

older tradition which he came to believe was under threat, if not actually at its end.

On occasion Furtwängler would take a stand in defending those under attack from the Nazis whom he believed deserving of better treatment—though as Allen points out, his open letter to Joseph Goebbels (11 April 1933) asking that ‘Walter, Klemperer, Reinhardt and others be permitted to express themselves through their art’ is, when examined as a whole, ‘ambivalent and self-contradictory’. His defence of Hindemith in 1934 when the planned Berlin premiere of the opera *Mathis der Maler* was cancelled after he had already championed the related symphony was equally ineffective: like the three Jewish artists mentioned above, Hindemith would eventually decide to emigrate.

Certain of Furtwängler’s pre-war writings were ‘sanitized’ (Allen’s word) for postwar publication. There’s something rather nauseating about his 1947 Mendelssohn Centenary Address, which begins, ‘It was not all that long ago that a bigoted racist doctrine denied

that Mendelssohn was a German composer’. Yet in his Brahms Centenary Address (16 May 1933), he uses the words ‘German’, ‘Germanness’ and ‘non-German’ seven times in eight lines in praising Brahms’s musical patrimony.

Turning to his own position as a composer, in a memorandum dated July 1937 Furtwängler noted that ‘The underground Bolshevization of music today ... is almost complete. It is hardly possible any more for someone like me, who stands for and writes a different kind of music, seriously to be heard’; yet it was in these years that he felt that the climate had altered sufficiently for him once more to put pen to paper for the first time in decades.

Allen is a comprehensively fair-minded commentator on a great musician caught up in a much bigger historical project to whose cultural apparatus he gave a certain superficial respectability. Few will disagree with his verdict that ‘as a result, he became mired in an ideological quicksand from which he can never be fully extricated’. GEORGE HALL

## **The Bible in Music**

*By Robert Ignatius Letellier. Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 551 pp. £70.99. ISBN: 978-1-4438-7314-7*

Whether you approach this subject as a true believer or a cultural historian, it’s certainly the case that—only a little less than in art history—a knowledge of Judeo-Christian mythology is important when it comes to appreciating the musical repertoire. Christianity in particular has been a major if not always very surprising (given the church’s role in promoting music) source of inspiration to composers. Despite Delius’s waspish observation on Parry—that he would have set the whole of the Bible to music had he lived long enough—it’s interesting to reflect on which books of the Bible have especially inspired (or not) composers and to be reminded of which biblical characters

have proved most popular operatically (Judith is the unexpected champion here, not just in Baroque opera but right up to Siegfried Matthus’s East German opera of 1985). The answers to such questions are to be found in Robert Ignatius Letellier’s survey, a tome of indeed Bible-like proportions.

A tighter focus would have been welcome. There is of course nothing surprising about oratorios taking their subjects from the Bible, and although it is handy to have so many of them listed here and to see where the lines between oratorio and opera got blurred, this study would have gained useful focus if it had concentrated on opera, ballet and perhaps