

“Die Nachtigall”

A pedagogical work-through

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The piece

Mendelssohn’s short strophic setting sings Goethe’s brief text three times. The first time through Mendelssohn uses the soprano and alto voices in duet (mm. 1-13). The second time through, the tenors and basses sing what the sopranos and altos had sung before, while the women’s voices flesh out implied harmonies and add running thirds as the men crescendo (mm. 13-25). The final verse begins at a hushed *pianissimo* dynamic, the sopranos taking the melody over a trio of accompanying voices. At measure 33 Mendelssohn turns briefly to the relative minor and thrice repeats the text “*singt alte liebe Lieder*” as he builds to a climax at measure 38. A coda accompanied by a tonic pedal tone in the soprano brings the piece to conclusion.

Translation and Pronunciation

Ger.	Die	Nach- ti-	gall,	sie	war	ent- fernt,
I.P.A.	di	‘na- xtl-	gal	zi	var	ɛnt- ‘fɛrnt
Eng.	<i>The</i>	<i>nightingale,</i>		<i>who</i>	<i>was</i>	<i>away,</i>

Ger.	der	Früh- ling	lockt	sie	wie- der;
I.P.A.	der*	‘fry- liŋ	lɔkt	zi	‘vi- dər*
Eng.	<i>the</i>	<i>springtime</i>	<i>lured</i>	<i>her</i>	<i>back.</i>

Ger.	Was	neu- es	hat	sie	nicht	ge- lernt,
I.P.A.	vas	‘no:l- əs	hat	zi	nɪçt	gə- ‘lɛrnt
Eng.	<i>what</i>	<i>new</i>	<i>did</i>	<i>she</i>	<i>not</i>	<i>learn,</i>

Ger.	Singt	al- te	lie- be	Lie- der.
I.P.A.	zɪŋt	‘al- tɐ	‘li- bɐ	‘li- dər*
Eng.	<i>sings</i>	<i>old</i>	<i>beloved</i>	<i>songs.</i>

“The nightingale who was away was lured back by the Springtime.

Having learnt nothing new, she sang old, beloved songs.”

-Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

Recommendations for teaching

1. Solfege (*Ab* = do) and count-singing (“1-and-2-and-TEE-and”) will ensure accurate learning.
3. Teach text separate from notes and rhythms. Add it only after fundamentals are secure.
3. After notes, rhythms, and text are secure, add subtle rubato at phrase ends.
3. Form quartets early; this chamber music requires shared instincts and lots of rehearsal.