

The paper I would like to propose for the panel aims to consider some aspects of Mendelssohn's musical experience in Berlin between 1840 and 1845, when he was given by king Friedrich Wilhelm IV the task of helping with his music the renaissance and the widespread promotion of ancient Greek tragedy: a particular focus I would like to put on the structure and the style he chose for the music he created for the Sophoclean plays *Antigone* and *Oedipus in Kolonos*.

Mendelssohn worked together with other famous artists at the king's court, like Ludwig Tieck, and he got a sincere and important support by a renowned classicist, Johann Gustav Droysen (Momigliano 1985); with him, Mendelssohn had an intense correspondence especially about the music he composed for the tragedy *Antigone*, which was staged in Potsdam the 28<sup>th</sup> of October, 1841 (Wehmer 1959). Droysen himself was so admired by his friend's new music, that he wrote an enthusiastic review on the first supplement of the *Spenerische Zeitung* of the 25<sup>th</sup> of April, 1842 (Hübner 1894).

Mendelssohn worked not on the original text of Sophocles, but on the metrical translation of the *Antigone* made by Johann Jakob Christian Donner in 1839. At first, the composer tried to recreate sounds that could be as much as possible connected with the ancient poetry; for the *strophe* and the *antistrophe* of the choruses, he chose to treat the music with an ancient mood, composing unison choral recitatives (which had to remember the anapaestic verse of the original text) and playing a soft accompaniment with flutes, tubas and harps; furthermore, he turned to modern melodrama for the verses of the two main characters of the tragedy. The result was brilliant, and the scene music for *Antigone*, op.55, was a success even in the next years (e.g. in 1845, at Covent Garden, it was played forty-five times) (Andraschke 1997; Seaton 2001; Flashar 2004; Geary 2006).

In 1843, Mendelssohn began to work on the *Oedipus in Kolonos*, and quite reproduced the structure variety of the previous work, just with some more innovations: in the choral sections, he was less tied to the rigorousness of the choriambic dimeter; he gave emphasis to the pathos of the lyric parts and to the melodramatic impact of the recitatives. The composition had not the same success of the *Antigone*, but it was again a useful proof of the effort made by musician to meet the exigencies of king Friedrich Wilhelm and his contemporaries, without altering the original text and the ancient verses, but rather mixing them with modern music moods (Seaton 2001; Flashar 2004).