Introduction

The early instrumental works of Felix Mendelssohn are quite extraordinary for their pioneering use of cyclic form. This series of pieces, dating from the latter half of the 1820s, takes up the idea of thematic recall and ongoing development across the separate movements of an instrumental work to a degree unprecedented in previous music and one unsurpassed until the late works of Franck some sixty years later. At a time when Beethoven was still alive, and predating virtually all other attempts in the medium, the young composer was developing a formal principle that would have a decisive impact on the idea of instrumental form for the next century and a half. In works such as the Piano Sextet (1824), the B minor Piano Quartet, Op. 3 (1824–5), the Octet (1825), Piano Sonatas in E and B♭ major (1826 and 1827) and the A minor and E♭ Quartets, Opp. 13 and 12 (1827 and 1829), the principles of thematic recollection and metamorphosis are fused into a new paradigm of musical form and unity. Even more intriguingly, after the age of twenty, with this succession of cyclic masterpieces behind him, Mendelssohn seemed to turn his back on this principle that he had so brilliantly espoused in these youthful works. His instrumental music would continue to grow in range and depth, but the radical formal designs and cyclic recall of these earlier pieces would be modified into the more subtle structures of his mature music and a more restrained process of cyclical thematic growth and transformation.

This book investigates this remarkable use of cyclic form in Mendelssohn's music, both in his works of the 1820s and throughout the subsequent development of this principle in his later music of the 1830/40s. This topic is set against the wider backdrop of the problem of instrumental form in the Romantic era; as the first composer in the generation following Beethoven who engaged convincingly with the compositional issue of musical form and large-scale coherence in instrumental music, Mendelssohn assumes considerable importance here, and these cyclic pieces form a significant part of his achievement. A further subtext of this investigation is a desire to contribute towards understanding cyclic form and its development across the nineteenth century more generally, a subject which has received

remarkably little attention. Mendelssohn is without doubt the most pivotal figure here in its early development before Franck and the French school of the late nineteenth century.

This conception of cyclic form is one which has notable implications for other aspects of musical experience and perception, most specifically here the phenomenology of form and conceptions of musical time. A remarkable characteristic of Mendelssohn's music is the linking of formal sophistication and impressive musical logic with a distinctly poetic, quasi-narrative quality. This mixture of formal strength and poetic content provides particularly fruitful ground for hermeneutic reflection. Nowhere is such reconciliation between form and expressive content more apparent than in these cyclic works, where the often radical formal designs are intimately – indeed intrinsically – related to the expressive realisation of the music. Especially in this regard, the structure of cyclic works play with listeners' perceptions of form and time, which can have a major impact on our conceptions of music's expressive narrative.

The cyclic procedures found in Mendelssohn's music introduce, it will be argued, new and fascinating conceptions of temporal experience and aesthetic journey. Notions of musical memory and multiple time arise from such structural implications, which require new approaches in order to understand their full potential. To this end, I will be drawing on philosophical and literary views of time, subjectivity and memory ranging from Plato to Bergson in order to interpret Mendelssohn's procedures in these pieces. This study is therefore not just an explication of form, but a consideration of how Mendelssohn's cyclic procedures relate to our perception of form and, through a combination of analysis and interpretation, the particular expressive course of his music. Form merges with content, technique with expression, and analysis with hermeneutics.

Perhaps surprisingly, given the significance of this music and current interest in the concepts of musical memory, subjectivity and history, this topic has hardly been explored in any detail at all. Indeed, there has been little detailed analytical study of Mendelssohn's music in general, so a major study here has considerable significance not just in the realm of Mendelssohn studies but also in the wider context of the position and understanding of this composer within his time and the music of his century.[1]

[1] The one major work in this area is Friedhelm Krummacher's landmark study of the chamber music for strings, which originated as his doctorial thesis and was published in 1978 as *Mendelssohn – Der Komponist: Studien zur Kammermusik für Streicher* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink). While Krummacher's study is without doubt the most important analytical account of

It is a fact not gone unobserved by Mendelssohn scholars that it might seem rather ironic to write about the music of a composer famous for his own reservation about the capacity of words confronted with music. But though Mendelssohn's protestation that words are unclear and unwieldy in dealing with the aesthetic experience of music rings true to many music lovers, our understanding of music is nevertheless importantly shaped by the verbal commentary surrounding and often inextricably intermingled with it. One could reasonably argue that Mendelssohn's relative lack of prominence within scholarship (strikingly disproportionate given his music's importance and unceasing popularity) has been partly a consequence of this reticence to explain and justify his music in verbal terms, with the resultant lack of ready verbal handholds or engaging contexts from which it could be interpreted leaving a vacuum that was easily occupied by the malicious extramusical discourse promulgated later by rivals and critics. Thus my intention here in analysing and interpreting Mendelssohn's music is to provide a richer cultural, historical and philosophical context for understanding and appreciating these works, to transform and deepen our aesthetic receptivity to this music.

Though my discussion grows from a historical and biographical background closely connected with the composer and questions of authorial intent make their appearance in several places, no attempt is made to limit the wider discussion to ideas that Mendelssohn may have or could have known. If the primary reason why we are still interested in this music now is because it speaks to us of something that is felt to be meaningful and important, trying to overcome our own historical situatedness through the chimera of an abstract antiquarianism is not only impossible but of questionable value for its own sake. The aim of this study is to widen our appreciation of this music's aesthetic significance for us, a hermeneutic endeavour that is richer when taking into account the historical context and beliefs of Mendelssohn and his time, but also in considering how we as historically situated perceivers may view it.[2]

Mendelssohn's music, his focus on formal and thematic construction within movements unavoidably leaves a good deal of the cyclic aspects of these pieces unexplored. Also significant, though markedly personal in judgement, is Greg Vitercik's *The Early Works of Felix Mendelssohn: A Study in the Romantic Sonata Style* (Philadelphia, PA: Gordon and Breach, 1992), which contains valuable studies of Mendelssohn's Octet and Quintet, Op. 18.

[2] Without belabouring this methodological point, it will be apparent that these views have a substantial intellectual background in the German nineteenth- and twentieth-century hermeneutic tradition. To rehistoricise the terms of the debate, Mendelssohn himself had personal and intellectual contact with Friedrich Schleiermacher in 1820s Berlin, and his own views and activities (discussed in Chapter 2) support this critical reading of history.

In the chapters that follow, I will be taking up a broadly chronological account of Mendelssohn's cyclic works. The idea of cyclic form is one which might well be expected in the early nineteenth century, as I argue in Chapter 1. This outlines the notion of cyclic form, trying to elucidate a definition of this problematic term and exploring it from both theoretical and historical perspectives, before tracing the development of this idea in the music of composers preceding Mendelssohn and across Mendelssohn's early works prior to 1825. There follow accounts of four of the composer's most significant cyclic works from the subsequent years – the Octet Op. 20, Piano Sonata Op. 6 and the Quartets Opp. 13 and 12 – which take up the central four chapters of the book and form the heart of my study.

The past played perhaps a more important role in Mendelssohn's music than in that of any other composer. Chapter 2 approaches his first major cyclic work, the Octet, from the perspective of the composer's strong historical sense, taking up ideas of musical memory and history as found embodied within the cyclic structure of this piece. The Octet enacts a coming to self-consciousness of its own musical history, which closely parallels near-contemporary views in early nineteenth-century Germany. This chapter sets up a historically based theory from the biographical and cultural context of these works, exploring in particular the composer's extraordinary personal connections with Goethe and Hegel. This will lead to the development of theories in later chapters that are more wide-ranging, moving from Neoplatonism to Bergson, Proust and Freud, in order to investigate the implications for memory and musical time that Mendelssohn's work may suggest.

The following two chapters take up the themes of time and memory, in relation to two of the composer's subsequent cyclic works, the E major Piano Sonata Op. 6 and A minor Quartet Op. 13. These works enact a circular journey, a mytho-poetic homecoming to an idyllic state left at their opening, an idea found in Western culture since antiquity and seen particularly emphatically in German society in the early nineteenth century. Mendelssohn's music from these years, I will be arguing here, participates in these universal myths of the return to a lost golden age, the search for a vanished past and the regaining of time. Though starting out from the cultural context of early nineteenth-century Germany (above all the work of Schiller and Novalis), these chapters makes use of broader ideas of time, memory and history to illuminate Mendelssohn's music, specifically the theories of Bergson and Proust.

In Chapter 5, this musical capacity for memory is seen now in an altered light, taking on a darker, more troubled aspect. Ostensibly, Mendelssohn's

E♭ Quartet is one of his most relaxed and seemingly trouble-free works, though a closer inspection of the cyclic processes at work underneath this beguiling surface reveals a visage anything but so easy-going. Instead, the unexpected and unsettling recall of past experiences within this work is seen in a light analogous to the psychoanalytical notion of trauma, this part of the study approaching Mendelssohn's quartet from the theoretical standpoint of Sigmund Freud's later codification of this idea.

Historical and more specifically biographical aspects return in the final chapter, which explores the various reasons why the composer felt the need to move away from the particular cyclic designs adopted in his works from the later 1820s, and the consequences this has for the cyclic elements manifested in his subsequent music from the later 1830s onwards. Instead of the open recollection and reminiscence of his teenage years, the cyclic recall of his earlier music would be replaced by a more subtle process of thematic growth and metamorphosis and an even firmer command of musical form, which contrasts with the more overtly radical and immediately impressive designs of his youth.

The centrepiece of Mendelssohn's mature cyclic style is the Symphony No. 3 in A minor, a work started in 1829 but only completed twelve years later in 1842. The musical progression of the symphony mirrors the more general movement in Mendelssohn's music from the past-haunted landscape and ruins of the opening movement to the ultimately affirmative peroration of the close of the work; from the inescapable recall of the symphony's introduction at the close of the first movement to its final transformation in the fourth-movement coda, crystallising in a nutshell the development of Mendelssohn's cyclic technique across these years. But this cyclic progression is fused with broader aspects of the musical construction which cannot easily be examined out of context. My account of the symphony, then, stands not only for Mendelssohn's mature cyclic technique, but inevitably also as a paradigm and exploration of his mature music in general.

1 The idea of cyclic form

The very term 'cyclic form' is confusing. Hans Keller was exaggerating only a little when he described it as 'one of the most senseless technical terms in the rich history of musicological nonsense'.[1] In fact, it is almost obligatory for commentators to offer some brief apology for their continued use of the term. Charles Rosen, for instance, states that '"cyclical form" is an ambiguous as well as a vague term', whilst James Webster, in his influential study of Haydn's 'Farewell' Symphony, prefaces his text with a disclaimer on the unsuitability of the terms 'cyclic' and 'through-composed', before going on to use them nevertheless.[2]

The term 'cyclic', as applied to music since c. 1750, can be used to describe:

1) a work where part of one movement is recalled in another (examples include Haydn's Symphony No. 46, Beethoven's Fifth and Ninth Symphonies, Mendelssohn's Octet, Schubert's E♭ Trio, Schumann's Piano Quintet, and later pieces by Franck, Brahms, Dvořák, Elgar and Mahler);
2) a work where separate movements are based on similar thematic material, often accompanied by the merging of individual movements (examples include Schubert's 'Wanderer' Fantasy, Mendelssohn's Third and Schumann's Fourth Symphonies, Liszt's B minor Sonata, and numerous works of Franck);
3) a collection of miniatures, which make full sense only when considered as a whole (archetypically the Romantic song-cycle, but also including piano collections such as Schumann's *Carnaval* or *Davidsbündlertänze*).

Of the three types of musical cyclicism given above, the last is least related to the other two, and it is confusing that a common terminology may be given to both a collection of miniatures and to an integrated multi-movement form involving recall or transformation of material across movements. The idea of a set of small-scale movements or fragments that

[1] Hans Keller, 'The Classical Romantics: Schumann and Mendelssohn', in H.H. Schönzeler (ed.), *Of German Music: A Symposium* (London: Oswald Wolff, 1976), p. 185.
[2] Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation* (London: Harper Collins, 1996), p. 88; James Webster, *Haydn's 'Farewell' Symphony and the Idea of Classical Style: Through-Composition and Cyclic Integration in his Instrumental Music* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 7–8.

form a cycle or chain does have, in common with the other two definitions, the notion of a collective bond whereby the individual part is dependent on the whole for its ultimate meaning and coherence, but it is confusing to conflate this with the idea of musical recurrence in (usually more substantial) instrumental forms or genres.

Here it is useful to distinguish between what can be termed a musical 'cycle' and what, conversely, may be taken to constitute 'cyclic form'.[3] A cycle, in its most general sense, refers to a succession of individual movements that go to make up a work, such as the mass, suite, sonata, symphony or song-cycle. It can be taken to refer to music from almost any period and is correspondingly wide in its definition. In practice, however, when referring to the music of the later eighteenth century onwards, the term cycle is usually reserved for a collection of miniatures (such as the song or piano cycle), as distinct from the conventional three- or four-movement sonata cycle. Cyclic form, on the other hand, is a more specific term used to describe a large-scale instrumental work, normally from the nineteenth or early twentieth century, in which the same or very similar thematic material is used in at least two different movements. It is thus a more specific term in definition and historical usage.

A work in cyclic form, then, is a particular type of cycle in which the connections between the individual parts are intensified and made explicit. As a consequence, the divisions between the two types are not necessarily clear-cut: a work can be a cycle and in cyclic form, though normally in practice the two are distinct. As a rule, for instance, most instrumental pieces in cyclic form consist of three or four large-scale movements with thematic connections or recall between them. But a work such as Beethoven's C♯ minor Quartet, frequently cited as an early example of cyclic form, has more similarity with a cycle of seven interdependent movements than a conventional four-movement quartet. Likewise, the song cycle or collection of piano miniatures can also involve cyclic recall, as is found in Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte* or Schumann's *Davidsbündlertänze*, *Dichterliebe* and *Frauenliebe und -leben*, though these would not usually be described as being in cyclic form.[4] A cycle can thus exhibit characteristics of cyclic form,

[3] This distinction is found, for instance, in *The New Harvard* and *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*.

[4] A further possibility for fusing these two types of cyclicism is given in the nineteenth century by collections of pieces that feature thematic cyclic recall within a multi-movement (sometimes multi-opus) cycle for often quasi-programmatic reasons, such as Grieg's 'Scenes from Folklife' Op. 19 (1871), Smetana's *Má vlast* (1874–9), and Dvořák's 'Nature, Life and Love' trilogy of overtures, Opp. 91–3 (1892). Grieg's ten books of *Lyric Pieces* provide an even more notable cyclical conception with the sixty-sixth and final piece, 'Remembrances' (Op. 71 No. 7, 1901), returning to the music of the first, 'Arietta' (Op. 12 No. 1, 1867), now transformed into a slow waltz.

and all cyclic forms are by definition a type of cycle, in its broadest sense, but the two concepts are not in essence the same thing. Their most general common characteristic, the idea of relationship of parts to whole, is too vague an attribute to support a common definition. The cyclic form of Mendelssohn's Op. 13 Quartet (1827) has nothing in common with the contemporaneous cycle that is Schubert's *Winterreise*. We have to recognise that we are dealing with two different, though not incompatible, concepts.

Hence cyclic instrumental works – those in cyclic form – are usually distinct from those musical cycles embodied in the song cycle or set of piano miniatures, and consequently the substantial literature on the song cycle or the notion of the cycle in the nineteenth century is of limited use in considering such instrumental pieces.[5] Indeed, it is difficult to establish when and where (let alone why) this terminology originated. One looks in vain for any description of a thematically unified multi-movement instrumental work as cyclic in the first half of the nineteenth century. References to the cycle or cyclic works, the *Zyklus* or *Kreis* in German, abound, but these refer to the collection of miniatures and not to what we have termed cyclic form above.[6] The term seems not to have been mentioned, for instance, by either Mendelssohn or Schumann to describe this formal principle, both of whom speak of the relationship of whole to parts and of intimate thematic connections within multi-movement works without using any term corresponding to cyclic. It seems that this terminology was codified well after the

[5] For an overview of the genesis, meaning and development of the concept of the cycle in relation to the genre of the Romantic song cycle, see Ruth Bingham, 'The Song Cycle in German-Speaking Countries, 1790–1840: Approaches to a Changing Genre', unpublished PhD thesis, Cornell University (1993); David Ferris, *Schumann's 'Eichendorff Liederkreis' and the Genre of the Romantic Cycle* (Oxford University Press, 2001), chapters 1 and 3; and Barbara Turchin, 'Robert Schumann's Song-Cycles in the Context of the Early Nineteenth-Century *Liederkreis*', unpublished PhD thesis, Columbia University (1981). In all three authors the notion of the cycle is taken to refer to a collection of miniatures and not in the sense I am using it here. The extensive literature relating the cycle-collection to the Romantic fragment is also less relevant applied to instrumental cyclic form, where individual movements are typically more autonomous and internally coherent and the cyclical recall helps integrate the larger work in a manner usually absent in the more 'incomplete' cycle collection. (See Richard Kramer, *Distant Cycles: Schubert and the Conceiving of Song* (University of Chicago Press, 1994), esp. pp. 8–9, or Ferris, *Schumann's 'Eichendorff Liederkreis'*, for a mildly revisionist deconstruction of the trope of unity in the fragment-inspired song-cycle.)

[6] For instance, Beethoven describes his Bagatelles Op. 126 as a 'Ciclus von Kleinigkeiten' in his sketches. Schumann, referring to his Op. 24 Heine *Liederkreis*, speaks of a 'Cyklus (zusammenhängend)' (letter to Clara Wieck, 24 February 1840, in Berthold Litzmann, *Clara Schumann, Ein Künstlerleben: Nach Tagebüchern und Briefen*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1902), vol. I, p. 407), but this, along with the Eichendorff set Op. 39, is one of his cycles that does not feature any thematic recall between songs. The sets which do – *Dichterliebe* and *Frauenliebe* – are conversely not designated as *Kreise*.

principle which it describes had become common practice. The first use of the term in musical aesthetics appears to be in 1857, in Vischer's *Ästhetik oder Wissenschaft des Schönen*, to denote a work exhibiting a spiritual unity across several movements, and 'cyclic form' was afforded its first individual entry in a music dictionary by Arrey von Dommer in 1865.[7] Its primary dissemination, however, seems to have arisen through César Franck and his pupils. While Franck himself was fairly reticent about the cyclic qualities of his compositions, Vincent d'Indy in particular was a keen activist for the Franck school and the 'principle of cyclic composition' which it espoused.[8]

The terminology 'cyclic form' is thus not the most happy of inspirations, since it is easily confused with the contemporary notion of the cycle and hence ambiguous in its definition. Furthermore, it is misnamed. Indeed, it could be argued that it is, by some definitions, often neither cyclic nor a form. The word cyclic derives from the Greek κυκλικός, circular, which in turn comes from the word for circle, κύκλος. The concept of cyclicism abstracted from the immediate discussion of common musical usage thus implies some sense of circular motion, an overall trajectory which returns to its starting point. A design which might merit the term cyclic is hence one where the end is near-identical to the beginning, thus creating a frame to the piece (a specific subsection of the literally recalling type of cyclicism, definition 1 above), or, potentially, a work in which the end can be thought of in some way as connecting up to the start, suggesting that the piece can start again or go round continuously in cycles. In both these designs the form created is circular, hence cyclic in this particular sense.

Properly, then, a work which ends with the music of the beginning is cyclic in the most literal sense. I will designate this specific type of musical cyclicism as being *circular*. However, a cycle can also mean more loosely the general idea of recall, the principle of return and repetition. A musical work need not only be one large cycle, but may consist of several returns or cycles. Hence any work in which music from a previous movement is recalled and reused in a later one can be termed cyclic. Thus, in itself, thematic affinity

[7] Friedrich Theodor Vischer, *Ästhetik oder Wissenschaft des Schönen: Zum Gebrauche für Vorlesungen von Dr. Friedrich Theodor Vischer*, 3 vols. (Reutlingen, Leipzig and Stuttgart: Carl Mäcken, 1846–57), vol. III (Stuttgart, 1857), § 786, pp. 950–2: 'Cyclische Compositionsform'; Arrey von Dommer, 'Cyclische Formen', in *Musikalisches Lexikon: auf Grundlage des Lexicon's von H. Ch. Koch* (Heidelberg: J.C.B. Mohr, 1865), pp. 225–7 (though this entry actually refers to the more general sense of a multi-movement symphony or sonata cycle). See further Ludwig Finscher, 'Zyklus', in Ludwig Finscher (ed.), *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 20 vols. (Kassel and Stuttgart: Bärenreiter and Metzler, 1998), vol. IX, cols. 2528–37.

[8] See Vincent d'Indy, *Cours de Composition*, ed. Auguste Sérieyx, 3 vols. in 4 books (Paris: A. Durand, 1903–50), especially the chapter 'La sonate cyclique' (vol. II.i (1909), pp. 375–433).

between movements of a work – even possibly an ongoing development and resolution – should strictly speaking not really warrant the epithet cyclic. (Beethoven's Op. 131 Quartet or Schubert's 'Wanderer' Fantasy, two works that are often cited as being cyclic, are therefore slightly uncertain inclusions in the canon of cyclic works.) This term implies, rather, the idea of recurrence, which, however, must be distinguished from recapitulation determined by the demands of normative designs such as sonata form. Cyclic form, therefore, involves musical recall above the level of the individual movement.[9] In practice, however, a work with extremely close thematic links between movements – even if these do not constitute literal recall of previously heard material – is usually designated as cyclic.

A further conception of the cycle, at its broadest and most vague, relates to the idea of separate parts forming links on a chain. This notion is in many ways misnamed, as the resulting structure is not necessarily circular and hence has no apparent relation to the etymological meaning of the word, but is commonly accepted as a definition. This is 'cyclic' in the same sense as all multi-movement works are cyclic, insofar as they are parts of a whole. A work which features an ongoing development or continuity across its movements without recall or close transformation might be more aptly termed 'through-composed'.

Since a work in cyclic form is one in which material is reused in separate movements, its designation as a form is furthermore also partly misleading, if by form we mean a distinct architectonic design capable of being repeated and which can therefore serve as a generic archetype. The term cyclic does not define the structure of an individual movement or determine the shape of the overall work, but only more generally describes the relationship between its movements. Thus at the level of the individual movement, the cyclic principle is typically in dialogue with an underlying generic form such as the sonata. In this sense, cyclicism is more akin to a structural principle or even a deforming process which works above or against traditional form. Cyclic form is thus the name given to a range of structures which result from what we could call a cyclic principle. As a consequence there is no single structural design common to all works in cyclic form but only a range of

[9] An exception to this rule could be made for a single-movement structure whose coda corresponds to the introduction, since the resulting form is circular and exists outside the bounds of sonata-space. Examples include the first movements of Mozart's Quintet K. 593, Haydn's Symphony No. 103, Schubert's Ninth and Mendelssohn's Third Symphonies, and the overtures to Mendelssohn's *Die Heimkehr aus der Fremde* and *St Paul*, and that to Wagner's *Tannhäuser*. There seems, however, little point in designating such works as cyclic; at best, one can speak of a cyclic frame.