the reader hardly notices the transition.

The topic is a gratifying one for the researcher. No one could tell that it lacked material. On the one hand, Moscheles's biography was well known thanks to his widow Charlotte's publication, Mendelssohn's (Moscheles's closest friend) well-documented biography, and many other sources. On the other hand, this outstanding musician worked for more than half a century across Europe and in various fields: pianist-virtuoso, composer, conductor, teacher, editor. All that he did he did as a creative, tireless, and generously giving public figure. His enormously productive activity provides endless directions where one can seek existing documentation. Indeed, the more detailed a life account is, the more connections and episodes there are to check and cross-examine, delving into the very texture of real life. There was so much expanse for deep research in archives and contemporaneous newspapers—which was meticulously done—that the result became a substantial critical revision of previously available materials. And much more.

The reader quickly forgets that this is a musicological study, and turns pages in the tempo of a historical novel. Notwithstanding Moscheles's intensive life, Kroll's narration is very attractive: it is both simple and expressive. To be sure, expressiveness comes from the life of Moscheles himself, his deeds and collisions, climaxes and strokes of fate. Kroll's obvious respect and admiration toward his protagonist is not a stretch of the imagination resulting from a researcher's fondness. By all accounts, Moscheles was a respectable and admirable person, and any biographer would be in happy harmony with him. Kroll's text is good prose, friendly, but without familiarity. It draws the reader closer to the epoch and the epoch closer to us. Reading the book, we palpate and smell the world in which that great musician lived and worked. Or, perhaps the opposite would be more correct: worked and lived. There are

words of Leon Botstein that could very well be applied to Moscheles: “I don’t work to live, I live to work.”<sup>1</sup>

And here comes the key word from the title that does not appear among the key words: Changing. “And the Changing World” says the title. The question whether the world of music changed by itself during Moscheles’s life, or if somebody, and there was no one more than Moscheles himself who brought so many dramatic changes into this world that perhaps it would not even be an exaggeration to re-word the title to read *Moscheles Changing the World of Musical Europe*. Indeed, we learn that Moscheles was mainly responsible for many crucial features of modern musical culture. For example, introducing Bach and Handel in concert programs on a large scale, he, for the first time in history, created bi-temporality of repertoire. If, in his youth, a composer, performer-virtuoso and improviser were combined in one person, and maintained mostly their own or a contemporaneous repertoire and amused the public with improvisation, from Moscheles’s practice and on, the public began to be served two main courses: old classics as an immortal culture canon and modern art (with optional and gradually declining improvisation). Of course, it could not come as an abstract idea. Its implementation would have been impossible if not for the fall of aristocratic culture, which drew after it a fall of the institution of the court *kappellmeister*; if not the separation of the functions of composer and performer; if not for the new urban bourgeois audience; if not for the development of music printing technology that made music more affordable for broad circles of music lovers; if not for Romantic mythology about genius composers of an idealized past, and many other factors. Kroll especially underlines the role of Moscheles in establishing the form of piano recitals. See his Chapter 8 “Le Concert C’est Moscheles: Historical Soirées and the Invention of the Solo Piano Recital.”

Moscheles also created the outline of the basic symphonic repertoire, placing Beethoven’s largest works as foundational pillars for the new temple of music. Moscheles introduced Mendelssohn to England and made him resonant and large. In 1836, his *St. Paul* was performed in Liverpool, even before the founding of the city’s orchestra, by which Mendelssohn was later commissioned to write the cantata celebrating the opening of the new hall—prevented, alas, by his death. When today Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra under baton of Vasily Petrenko celebrates 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the orchestra with mounting Mendelssohn’s *Elijah*, we hardly put it together with Moscheles’ contribution in designing concert life in England where he worked during twenty-one year. Chapter 3 “A Home in England, 1825-1846” reveals a long period, full of interesting and dramatic moments in his multifaceted creative activity, which could last indefinitely longer if not Mendelssohn’s invitation to join him in Leipzig conservatory. The Idyl lasted only a year, ending with his young friend’s premature death. A terrible blow for Moscheles, who overcame his grief by continuation of Mendelssohn’s tradition.

Mendelssohn’s image beautifully towers above the impressive gallery of people with whom Moscheles built new music life. (Chapter 7 “A Friendship Like No Other: Mendelssohn and Moscheles”). Exceptional friendship and brotherhood connected them first of all in understanding of music itself. How much one would give today for witnessing their playing and improvising in four hands? Or their, with Clara Schumann, performance of Bach’s triple concerto! But even more deep and important was their unity in social, educational, aesthetic, historical and other aspects, which, accumulated in Leipzig school due to their joined efforts,

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1 Interview with Leon Botstein: 35 Years (and Counting) as President of Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY By Olivia J. Abel (<http://www.hvmag.com/core/pagetools.php?pageid=8698&url=%2FHudson-Valley-Magazine%2FAugust-2011%2FInterview-with-Leon-Botstein-35-Years-and-Counting-as-President-of-Bard-College-Annandale-on-Hudson-NY%2F&mode=print>, accessed 19 January 2016)

founded the very Ethos of modern professional music culture. Chapter 5 “The Pianist, The Pedagogue and his Pianos” provides much important knowledge of history of modern pianism.

Relations with Beethoven, the great man, divined by his contemporaries, whose last years and days had Moscheles faithfully involved in his practical matters and needs. In Chapter 6 “Encounters with Beethoven and his Music” scrupulously cleans Kroll Moscheles’ role in Beethoven’s life, peeling a bad husk stamped by Schindler’s lies, not without anti-Semitic overtones triggered by jealousy.

Jewish question, in many (if not all – either directly or indirectly) ways affected the life and activities of Moscheles (see Chapter 9, “The Jewish Musician”). Converted to Christianity, obviously for facilitating better integration in English institution, and particularly to Lutheran confession, probably with preview of continuation his career in Leipzig, Moscheles nevertheless could not solve unsolvable Jewish problems in non-Jewish society. While Moscheles himself hardly left any discussion of this point, and, as Mark Kroll says, there are “more questions than answers” (p. 335), the author neither avoids nor pedalizes it, limiting himself with tactful account of relevant issues.

Finishing the main text of the book (supplied with vast reference material) with Chapter 10 “Reminiscences of Moscheles’ Family by his Great-Great-Grandson Henry Roche”, Mark Kroll contextualizes Moscheles even deeper, reminding us how complexly interlaced is culture in the world where people are much closer to each other than they often think.

The entire book, while being a marvelous biography, is extremely valuable contribution to the history of European music in general.

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