

In 1841, Sophocles's *Antigone* premiered at the Prussian royal court with staging by Ludwig Tieck and music by Felix Mendelssohn. Commissioned by King Friedrich Wilhelm IV, this production aimed to faithfully re-create aspects of Greek tragedy. It thus used the recently completed metrical translation of J. J. Donner and featured an elaborate reconstruction of the ancient playing space as well as an exclusively male chorus to sing the odes. For Mendelssohn, however, the music quickly became a vehicle for reconciling audiences to the otherness of Greek tragedy. For after initially devising a plan to emulate the presumed sound of ancient music, he turned to a contemporary musical language in hopes of conveying what he described as the "mood" of each individual chorus—something possible only by drawing upon familiar musical styles that, for nineteenth-century listeners, possessed certain extramusical associations. At the same time, though, Mendelssohn subtly evoked elements of Greek practice by, for example, shaping the rhythm of the melodic line to reflect the prosody of Donner's metrical translation and using different kinds of vocal delivery—singing, recitative, chant-like music, and spoken text—to suggest significant changes in the original poetic meter.

The 1841 *Antigone* thus offers an example of a production that aimed to be at once "authentic" and modernizing, with music as a mediating force that bridged the divide between past and present. Indeed, several commentators of the day singled out the music as a crucial factor in the play's positive reception, likening the composer's task to that of a translator. Inspired by the success of this production, similar ones were staged throughout Germany (and abroad), including Euripides's *Medea* (1843) with music by Wilhelm Taubert, as well as Sophocles's *Oedipus at Colonus* (1845) and *Oedipus the King* (1851), with music by Mendelssohn and Franz Lachner, respectively. This paper considers the role that music played in these productions as a whole, with a particular focus on the manner in which music served as a means of engaging spectators with Greek tragedy by speaking to their modern aesthetic sensibilities. For instance, Mendelssohn's use of a wind-band accompaniment for the opening chorus of *Antigone* would have called to mind a type of music often heard at large, outdoor festivals marking important political and military events, and as such would have highlighted the ode's celebratory and martial associations in a way that resonated with nineteenth-century German culture.

With its attempts to recover the past and its effort to use modern music as an inroad to Greek tragedy, the 1841 production of *Antigone* and those that followed in its wake implicitly challenge the perspective of present-day critics who tend to view performances of ancient drama as *either* historicizing (and therefore gesturing toward the past) *or* as modernizing (and therefore geared toward contemporary tastes). What's more, the mid nineteenth-century German revival of Greek tragedy raises the question of whether music might serve a similar function in twenty-first century productions of ancient drama—a question that will be addressed, though by no means definitively answered, in the concluding portion of this paper.