

= Felix Mendelssohn =

Jakob Ludwig Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy (German : [ˈjaːk?p ˈluːtvɪç ˈfeːlʔks ˈmɛndl ˈʒoːn baːtʔlɪdɪ] ; 3 February 1809 – 4 November 1847) , born and widely known as Felix Mendelssohn , was a German composer , pianist , organist and conductor of the early Romantic period .

A grandson of the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn , Felix Mendelssohn was born into a prominent Jewish family . He was brought up without religion until the age of seven , when he was baptised as a Reformed Christian . Mendelssohn was recognised early as a musical prodigy , but his parents were cautious and did not seek to capitalise on his talent .

Mendelssohn enjoyed early success in Germany , where he also revived interest in the music of Johann Sebastian Bach , and in his travels throughout Europe . He was particularly well received in Britain as a composer , conductor and soloist , and his ten visits there – during which many of his major works were premiered – form an important part of his adult career . His essentially conservative musical tastes , however , set him apart from many of his more adventurous musical contemporaries such as Franz Liszt , Richard Wagner and Hector Berlioz . The Leipzig Conservatoire (now the University of Music and Theatre Leipzig) , which he founded , became a bastion of this anti @-@ radical outlook .

Mendelssohn wrote symphonies , concerti , oratorios , piano music and chamber music . His best @-@ known works include his Overture and incidental music for A Midsummer Night 's Dream , the Italian Symphony , the Scottish Symphony , the overture The Hebrides , his mature Violin Concerto , and his String Octet . His Songs Without Words are his most famous solo piano compositions . After a long period of relative denigration due to changing musical tastes and antisemitism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries , his creative originality has now been recognised and re @-@ evaluated . He is now among the most popular composers of the Romantic era .

= = Life = =

= = = Childhood = = =

Felix Mendelssohn was born on 3 February 1809 , in Hamburg , at the time an independent city @-@ state , in the same house where , a year later , the dedicatee and first performer of his Violin Concerto , Ferdinand David , was to be born . Mendelssohn 's father was the banker Abraham Mendelssohn , the son of the German Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn . His mother was Lea Salomon , a member of the Itzig family and a sister of Jakob Salomon Bartholdy . Mendelssohn was the second of four children ; his older sister Fanny also displayed exceptional and precocious musical talent .

The family moved to Berlin in 1811 , leaving Hamburg in disguise fearing French revenge for the Mendelssohn bank 's role in breaking Napoleon 's Continental System blockade . Abraham and Lea Mendelssohn sought to give their children – Fanny , Felix , Paul and Rebecka – the best education possible . Fanny became a well @-@ known pianist and amateur composer ; originally Abraham had thought that she , rather than Felix , would be the more musical . However , at that time , it was not considered proper , by either Abraham or Felix , for a woman to have a career in music , so Fanny remained an active but non @-@ professional musician . Abraham was also disinclined to allow Felix to follow a musical career until it became clear that he seriously intended to dedicate himself to it .

Mendelssohn grew up in an intellectual environment . Frequent visitors to the salon organised by his parents at the family 's home in Berlin included artists , musicians and scientists , amongst them Wilhelm and Alexander von Humboldt , and the mathematician Peter Gustav Lejeune Dirichlet (whom Mendelssohn 's sister Rebecka would later marry) . Sarah Rothenburg wrote of the household that " Europe came to their living room " .

= = = Surname = = =

Abraham Mendelssohn renounced the Jewish religion ; he and his wife deliberately decided not to have Felix circumcised , in contravention of the Jewish tradition . Felix and his siblings were first brought up without religious education , and were baptised by a Reformed Church minister in 1816 , at which time Felix was given the additional names Jakob Ludwig . Abraham and his wife Lea were themselves baptised in 1822 , formally adopting the surname Mendelssohn Bartholdy (which they had used since 1812) for themselves and their children . The name Bartholdy was added at the suggestion of Lea 's brother , Jakob Salomon Bartholdy , who had inherited a property of this name in Luisenstadt and adopted it as his own surname . In an 1829 letter to Felix , Abraham explained that adopting the Bartholdy name was meant to demonstrate a decisive break with the traditions of his father Moses : " There can no more be a Christian Mendelssohn than there can be a Jewish Confucius " . On embarking on his musical career , Felix did not entirely drop the name Mendelssohn as Abraham requested , but in deference to his father signed his letters and had his visiting cards printed using the form ' Mendelssohn Bartholdy ' . In 1829 , his sister Fanny wrote to him of " Bartholdy [...] this name that we all dislike " .

= = = Career = = =

= = = Musical education = = =

Like Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart before him , Mendelssohn was regarded as a child prodigy . He began taking piano lessons from his mother when he was six , and at seven was tutored by Marie Bigot in Paris . After the family moved to Berlin , all four Mendelssohn children studied piano with Ludwig Berger , who was himself a former student of Muzio Clementi . From at least May 1819 Felix (and his sister Fanny) studied counterpoint and composition with Carl Friedrich Zelter in Berlin . This was an important influence on his future career . Zelter had almost certainly been recommended as a teacher by his aunt Sarah Levy , who had been a pupil of W. F. Bach and a patron of C. P. E. Bach . Sarah Levy was a talented keyboard player in her own right , often playing with Zelter 's orchestra at the Sing @-@ Akademie zu Berlin , of which she and the Mendelssohn family were leading patrons . Sarah had formed an important collection of Bach family manuscripts which she bequeathed to the Singakademie ; Zelter , whose tastes in music were conservative , was also an admirer of the Bach tradition . This undoubtedly played a significant part in forming Felix Mendelssohn 's musical tastes . His works show his study of Baroque and early classical music . His fugues and chorales especially reflect a tonal clarity and use of counterpoint reminiscent of Johann Sebastian Bach , by whose music he was deeply influenced .

= = = Early maturity = = =

Mendelssohn probably made his first public concert appearance at age 9 , when he participated in a chamber music concert accompanying a horn duo . He was also a prolific composer from an early age . As an adolescent , his works were often performed at home with a private orchestra for the associates of his wealthy parents amongst the intellectual elite of Berlin . Between the ages of 12 and 14 , Mendelssohn wrote 12 string symphonies for such concerts . These works were ignored for over a century , but are now recorded and occasionally played in concerts . He wrote his first published work , a piano quartet , by the time he was 13 . It was probably Abraham Mendelssohn who procured the publication of Mendelssohn 's early piano quartet by the house of Schlesinger . In 1824 , the 15 @-@ year @-@ old wrote his first symphony for full orchestra (in C minor , Op. 11) . At age 16 Mendelssohn wrote his String Octet in E @-@ flat major , the first work which showed the full power of his genius . This Octet and his Overture to Shakespeare 's A Midsummer Night 's Dream , which he wrote a year later in 1826 , are the best @-@ known of his early works . (He later also wrote incidental music for the play , including the famous Wedding March , in 1842) . The Overture is perhaps the earliest example of a concert overture ? that is , a piece not written

deliberately to accompany a staged performance , but to evoke a literary theme in performance on a concert platform ; this was a genre which became a popular form in musical Romanticism .

In 1824 Mendelssohn studied under the composer and piano virtuoso Ignaz Moscheles , who however confessed in his diaries that he had little to teach him . Moscheles became a close colleague and lifelong friend . The year 1827 saw the premiere ? and sole performance in his lifetime ? of Mendelssohn 's opera , *Die Hochzeit des Camacho* . The failure of this production left him disinclined to venture into the genre again .

Besides music , Mendelssohn 's education included art , literature , languages , and philosophy . He had a particular interest in classical literature and translated Terence 's *Andria* for his tutor Heyse in 1825 ; Heyse was impressed and had it published in 1826 as a work of " his pupil , F * * * * " [i.e. " Felix " (asterisks as provided in original text)] . This translation also qualified Mendelssohn to study at the Humboldt University of Berlin , where from 1826 to 1829 he attended lectures on aesthetics by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel , on history by Eduard Gans and on geography by Carl Ritter .

= = = Meeting Goethe and conducting Bach = = =

In 1821 Zelter introduced Mendelssohn to his friend and correspondent , the elderly Johann Wolfgang von Goethe , who was greatly impressed by the child , leading to perhaps the earliest confirmed comparison with Mozart in the following conversation between Goethe and Zelter :

" Musical prodigies ... are probably no longer so rare ; but what this little man can do in extemporizing and playing at sight borders the miraculous , and I could not have believed it possible at so early an age . " " And yet you heard Mozart in his seventh year at Frankfurt ? " said Zelter . " Yes " , answered Goethe , " ... but what your pupil already accomplishes , bears the same relation to the Mozart of that time that the cultivated talk of a grown @-@ up person bears to the prattle of a child . "

Mendelssohn was invited to meet Goethe on several later occasions , and set a number of Goethe 's poems to music . His other compositions inspired by Goethe include the overture *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage* , (Op. 27 , 1828) and the cantata *Die erste Walpurgisnacht* (*The First Walpurgis Night* , Op. 60 , 1832) .

In 1829 , with the backing of Zelter and the assistance of actor Eduard Devrient , Mendelssohn arranged and conducted a performance in Berlin of Bach 's *St Matthew Passion* . Four years previously his grandmother , Bella Salomon , had given him a copy of the manuscript of this (by then all @-@ but @-@ forgotten) masterpiece . The orchestra and choir for the performance were provided by the Berlin Singakademie . The success of this performance , one of the very few since Bach 's death and the first ever outside of Leipzig , was the central event in the revival of J. S. Bach 's music in Germany and , eventually , throughout Europe . It earned Mendelssohn widespread acclaim at the age of 20 . It also led to one of the few references which Mendelssohn made to his origins : " To think that it took an actor and a Jew 's son to revive the greatest Christian music for the world ! "

Over the next few years Mendelssohn traveled widely , including making his first visit to England in 1829 , and also visiting amongst other places Vienna , Florence , Milan , Rome and Naples , in all of which he met with local and visiting musicians and artists . These years proved the germination for some of his most famous works , including the *Hebrides Overture* and the *Scottish and Italian symphonies* .

= = = Düsseldorf = = =

On Zelter 's death in 1832 , Mendelssohn had hopes of succeeding him as conductor of the Sing @-@ Akademie zu Berlin . However , at a vote in January 1833 he was defeated for the post by the less distinguished Carl Friedrich Rungenhagen . This may have been because of Mendelssohn 's youth , and fear of possible innovations ; it was also suspected by some to be attributable to his Jewish ancestry . Following this rebuff , Mendelssohn divided most of his professional time over the next few years between Britain and Düsseldorf , where he was appointed musical director (his first

paid post as a musician) in 1833 .

In the spring of that year Mendelssohn directed the Lower Rhenish Music Festival in Düsseldorf , beginning with a performance of Handel 's oratorio Israel in Egypt prepared from the original score which he had found in London . This precipitated a Handel revival in Germany , similar to the reawakened interest in J. S. Bach following his performance of the St Matthew Passion . Mendelssohn worked with dramatist Karl Immermann to improve local theatre standards , and made his first appearance as an opera conductor in Immermann 's production of Mozart 's Don Giovanni at the end of 1833 , where he took umbrage at the audience 's protests about the cost of tickets . His frustration at his everyday duties in Düsseldorf , and the city 's provincialism , led him to resign his position at the end of 1834 . He had offers from both Munich and Leipzig for important musical posts , and decided in 1835 to accept the latter .

= = = = Leipzig and Berlin = = = =

In 1835 Mendelssohn was named conductor of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra . He chose this position although he had also been offered direction of the opera house in Munich and the editorship of the prestigious music journal , the Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung . Mendelssohn concentrated on developing the musical life of Leipzig , working with the orchestra , the opera house , the Choir of St. Thomas Church , and the city 's other choral and musical institutions . Mendelssohn 's concerts included , in addition to many of his own works , three series of " historical concerts " and a number of works by his contemporaries . He was deluged by offers of music from rising composers and would @-@ be composers ; amongst these was Richard Wagner , who submitted his early Symphony , which to Wagner 's disgust Mendelssohn lost or mislaid . Mendelssohn also revived interest in Franz Schubert . Robert Schumann discovered the manuscript of Schubert 's 9th Symphony and sent it to Mendelssohn , who promptly premiered it in Leipzig on 21 March 1839 , more than a decade after Schubert 's death .

A landmark event during Mendelssohn 's Leipzig years was the premiere of his oratorio St. Paul , given at the Lower Rhenish Festival in Düsseldorf in 1836 , shortly after the death of the composer 's father , which much affected him ; Felix wrote that he would " never cease to endeavour to gain his approval [...] although I can no longer enjoy it " . St. Paul seemed to many of Mendelssohn 's contemporaries to be his finest work , and sealed his European reputation .

When Friedrich Wilhelm IV came to the Prussian throne in 1840 with ambitions to develop Berlin as a cultural centre (including the establishment of a music school , and reform of music for the church) , the obvious choice to head these reforms was Mendelssohn . He was however reluctant to undertake the task , especially in the light of his existing strong position in Leipzig . Mendelssohn did however spend some time in Berlin , writing some church music , and , at the King 's request , music for productions of Sophocles 's Antigone (1841) and Oedipus at Colonus (1845) , Shakespeare 's A Midsummer Night 's Dream (1843) and Racine 's Athalie (1845) . But the funds for the school never materialised , and various of the court 's promises to Mendelssohn regarding finances , title , and concert programming were broken . He was therefore not displeased to have the excuse to return to Leipzig .

In 1843 Mendelssohn founded a major music school ? the Leipzig Conservatory , now the Hochschule für Musik und Theater " Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy " or (in its own English self @-@ designation) the Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy University of Music and Theatre ? where he persuaded Ignaz Moscheles and Robert Schumann to join him . Other prominent musicians , including string players Ferdinand David and Joseph Joachim and music theorist Moritz Hauptmann , also became staff members . After Mendelssohn 's death in 1847 , his conservatorial tradition was carried on when Moscheles succeeded him as head of the Conservatory .

= = = = Mendelssohn in Britain = = = =

In 1829 Mendelssohn paid his first visit to Britain , where his former teacher Ignaz Moscheles , already settled in London , introduced him to influential musical circles . In the summer he visited

Edinburgh , where he met among others the composer John Thomson , whom he later recommended to be Professor of Music at Edinburgh University . On his eighth visit in the summer of 1844 , he conducted five of the Philharmonic concerts in London , and wrote :

[N] ever before was anything like this season ? we never went to bed before half @-@ past one , every hour of every day was filled with engagements three weeks beforehand , and I got through more music in two months than in all the rest of the year .

On subsequent visits he met Queen Victoria and her musical husband Prince Albert , who both greatly admired his music .

In the course of ten visits to Britain during his life , totalling about 20 months , Mendelssohn won a strong following , sufficient for him to make a deep impression on British musical life . He composed and performed , and he edited for British publishers the first critical editions of oratorios of Handel and of the organ music of J. S. Bach . Scotland inspired two of his most famous works : the overture *The Hebrides* (also known as *Fingal 's Cave*) ; and the *Scottish Symphony* (*Symphony No. 3*) .

Mendelssohn also worked closely with his protégé , the British composer and pianist William Sterndale Bennett (whom he had first heard in London in 1833 when Bennett was 17) , both in London and Leipzig , where Bennett appeared throughout the 1836 / 1837 season . Mendelssohn 's oratorio *Elijah* was commissioned by and premiered at the Birmingham Triennial Music Festival on 26 August 1846 , composed to a German text translated into English by William Bartholomew , who authored and translated many of Mendelssohn 's works during his time in England . On his last visit to Britain in 1847 , Mendelssohn was the soloist in Beethoven 's *Piano Concerto No. 4* and conducted his own *Scottish Symphony* with the Philharmonic Orchestra before the Queen and Prince Albert .

===== Death =====

Mendelssohn suffered from poor health in the final years of his life , probably aggravated by nervous problems and overwork . A final tour of England left him exhausted and ill from a hectic schedule . The death of his sister Fanny on 14 May 1847 caused him great distress . Less than six months later , on 4 November , Mendelssohn himself died in Leipzig after a series of strokes . He was 38 . His grandfather Moses , his sister Fanny and both his parents had died from similar apoplexies . Felix 's funeral was held at the Paulinerkirche , Leipzig , and he was buried at the Dreifaltigkeitsfriedhof I in Berlin @-@ Kreuzberg . The pallbearers included Moscheles , Schumann and Niels Gade . Mendelssohn had once described death , in a letter to a stranger , as a place " where it is to be hoped there is still music , but no more sorrow or partings " .

===== Personal life =====

===== Personality =====

Although the image was cultivated , especially after his death in the detailed family memoirs by his nephew Sebastian Hensel , of a man always equable , happy and placid in temperament , this was misleading . The nickname " discontented Polish count " was given to Mendelssohn because of his aloofness , and he referred to the epithet in his letters . Mendelssohn was frequently given to alarming fits of temper which occasionally led to collapse . On one occasion in the 1830s , when his wishes had been crossed , " his excitement was increased so fearfully ... that when the family was assembled ... he began to talk incoherently , and in English , to the great terror of them all . The stern voice of his father at last checked the wild torrent of words ; they took him to bed , and a profound sleep of twelve hours restored him to his normal state " . Such fits may be related to his early death .

Mendelssohn was a fine and enthusiastic artist in pencil and watercolour , a skill which he used throughout his life for his own amusement and that of his friends . His enormous correspondence shows that he could also be a witty writer in German and English ? sometimes accompanied by

humorous sketches and cartoons in the text .

== Religion ==

On 21 March 1816 , at the age of seven years , Mendelssohn was baptised with his brother and sisters in a home ceremony by Johann Jakob Stegemann , minister of the Evangelical congregation of Berlin 's Jerusalem Church and New Church . Although Mendelssohn was a conforming (if not over @-@ zealous) Christian as a member of the Reformed Church , he was both conscious and proud of his Jewish ancestry and notably of his connection with his grandfather Moses Mendelssohn . He was the prime mover in proposing to the publisher Heinrich Brockhaus a complete edition of Moses 's works , which continued with the support of his uncle Joseph Mendelssohn . Mendelssohn was notably reluctant , either in his letters or conversation , to comment on his innermost beliefs ; his friend Devrient wrote that " [his] deep convictions were never uttered in intercourse with the world ; only in rare and intimate moments did they ever appear , and then only in the slightest and most humorous allusions " . Thus for example in a letter to his sister Rebecka , Mendelssohn rebukes her complaint about an unpleasant relative : " What do you mean by saying you are not hostile to Jews ? I hope this was a joke [...] It is really sweet of you that you do not despise your family , isn 't it ? " Some modern scholars have devoted considerable energy to demonstrate either that Mendelssohn was deeply sympathetic to his ancestors ' Jewish beliefs , or that he was hostile to this and sincere in his Christian beliefs .

== Mendelssohn and his contemporaries ==

Throughout his life Mendelssohn was wary of the more radical musical developments undertaken by some of his contemporaries . He was generally on friendly , if sometimes somewhat cool , terms with the likes of Hector Berlioz , Franz Liszt , and Giacomo Meyerbeer , but in his letters expresses his frank disapproval of their works , for example writing of Liszt that his compositions were " inferior to his playing , and [?] only calculated for virtuosos " ; of Berlioz 's overture Les francs @-@ juges " the orchestration is such a frightful muddle [...] that one ought to wash one 's hands after handling one of his scores " ; and of Meyerbeer 's opera Robert le diable " I consider it ignoble " , calling its villain Bertram " a poor devil " . When his friend the composer Ferdinand Hiller suggested in conversation to Mendelssohn that he looked rather like Meyerbeer ? they were actually distant cousins , both descendants of Rabbi Moses Isserlis ? Mendelssohn was so upset that he immediately went to get a haircut to differentiate himself .

In particular , Mendelssohn seems to have regarded Paris and its music with the greatest of suspicion and an almost puritanical distaste . Attempts made during his visit there to interest him in Saint @-@ Simonianism ended in embarrassing scenes .

It is significant that the only musician with whom he remained a close personal friend , Ignaz Moscheles , was of an older generation and equally conservative in outlook . Moscheles preserved this outlook at the Leipzig Conservatory until his own death in 1870 .

== Marriage and children ==

Mendelssohn married Cécile Charlotte Sophie Jeanrenaud (10 October 1817 ? 25 September 1853) , the daughter of a French Reformed Church clergyman , on 28 March 1837 . The couple had five children : Carl , Marie , Paul , Lili and Felix . The second youngest child , Felix August , contracted measles in 1844 and was left with his health impaired ; he died in 1851 . The eldest , Carl Mendelssohn Bartholdy (7 February 1838 ? 23 February 1897) , became a distinguished historian , and professor of history at Heidelberg and Freiburg universities , dying in 1897 in a psychiatric institution in Freiburg . Paul Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1841 ? 1880) was a noted chemist and pioneered the manufacture of aniline dye . Marie married Victor Benecke and lived in London . Lili married Adolph Wach , later Professor of Law at Leipzig University . The family papers inherited by Marie and Lili 's children form the basis of the extensive collection of Mendelssohn manuscripts ,

including the so @-@ called ' Green Books ' of his correspondence , now in the Bodleian Library at Oxford University .

Cécile Mendelssohn Bartholdy died less than six years after her husband , on 25 September 1853 .

= = = = Jenny Lind = = = =

In general Mendelssohn 's personal life seems to have been fairly conventional compared to those of his contemporaries Wagner , Berlioz , and Schumann ? except for his relationship with Swedish soprano Jenny Lind , whom he met in October 1844 , and with whom , it was rumoured , he became emotionally involved . Papers confirming this were alleged to exist , although their contents had not been made public . In 2013 George Biddlecombe confirmed in the Journal of the Royal Musical Association that " The Committee of the Mendelssohn Scholarship Foundation possesses material indicating that Mendelssohn wrote passionate love letters to Jenny Lind entreating her to join him in an adulterous relationship and threatening suicide as a means of exerting pressure upon her , and that these letters were destroyed on being discovered after her death . "

Mendelssohn met and worked with Lind many times , and started an opera , Lorelei , for her , based on the legend of the Lorelei Rhine maidens ; the opera was unfinished at his death . He is said to have tailored the aria " Hear Ye Israel " in his oratorio Elijah to Lind 's voice , although she did not sing this part until after his death , at a concert in December 1848 . In 1847 Mendelssohn attended a London performance of Meyerbeer 's Robert le diable ? an opera which musically he despised ? in order to hear Lind 's British debut , in the role of Alice . The music critic Henry Chorley , who was with him , wrote " I see as I write the smile with which Mendelssohn , whose enjoyment of Mdlle . Lind 's talent was unlimited , turned round and looked at me , as if a load of anxiety had been taken off his mind . His attachment to Mlle. Lind 's genius as a singer was unbounded , as was his desire for her success " .

Upon Mendelssohn 's death Lind wrote , " [He was] the only person who brought fulfillment to my spirit , and almost as soon as I found him I lost him again " . In 1849 she established the Mendelssohn Scholarship Foundation , which makes an award to a British resident young composer every two years in Mendelssohn 's memory . The first winner of the scholarship was Arthur Sullivan , then aged 14 , in 1856 . In 1869 Lind erected a plaque in Mendelssohn 's memory at his birthplace in Hamburg .

= = Mendelssohn as musician = =

= = = Composer = = =

Richard Taruskin writes that , although Mendelssohn produced works of extraordinary mastery at a very early age ,

he never outgrew his precocious youthful style . [...] He remained stylistically conservative [...] feeling no need to attract attention with a display of ' revolutionary ' novelty . Throughout his short career he remained comfortably faithful to the musical status quo ? that is , the " classical " forms , as they were already thought of by his time . His version of romanticism , already evident in his earliest works , consisted in musical " pictorialism " of a fairly conventional , objective nature (though exquisitely wrought) .

In this way he differed substantially from contemporaries such as Wagner and Berlioz , and even from Schumann and Chopin . The absence of real stylistic ' development ' during Mendelssohn 's career makes it appropriate to consider his works by genre , rather than in order of composition .

= = = = Early works = = = =

The young Mendelssohn was greatly influenced in his childhood by the music of Bach , Beethoven ,

and Mozart , traces of whom can be seen in the 12 early string symphonies , which were mainly written for performance in the Mendelssohn household and not published or publicly performed until long after his death . He wrote these from 1821 to 1823 , when he was between the ages of 12 and 14 .

Mendelssohn 's first published works were his three piano quartets , (1822 ? 1825 ; Op. 1 in C minor , Op. 2 in F minor and Op. 3 in B minor) ; but his capacities are especially revealed in a group of works of his early maturity :

the String Octet (1825)

the Overture A Midsummer Night 's Dream (1826) , which in its finished form also owes much to the influence of Adolf Bernhard Marx , at the time a close friend of Mendelssohn .

the two early quartets : Op. 12 (1829) and Op. 13 (1827) , which both show a remarkable grasp of the techniques and ideas of Beethoven 's last quartets that Mendelssohn had been closely studying

These four works show an intuitive grasp of form , harmony , counterpoint , colour , and compositional technique , which justify claims frequently made that Mendelssohn 's precocity exceeded even that of Mozart in its intellectual grasp .

= = = = Symphonies = = = =

Mendelssohn 's mature symphonies are numbered approximately in the order that they were published , rather than the order in which they were composed . The order of actual composition is : 1 , 5 , 4 , 2 , 3 . The placement of No. 3 in this sequence is problematic because he worked on it for over a decade , starting sketches for it soon after beginning work on No. 5 , but completing it after both Nos. 5 and 4 .

The Symphony No. 1 in C minor for full @-@ scale orchestra was written in 1824 , when Mendelssohn was aged 15 . This work is experimental , showing the influences of Beethoven and Carl Maria von Weber . Mendelssohn conducted this symphony on his first visit to London in 1829 , with the orchestra of the Royal Philharmonic Society . For the third movement he substituted an orchestration of the Scherzo from his Octet . In this form the piece was a success , and laid the foundations of his British reputation .

During 1829 and 1830 Mendelssohn wrote his Symphony No. 5 , known as the Reformation . It celebrated the 300th anniversary of the Lutheran Church . Mendelssohn remained dissatisfied with the work and did not allow publication of the score .

The Scottish Symphony (Symphony No. 3 in A minor) was written and revised intermittently between 1829 (when Mendelssohn noted down the opening theme during a visit to Holyrood Palace) and 1842 , when it was given its premiere in Leipzig , the last of his symphonies to be performed in public . This piece evokes Scotland 's atmosphere in the ethos of Romanticism , but does not employ any identified Scottish folk melodies .

Mendelssohn 's travels in Italy inspired him to write the Symphony No. 4 in A major , known as the Italian Symphony . He conducted the premiere in 1833 , but did not allow the score to be published during his lifetime , as he continually sought to rewrite it .

Mendelssohn wrote the symphony @-@ cantata Lobgesang (Hymn of Praise) in B @-@ flat major , posthumously named Symphony No. 2 , to mark the celebrations in Leipzig of the 400th anniversary of the invention of the printing press ; the first performance took place on 25 June 1840 .

= = = = Other orchestral music = = = =

Mendelssohn wrote the concert Hebrides Overture (Fingal 's Cave) in 1830 , inspired by visits to Scotland around the end of the 1820s . He visited Fingal 's Cave , on the Hebridean isle of Staffa , as part of his Grand Tour of Europe , and was so impressed that he scribbled the opening theme of the overture on the spot , including it in a letter he wrote home the same evening .

Throughout his career he wrote a number of other concert overtures . Those most frequently played

today include an overture to Ruy Blas , commissioned for a charity performance of Victor Hugo 's drama , which Mendelssohn hated ; Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage (Meeresstille und glückliche Fahrt) , inspired by a pair of poems by Goethe ; and The Fair Melusine .

The incidental music to A Midsummer Night 's Dream (Op. 61) , including the well @-@ known Wedding March , was written in 1843 , seventeen years after the overture .

= = = = Opera = = = =

Mendelssohn wrote some Singspiels for family performance in his youth . His opera Die beiden Neffen (The Two Nephews) was rehearsed for him on his 15th birthday . 1829 saw Die Heimkehr aus der Fremde (Son and Stranger or Return of the Roamer) , a comedy of mistaken identity written in honor of his parents ' silver anniversary and unpublished during his lifetime . In 1825 he wrote a more sophisticated work , Die Hochzeit des Camacho (Camacho 's Wedding) , based on an episode in Don Quixote , for public consumption . It was produced in Berlin in 1827 , but coolly received . Mendelssohn left the theatre before the conclusion of the first performance , and subsequent performances were cancelled .

Although he never abandoned the idea of composing a full opera , and considered many subjects ? including that of the Nibelung saga later adapted by Wagner ? he never wrote more than a few pages of sketches for any project . In Mendelssohn 's last years the opera manager Benjamin Lumley tried to contract him to write an opera from Shakespeare 's The Tempest on a libretto by Eugène Scribe , and even announced it as forthcoming in 1847 , the year of Mendelssohn 's death . The libretto was eventually set by Fromental Halévy . At his death Mendelssohn left some sketches for an opera on the story of the Lorelei .

= = = = Concertos = = = =

The Violin Concerto in E minor , Op. 64 (1844) , written for Ferdinand David , has become one of the most popular of all of Mendelssohn 's compositions . David , who had worked closely with Mendelssohn during the piece 's preparation , gave the premiere of the concerto on his Guarneri violin .

Mendelssohn also wrote a lesser @-@ known , early concerto for violin and strings in D minor (1822) ; four piano concertos (" no . 0 " in A minor , 1822 ; 1 in G minor , Op. 25 , 1831 ; 2 in D minor , Op. 40 , 1837 ; and 3 in E minor , Op. posth . , a fragment from 1844) ; two concertos for two pianos and orchestra , E major (BWV O5) , which he wrote at 15 , and A @-@ flat major (BWV O6) , at 17 ; and another double concerto , for violin and piano (1823) . In addition , there are several single @-@ movement works for soloist and orchestra . Those for piano are the Rondo Brillante , Op. 29 , of 1834 ; the Capriccio Brillante , Op. 22 , of 1832 ; and the Serenade and Allegro Giocoso Op. 43 , of 1838 . He also wrote two concertinos (Konzertstücke) , Opp . 113 and 114 , originally for clarinet , basset horn and piano ; Op. 113 was orchestrated by the composer .

= = = = Chamber music = = = =

Mendelssohn 's mature output contains numerous chamber works , many of which display an emotional intensity lacking in some of his larger works . In particular , his String Quartet No. 6 , the last of his string quartets and his last major work ? written following the death of his sister Fanny ? is both powerful and eloquent . Other mature works include two other string quintets ; sonatas for the clarinet , cello , viola and violin ; and two piano trios . For the Piano Trio No. 1 in D minor , Mendelssohn uncharacteristically took the advice of his fellow composer , Ferdinand Hiller , and rewrote the piano part in a more romantic , " Schumannesque " style , considerably heightening its effect .

= = = = Choral works = = = =

Mendelssohn 's two large biblical oratorios , St Paul in 1836 and Elijah in 1846 , are greatly influenced by Bach . His unfinished oratorio , Christus , consists of a recitative , a chorus " There Shall a Star Come out of Jacob , " and a male trio ; the chorus is sometimes performed .

Strikingly different is the more overtly romantic Die erste Walpurgisnacht (The First Walpurgis Night) , a setting for chorus and orchestra of a ballad by Goethe describing pagan rituals of the Druids in the Harz mountains in the early days of Christianity . This remarkable score has been seen by the scholar Heinz @-@ Klaus Metzger as a " Jewish protest against the domination of Christianity " .

Mendelssohn also wrote many smaller @-@ scale sacred works for unaccompanied choir and for choir with organ . Most are written in or translated into English , and remain highly popular . Amongst the most famous is Hear My Prayer , whose second half contains " O for the Wings of a Dove , " which became extremely popular as a separate item . The piece is written for full choir , organ , and a treble or soprano soloist who has many challenging and extended solo passages . As such , it is a particular favourite for choirboys in churches and cathedrals and has frequently been recorded as a treble solo . Mendelssohn 's biographer Todd comments " The very popularity of the anthem in England [...] later exposed it to charges of superficiality from those contemptuous of Victorian mores " .

The hymn tune Mendelssohn ? an adaptation by William Hayman Cummings of a melody from Mendelssohn 's cantata Festgesang (Festive Hymn) ? is the standard tune for Charles Wesley 's popular hymn Hark ! The Herald Angels Sing . This extract from an originally secular 1840s composition , which Mendelssohn felt unsuited to sacred music , is ubiquitous at Christmas .

= = = = Songs = = = =

Mendelssohn wrote many songs , both for solo voice and for duet , with piano . Many of these are simple , or slightly modified , strophic settings . Some , including Auf Flügeln des Gesanges (On Wings of Song) , became popular . Nine of Mendelssohn 's songs , including Auf Flügeln des Gesanges and Neue Liebe (New Love , set to a poem by Heinrich Heine) were transcribed for piano solo , in a virtuoso style , by Franz Liszt .

A number of songs written by Mendelssohn 's sister Fanny originally appeared under her brother 's name ; this may have been partly due to the prejudice of the family , and partly to her own retiring nature .

= = = = Piano music = = = =

Mendelssohn 's Songs Without Words (Lieder ohne Worte) , eight cycles each containing six lyric pieces (two published posthumously) , remain his most famous solo piano compositions . They became standard parlour recital items even during the composer 's lifetime , and their overwhelming popularity has itself caused many critics to underrate their musical value . Other composers who were inspired to produce similar pieces of their own , included Charles @-@ Valentin Alkan (his five sets of Chants , each ending with a barcarole) , Anton Rubinstein , Ignaz Moscheles , and Edvard Grieg .

Other notable piano pieces by Mendelssohn include his Variations sérieuses , Op. 54 (1841) , the Rondo Capriccioso , the set of six Preludes and Fugues , Op. 35 (written between 1832 and 1837) , and the Seven Characteristic Pieces , Op. 7 (1827) .

= = = = Organ music = = = =

Mendelssohn played the organ and composed for it from the age of 11 to his death . His primary organ works are the Three Preludes and Fugues , Op. 37 (1837) , and the Six Sonatas , Op. 65 (1845) , of which Eric Werner wrote " next to Bach 's works , Mendelssohn 's Organ Sonatas belong to the required repertory of all organists " .

= = = Performer = = =

Mendelssohn was renowned during his lifetime as a keyboard performer , both on the piano and on the organ . One of his obituarists noted :

First and chiefest we esteem his pianoforte @-@ playing , with its amazing elasticity of touch , rapidity , and power ; next his scientific and vigorous organ playing [...] his triumphs on these instruments are fresh in public recollection .

In his concerts and recitals Mendelssohn performed both his own works and those of his predecessor German composers , notably works of Weber , Beethoven and (on the organ) J.S. Bach .

Both in private and public performances , Mendelssohn was also renowned for his improvisations . On one occasion in London , when asked by the soprano Maria Malibran after a recital to extemporise , he created a piece which included the melodies of all the songs she had sung . The music publisher Victor Novello who was present remarked ' He has done some things that seem to me impossible , even after I have heard them done . ' At another recital in 1837 , where Mendelssohn played the piano for a singer , Robert Schumann ignored the soprano and wrote ' Mendelssohn accompanied like a God ' .

= = = Conductor = = =

Mendelssohn was a noted conductor , both of his own works and of other composers . At his London debut in 1829 , he was noted for his innovatory use of a baton (then a great novelty) . But his novelty also extended to taking great care over tempo , dynamics and the orchestral players themselves ? both rebuking them when they were recalcitrant and praising them when they satisfied him . It was his success at conducting at the Lower Rhine music festival of 1836 that led to him taking his first paid professional position as director at Düsseldorf . Amongst those who appreciated Mendelssohn 's conducting was Hector Berlioz , who in 1843 , invited to Leipzig , exchanged batons with Mendelssohn , writing " When the Great Spirit sends us to hunt in the land of souls , may our warriors hang our tomahawks side by side at the door of the council chamber " . At Leipzig , Mendelssohn led the Gewandhaus orchestra to great heights ; although concentrating on the great composers of the past (already becoming canonised as the ' classics ') he also included new music by Schumann , Berlioz , Gade and many others (including of course his own music) . One critic who was not impressed however was Richard Wagner ; he accused Mendelssohn of using tempos in his performances of Beethoven symphonies that were far too fast .

= = = Editor = = =

Mendelssohn 's interest in baroque music was not limited to the Bach St Matthew Passion which he had revived in 1829 . He was concerned in preparing and editing such music , whether for performance or for publication , to be as close as possible to the original intentions of the composers , including wherever possible a close study of early editions and manuscripts . This could lead him into conflict with publishers ; for instance , his edition of Handel 's oratorio Israel in Egypt for the London Handel Society (1845) evoked an often contentious correspondence , with Mendelssohn refusing for example to add dynamics where not given by Handel , or to add parts for trombones . Mendelssohn also edited a number of Bach 's works for organ , and apparently discussed with Robert Schumann the possibility of producing a complete Bach edition .

= = = Teacher = = =

Although Mendelssohn attributed great importance to musical education , and made a substantial commitment to the Conservatoire he founded in Leipzig , he did not greatly enjoy teaching and undertook only a very few private pupils ; these he took only if he believed they had notable qualities or potential . Amongst such students were composer William Sterndale Bennett , the pianist Camille @-@ Marie Stamaty , the violinist and composer Julius Eichberg , and Walther von Goethe (

grandson of the poet) . At the Leipzig Conservatoire Mendelssohn taught classes in composition and ensemble playing .

= = Reputation and legacy = =

= = = The first century = = =

In the immediate wake of Mendelssohn 's death , he was mourned both in Germany and England . However , the conservative strain in Mendelssohn , which set him apart from some of his more flamboyant contemporaries , bred a corollary condescension amongst some of them toward his music . Mendelssohn 's relations with Berlioz , Liszt and others had been uneasy and equivocal . Listeners who had raised questions about Mendelssohn 's talent included Heinrich Heine , who wrote in 1836 after hearing the oratorio St. Paul that his work was " characterized by a great , strict , very serious seriousness , a determined , almost importunate tendency to follow classical models , the finest , cleverest calculation , sharp intelligence and , finally , complete lack of naïveté . But is there in art any originality of genius without naïveté ? "

Such criticism of Mendelssohn for his very ability ? which could be characterised negatively as facility ? was taken to further lengths by Richard Wagner . Mendelssohn 's success , his popularity and his Jewish origins irked Wagner sufficiently to damn Mendelssohn with faint praise , three years after his death , in an anti @-@ Jewish pamphlet *Das Judenthum in der Musik* :

[Mendelssohn] has shown us that a Jew may have the amplest store of specific talents , may own the finest and most varied culture , the highest and tenderest sense of honour ? yet without all these pre @-@ eminences helping him , were it but one single time , to call forth in us that deep , that heart @-@ searching effect which we await from art [...] The washiness and the whimsicality of our present musical style has been [...] pushed to its utmost pitch by Mendelssohn 's endeavour to speak out a vague , an almost nugatory Content as interestingly and spiritedly as possible .

This was the start of a movement to downgrade Mendelssohn 's status as a composer which lasted almost a century , the echoes of which still survive today in critiques of Mendelssohn 's supposed mediocrity .

The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche expressed consistent admiration for Mendelssohn 's music , in contrast to his general scorn for " Teutonic " Romanticism :

At any rate , the whole music of romanticism [e.g. Schumann and Wagner] ... was second @-@ rate music from the very start , and real musicians took little notice of it . Things were different with Felix Mendelssohn , that halcyon master who , thanks to his easier , purer , happier soul , was quickly honored and just as quickly forgotten , as a lovely incident in German music .

Some readers , however , have interpreted Nietzsche 's characterization of Mendelssohn as a ' lovely incident ' as condescending .

In the 20th century the Nazi regime and its Reichsmusikkammer cited Mendelssohn 's Jewish origin in banning performance and publication of his works , even asking Nazi @-@ approved composers to rewrite incidental music for *A Midsummer Night 's Dream* (Carl Orff obliged) . Under the Nazis , " Mendelssohn was presented as a dangerous ' accident ' of music history , who played a decisive role in rendering German music in the 19th century ' degenerate ' . " The German Mendelssohn Scholarship for students at the Leipzig Conservatoire was discontinued in 1934 (and not revived until 1963) . The monument dedicated to Mendelssohn erected in Leipzig in 1892 was removed by the Nazis in 1936 . A replacement was erected in 2008 . His grave however remained unmolested during the National Socialist years .

Mendelssohn 's reputation in England remained high throughout the 19th century . Prince Albert inscribed (in German) , a libretto for the oratorio *Elijah* in 1847 :

To the noble artist who , surrounded by the Baal @-@ worship of false art , has been able , like a second Elijah , through genius and study , to remain true to the service of true art .

In 1851 an adulatory novel by the teenaged Elizabeth Sara Sheppard was published , entitled *Charles Auchester* . The book features as its leading character Mendelssohn , as the " Chevalier

Seraphael ", and remained in print for nearly 80 years . In 1854 Queen Victoria requested that the Crystal Palace include a statue of Mendelssohn when it was rebuilt . Mendelssohn 's Wedding March from A Midsummer Night 's Dream was played at the wedding of Queen Victoria 's daughter , Princess Victoria , The Princess Royal , to Crown Prince Frederick of Prussia in 1858 , and it remains popular at marriage ceremonies . Mendelssohn 's sacred choral music , particularly the smaller @-@ scale works , remains popular in the choral tradition of the Church of England . However many critics , including Bernard Shaw , began to condemn Mendelssohn 's music for its association with Victorian cultural insularity ; Shaw in particular complained of the composer 's " kid @-@ glove gentility , his conventional sentimentality , and his despicable oratorio @-@ mongering " . In the 1950s the scholar Wilfrid Mellers complained of Mendelssohn 's " spurious religiosity which reflected the element of unconscious humbug in our morality " .

A contrasting opinion came from the pianist and composer Ferruccio Busoni , who considered Mendelssohn " a master of undisputed greatness " and " an heir of Mozart " . Busoni and other pianists such as Anton Rubinstein and Charles @-@ Valentin Alkan all regularly included Mendelssohn 's piano works in their recitals .

= = = Modern opinions = = =

Charles Rosen in a chapter on Mendelssohn in his 1995 book *The Romantic Generation* both praises and criticizes the composer , calling him a " genius " with a " profound " comprehension of Beethoven and " the greatest child prodigy the history of Western music has ever known " . Although Rosen feels that in his later years , without losing his craft or genius , the composer " renounced ... his daring " , he calls Mendelssohn 's relatively late Violin Concerto in E minor " the most successful synthesis of the Classical concerto tradition and the Romantic virtuoso form " . Rosen calls the Fugue in E minor (later included in Mendelssohn 's Op. 35 for piano) a " masterpiece " ; but in the same paragraph calls Mendelssohn " the inventor of religious kitsch in music " .

Such opinions are evidence of how a more nuanced appreciation of Mendelssohn 's work has developed over the last 50 years , together with the publication of a number of modern biographies placing his achievements in context . Mercer @-@ Taylor comments on the irony that " this broad @-@ based reevaluation of Mendelssohn 's music is made possible , in part , by a general disintegration of the idea of a musical canon " , an idea which Mendelssohn " as a conductor , pianist and scholar " had done so much to establish .

A large portion of Mendelssohn 's 750 works still remained unpublished in the 1960s , but most of them have now been made available . A scholarly edition of Mendelssohn 's complete works and correspondence is in preparation but is expected to take many years to complete , and will be in excess of 150 volumes . This includes a modern and fully researched catalogue of his works , the Mendelssohn @-@ *Werkverzeichnis* (MWV) . All of Mendelssohn 's oeuvre ? including the most popular works such as the E minor Violin Concerto and the Italian Symphony ? has been explored more deeply , and prior concepts about the Victorian conventionality of the oratorio *Elijah* have been shed . The frequently intense and dramatic world of Mendelssohn 's chamber works has been more fully recognized . Virtually all of Mendelssohn 's published works are now available on CD , and his works are frequently heard in the concert hall and on broadcasts . An English Heritage blue plaque commemorating Mendelssohn was placed at 4 Hobart Place in Belgravia , London , in 2013 . As the critic H. L. Mencken concluded , if Mendelssohn indeed missed true greatness , he missed it " by a hair " .

= = = Recordings = = =

See articles on individual works for links to recordings

= = = Music scores = = =

Free scores by Felix Mendelssohn at the International Music Score Library Project

The Mutoxia Project has compositions by Felix Mendelssohn
Free scores by Felix Mendelssohn in the Choral Public Domain Library (ChoralWiki)
Mendelssohn Bartholdy