

# Exploring the Jewish Presence in German Musical History



Rebecca Cypess

Assistant Professor, Music Full-time faculty member in Musicology

## CURRENT RESEARCH

Without Sara Levy, the legacy of Johann Sebastian Bach may have been lost

We are all familiar with the music of Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), but not many of us may have heard of Sara Levy (1761–1854), a German-Jewish performer, patron, and collector who preserved the music of the past and shaped the music of the future. Although without her, the legacy of Bach and his contemporaries might have been lost, her role in the formation of German musical history has largely been forgotten—or even willfully ignored—perhaps because of her status as a woman and as a Jew. Dr. Rebecca Cypess, Assistant Professor of Music at Rutgers University, seeks to restore Sara Levy to her place in history, recover her perspective on the music she collected and commissioned, and hear this music—much of it completely unknown today—once again. In the present age, marked by religious conflict, Sara Levy's efforts to forge a common musical tradition accessible to both Christians and Jews serve as an instructive model for tolerance, coexistence, and creative expression.

A student of Johann Sebastian Bach's eldest son, Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, Sara Levy lived through the period of the Enlightenment and helped cultivate an interest in earlier music at a moment when historicism was just emerging as an important concept. She preserved much of the local Berlin music of previous generations, and later donated her collection to the Sing-Akademie in Berlin, thereby sharing a musical culture that was otherwise forgotten. In addition, Levy was an important leader within Berlin Jewry, advocating increased education and inter-religious socialization. Music was an important instrument of Enlightenment for Levy and her circle.

An active harpsichordist and fortepianist, Dr. Cypess hopes to bring Sara Levy's...

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## AFFILIATION



Rutgers University

## EDUCATION

- Ph.D. in Music History 2008, Yale University
- M.A. and M.Phil. in Music History 2004 and 2005, respectively, Yale University
- M.A. in Jewish Studies 2004, Yeshiva University
- M.Mus. in Harpsichord Performance 2001, Royal College of Music--London
- B.A. in Music 2000, Cornell University

## AWARDS

- American Association of University Women. Short-term Publication Grant, 2015
- Research Award for the audio recording project "Listening to Sara Levy," 2014
- Major Grant from the New Jersey Council for the Humanities, 2014
- Conference Funding in German Studies from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), 2014
- William H. Scheide Research Grant for research on music in the salon of Sara Levy, 2014

## RESEARCH AREAS

Humanities, History, Music

## FUNDING REQUEST

Your contributions will support Dr. Rebecca Cypess of Rutgers University as she continues to study the role and the history of Sara Levy, unveiling her influence in the formation of German musical history. Donations will help fund a series of concerts and recordings (including post-production editing), a collection of facsimiles of music manuscripts, and summer research. Help uncover a larger piece of musical history; fund Dr. Cypess's research.