



UNIVERSITY OF
THE THIRD AGE

Benalla & District Inc.



Programme Notes 10th May, 2019



And do you agree with me, that the first condition of an artist should be to bear respect towards what is great, and to bow to it and acknowledge it, and not attempt to extinguish great flames for the sake of making his own rushlight burn more brightly?

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy.' The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, decorative flourish at the end.

FELIX MENDELSSOHN BARTHOLDY

1809 - 1847

Synopsis

German Romantic composer, pianist and conductor. Felix Mendelssohn was born on February 3, 1809, in Hamburg, Germany. At age 9, he made his public debut in Berlin. In 1819, he joined the Singakademie music academy and began composing non-stop. At Singakademie, he also became a conductor, but continued to compose prolifically. Mendelssohn founded the Leipzig Conservatory of Music in 1843. He died on November 4, 1847, in Leipzig.

Childhood



Pianist, composer and conductor Felix Mendelssohn was born Jakob Ludwig Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy in Hamburg, Germany, on February 3, 1809. His parents were Jewish, but converted to Christianity before he, his brother and two sisters were born. When Mendelssohn was 2 years old, he moved to Berlin with his parents and siblings. In Berlin, the young Mendelssohn began taking piano lessons with

Ludwig Berger. Mendelssohn also studied composition under composer K.F. Zelter as a child. In 1816, he broadened his lessons, studying under pianist Marie Bigot during an extended stay in Paris, France.

Mendelssohn was quick to establish himself as a musical prodigy. During his childhood, he composed a handful of operas and 11 symphonies. At just 9 years old, he made his public debut in Berlin.

Early Work

In 1819, Felix Mendelssohn joined the Singakademie music academy and began composing non-stop. In 1820 alone, he wrote a violin sonata, two piano sonatas, multiple songs, a cantata, a brief opera and a male quartet. In 1826, Mendelssohn produced one of his best known works, Overture to a Midsummer Night's Dream.



*A Midsummer Night's Dream –
Lost in the Forest*

He presented his opera *The Marriage of the Camacho*, the following year in Berlin.

It was the only opera of his performed in public during his life.

At Singakademie, Mendelssohn also became a conductor. In 1829, he conducted a performance of Bach's St. Matthew Passion. The performance's success led to other great opportunities, including a chance to conduct the London Philharmonic Society that same year.



Inspired by his visit to England and Scotland, Mendelssohn began composing his Symphony No. 3; it took more than a decade to complete. Known as his Scottish Symphony, the work commemorated his visit to Holyrood Chapel in Edinburgh and the highlands.

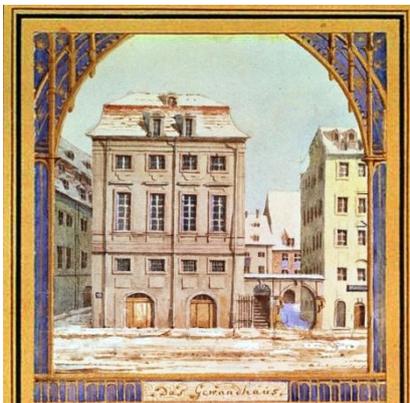
Mendelssohn continued to compose prolifically while working as a conductor. He wrote the Reformation Symphony in 1830, and followed that accomplishment with a three-year European tour. During that time, he published his first book of songs, entitled 'Songs without Words' (1832). The 'Italian' Symphony (1833), another of Mendelssohn's best known works, was also born of this period. In 1835, Mendelssohn was granted an illustrious role: conductor of the Gewandhaus Orchestra in Leipzig.

Personal Life

In 1836, a year after his father died, Mendelssohn met Cécile Jeanrenaud, a clergyman's daughter, in Frankfurt. Mendelssohn was 10 years Jeanrenaud's senior. She was just 16 when they got engaged. The couple married on March 28, 1837. Over the course of their marriage, they had five children.



Later Work



*Original Leipzig Gewandhaus
1st Home to Mendelssohn's
Conservatorium at Leipzig*

The same year that he married, Mendelssohn composed his Piano Concerto No. 2 in D Minor. From 1838 to 1844, he toiled away on his Violin Concerto in E Minor. Prior to the piece's completion, Mendelssohn founded the Leipzig Conservatory of Music and became its director. In so doing, he put Leipzig on the map as the musical centre of Germany.

After finishing the Violin Concerto in E Minor, Mendelssohn conducted a string of concerts for the Philharmonic. In 1846 he presented his newly written Elijah at the Birmingham Festival.

Final Years

In May 1847, Mendelssohn's sister, Fanny, who was a lifelong inspiration to him, died suddenly. Her death left him so devastated that he soon lost his own zest for life. His health, already compromised by his strenuous career, began to deteriorate rapidly. Six months later, on November 4, 1847, Felix Mendelssohn died of a ruptured blood vessel in Leipzig, Germany. He had recently returned from a brief visit to Switzerland, where he'd completed composition of his String Quartet in F Minor.

Although he was only 38 when he died, Mendelssohn managed to distinguish himself as one of the first significant Romantic composers of the 1800s.(www.biography.com)

Hebrides Overture Opus 27 (Fingal's Cave)



This is a concert overture, that is, it does not precede a play or opera, but is a stand-alone piece of music. It was inspired by one of Mendelssohn's trips to the British Isles, specifically an 1829 excursion to the Scottish island of Staffa, with its basalt sea cave known as Fingal's Cave.

It is not known whether Mendelssohn set foot on the island, the cave being best visible from the water, but the composer reported that he immediately jotted down the opening theme for his composition. He sent it home on a postcard with a note to his sister Fanny that read, "In order to make you understand how extraordinarily the

Hebrides affected me, I send you the following, which came into my head there."

Unfortunately, despite this stroke of genius, he completed at least 2 versions of the piece and wrote to his sister that he was still wrestling with it in 1832 because it did not savour enough of "oil and seagulls and dead fish". He at first called the work "To the Lonely Island" or "Zur einsamen Insel", but then settled on the present title. However, in 1834, the year after the first publication, the publishers issued an edition with the name *Fingalshöhle* (Fingal's Cave) and this title stuck, causing some confusion.



Entrance to Fingal's Cave, 1900

The opening notes state the theme Mendelssohn conceived while visiting the cave and is played by violas, cellos, and bassoons. It sets an initial scene of haunting solitude until the violins take over and the lower voices begin a pattern of sixteenth notes that represent the ebb and flow of the sea. The second theme is a soaring melody meant to convey the drama of the scene, which one reviewer likened to "the howling of the wind and roaring of the waves, where nothing living is seen except the sea bird whose reign is undisturbed by human intruder".

The performance we listen to is by the Orchestre Nationale de France conducted by Neeme Järvi.

The Youtube link is: www.youtube.com/watch?v=fgPlK7avLQ0

String Quartet No. 2 in A minor Opus 13

We don't know any of the details- not even her name. But in 1827 the 18-year-old Felix Mendelssohn seems to have fallen head over heels in love. In June of that year, Mendelssohn was inspired to write the words and music for a love song called *Frage*, Op. 9 ("Question"). The short song is full of teasingly hesitant questions which find contented resolution in a cadence which evokes the serene, dreamy final bars of the Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, written a year earlier.



“Is it true that you always wait for me there in the leafy path by the grape arbour and ask the moonlight and the little stars about me? Is it true? What I feel can only be understood by someone who feels it with me, and who will stay forever true to me.”

This song provided the seed for Mendelssohn’s String Quartet No. 2 in A minor, Op. 13, written a few months later. It was so central to the quartet’s development that the song was included with the published score. Mendelssohn wrote to a friend,

“The song that I sent with the quartet is its theme. You will hear it – with its own notes – in the first and last movements, and in all four movements you will hear its emotions expressed. If it doesn’t please you at first, which might happen, then play it again, and if you still find something ‘minuetish,’ think of your stiff and formal friend Felix with his tie and valet. I think I express the song well, and it all sounds like music to me”.

But as you listen to the Second String Quartet, you’ll quickly realize that this often-stormy music goes far beyond the youthful love song at its heart. 1827 was also the year Beethoven died. More importantly, it was the year in which Beethoven’s enigmatic final five string quartets were published. Most, including Mendelssohn’s father, dismissed Beethoven’s last quartets as (in the words of the violinist Louis Spohr) “*indecipherable, uncorrected horror.*” But Mendelssohn found deep inspiration as he studied these works. The ghost of Beethoven is present throughout Mendelssohn’s Second Quartet, especially in the final movement which pays homage to the final movement of Beethoven’s Op. 132, also set in A minor.(Acknowledgement: thelistenersclub.com).



We listen to the 3rd movement “Intermezzo” (Mendelssohn at his most lyrical) as played at a recital in April 2017 at the Field Concert Hall, Curtis Institute of Music, Philadelphia. The Youtube link to the whole String Quartet is:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=6UAU7xbTOyA&t=1118s

Octet for Strings in E flat major Opus 20

Mendelssohn composed the Octet in E flat major Op 20 in 1825 when he was 16 years of age, and presented the autographed score as a birthday present to his violin teacher Eduard Rietz. It has been conjectured that the work was inspired by Louis Spohr’s Double Quartet No 1 in D minor Op 65 composed in the same year.

The Octet is considered to be the first work of Mendelssohn's musical maturity. Prior to this he had completed dozens of major works including symphonies, concertos and operas.



The work is scored for double string quartet (four violins, two violas, two cellos). The opening Allegro is exhilarating with its soaring first violin line. The Andante in a modified sonata form provides with its ethereal beauty a soothing reprise from the opening movement. The Scherzo is marked to be played fast, as light as possible and is inspired by the closing lines of 'Walpurgisnachtstraum' (Walpurgis Night's Dream) of Goethe's *Faust*: "Trails of cloud and mist, Brighten from above; Breeze in the trees, and wind in the reeds, And all is scattered". The Presto finale is a bravura display of technique. It is a combination of a rondo, complex counterpoint and *moto perpetuo* (constant motion).

On the manuscript Mendelssohn wrote: "The octet must be played by all instruments in symphonic orchestral style. Pianos and fortes must be strictly observed and more strongly emphasized than is usual in pieces of this character.

(from the programme notes of a concert given at the Melbourne Recital Centre on Sunday 1st October, 2017 by the Melbourne Chamber Orchestra).

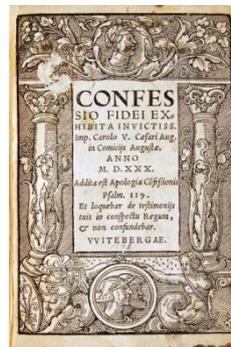
The performance we hear is by the Borromeo Quartet and the Heifetz Faculty Stars from an all-Felix Mendelssohn concert at the 2017 Heifetz International Music Institute on July 21, 2017 in the Francis Auditorium at Mary Baldwin University in Staunton USA.

We hear the final movement (Presto). The Youtube link to the complete work is:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vlr4WYwL9cw&t=1860s

Symphony No.5 in D minor Opus 107* ("The Reformation")

In the year 1830, the Lutheran Church was marking the 300th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession, a fundamental document of the Protestant faith. Felix Mendelssohn decided to participate in the celebration by writing a grand symphony incorporating Martin Luther's chorale *Ein' feste Burg* ("A Mighty Fortress"). He was apparently eager to follow in the footsteps of J. S. Bach, whose *St. Matthew Passion* he had revived at the Berlin Singakademie in 1829: Bach had written his cantata *Ein' feste Burg* (Cantata No. 80) exactly 100 years earlier for the bicentennial of the Lutheran Church.



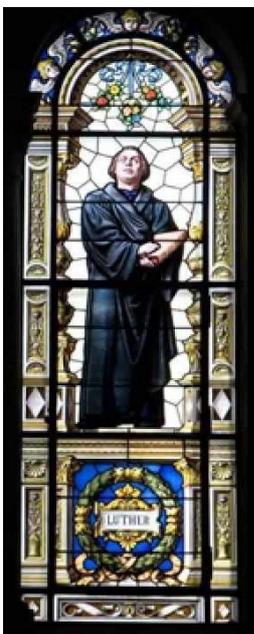
Mendelssohn started work on the symphony while in England in the autumn of 1829, and finished it in Berlin the following spring. Mendelssohn made an effort to work out every detail of the instrumentation (at least in the first movement) in his head before committing a single note to paper.

Felix undertook to write down the entire score, the whole of the instrumentation, bar by bar a gigantic effort of memory, to fit in each detail, each doubling of parts, each solo effect barwise, like an immense mosaic.

If writing the symphony was a great effort, naming it was not easy either. In a letter to his sister Fanny, Mendelssohn asked her advice on a suitable title:

“Try to collect opinions as to the title I ought to select: Reformation Symphony, Confession Symphony, Symphony for a Church Festival, Juvenile Symphony, or whatever you like. Write to me about it, and instead of all the stupid suggestions, send me one clever one; but I also want to hear the nonsensical ones sure to be produced on the occasion”.

In the wake of the revolutionary events of the year 1830, the church festivities were cancelled. Mendelssohn's symphony was again scheduled for performance in Paris in 1832, while Mendelssohn was in town. This time it was the musicians who protested against the work, which had too much dense counterpoint to their taste. Mendelssohn led a single performance in Berlin later that year, but then withdrew the work and did not allow it to be performed or published during his lifetime. What is more, he left instructions for the manuscript to be burned. The symphony was not published until 21 years after the composer's death, which explains why it is numbered last among Mendelssohn's symphonies.



The last movement (which we hear) opens with a flute solo in G major, intoning the chorale *Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott* ("A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"). More and more instruments join in, and the chorale is treated in a Bach-like contrapuntal style. The home key of D major is reached at the end of an excited *Allegro vivace* section, followed by an *Allegro maestoso* tempo. The chorale theme returns, and becomes the basis of an extended fugato. Later we hear a more lyrical variation in which parts of the melody are taken up by the cellos and basses with accompaniment in short staccato notes from violins, violas, and double basses. After the chorale is joined by a new, folk-like dance melody, the jubilant movement ends with a solemn proclamation of "A Mighty Fortress."

.....(Acknowledgement:www.kennedy-center.org).

The Youtube link to the whole symphony played here by the Berlin Philharmonic under the baton of James Levine is:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=VvZn3ULCRdg&t=3s

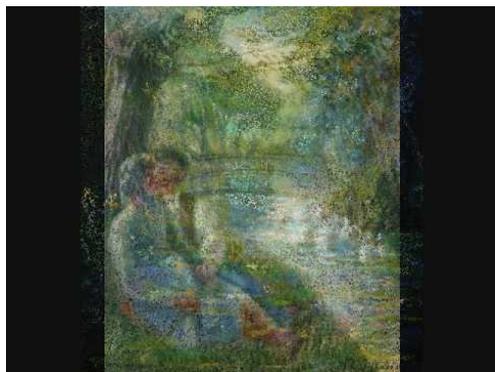
* Mendelssohn's Symphony 5 was the second in order of composition.

The order is 1, 5, 4, 2, 3.

On Wings of Song Opus 34 No. 2

Beloved of swooning sopranos in Victorian and Edwardian drawing-rooms, this, the second of Mendelssohn's "six songs for voice and piano" (Opus 34-2, 1834), is a setting of the poem "Auf Flügeln des Gesanges" by the German Romantic poet Heinrich Heine published in his *Buch der Lieder* in 1827. (Heine, apparently, did not care for Mendelssohn's treatment of his poem – Mendelssohn wrote it for his future wife Cecile Jeanrenaud).

Although Mendelssohn composed nearly 100 songs in his career, which have never entered the Romantic song repertory the way that those by his colleagues Schubert, Schumann and Brahms, this one has the distinction of being included among (if not the only one of) the composer's lieder that is commonly performed in concert.



On wings of song I'll bear thee,
My loved one, far, far away.
To distant regions enchanted,
Where Ganges waters play.

We'll find there a beautiful garden,
aglow beneath the moon,
The lotus blossoms await thee,
await thy coming soon,
The lotus blossoms await thee,
await thy coming soon.

The violets hide in the shadows,
And peep at the stars high above.
Roses so rare are confiding
Their sweet scented secrets of love.

And sleeping beneath the palm trees
gazelles and tender-eyed does,
While in the distant moonlight
the sacred Ganges flows,
While in the distant moonlight the
sacred Ganges flows.

'Tis there we shall be together,
There by the palm-lined stream,
To love each other ever,
And dream love's beautiful dream,
And dream love's beautiful dream,
Love's beautiful dream.

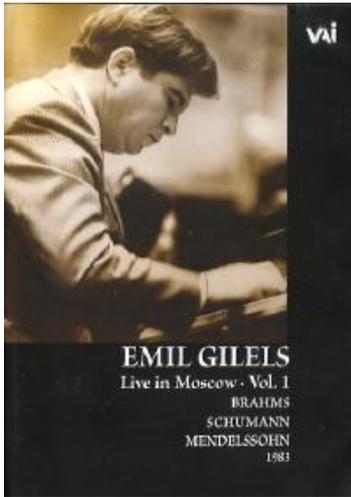
Translation by Richard D. Rowe

The Artists for this performance are soprano Susanna Philips and pianist Craig Terry.

The Youtube link is: www.youtube.com/watch?v=LzKZS3OGUw8

Song Without Words (Lieder ohne Worte) Opus 38 No. 6 "Duetto".

Published in 1837, the third volume of Op 38, was among the first works of Mendelssohn to appear after his wedding to Cécile Jeanrenaud, daughter of a French Huguenot minister whose family had settled in Frankfurt. Like Op 30, Op 38 was dedicated to a woman, Rosa von Woringen). But as in Op 30, several pieces were written for other women, including the pensive No 2, for the soprano Henriette Grabau, and the brilliantly arpeggiated No 3, for the eighteen-year-old Clara Wieck.



In a special category by itself was No 6. Titled “Duetto”, it bore Mendelssohn’s specific instruction to highlight the two melodic voices throughout. Alternating in the soprano and tenor and then joining together, the two voices represented the composer and his fiancée, as he at once penned an intimate love song, but also drew on a tradition extending back to Weber’s “Aufforderung zum Tanz” (‘Invitation to the Dance’) and Mozart’s duet ‘Là ci darem la mano’ from Don Giovanni.

We listen to a recording by the Russian pianist Emil Gilels, given in recital in Moscow during 1983.

The Youtube link is: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZQtLgjZCEbQ

Piano Trio in D minor Opus 49

The most intensely busy time of Mendelssohn's life was ushered in by his appointment in 1835 as the administrator, music director and conductor of the Leipzig Gewandhaus concerts. In very short order, he raised the quality of musical life in Leipzig to equal that of any city in Europe, and in 1842 he founded the local Conservatory to maintain his standards of excellence. (The school was to be the most highly regarded institution of its kind in the world for the next half century.) In 1841, he was named director of the Music Section of the Academy of Arts in Berlin, a cultural venture newly instituted by King Frederick William IV of Prussia, which required him not only to supervise and conduct a wide variety of programs but also to compose upon royal demand.

Mendelssohn's duties kept him close to Leipzig for most of 1839, but he did manage to escape in May to conduct at the Lower Rhine Music Festival in Düsseldorf and in September to oversee the presentation of his oratorio St. Paul in Brunswick.

The D minor Piano Trio was completed in July, between those two engagements. The work has remained one of Mendelssohn's most popular and beloved instrumental creations —Pablo Casals chose to play it when he was invited by President John F. Kennedy to perform at the White House in 1961.

Though Mendelssohn was careful to involve all of the participants equally in the D minor Trio in the presentation and development of the thematic material, the piano is granted the most brilliant of the three parts. We listen to the 2nd movement - the Andante - led by the piano, reminiscent in its three-part structure and melodic style of the Songs Without Words.



The performing artists are: Andre Previn (piano), Lynn Harrel (cello) and Sophie Ann Mutter (violin). You can watch and listen to the 1st and 2nd movements of the Trio at:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=WKGht6VrJWk

Cello Sonata in D major Opus 58

The Cello sonata was written in the first half of 1843 when Mendelssohn's life was full of demanding projects, some in the process of failing, others just coming into being.

He had accepted from King Wilhelm an invitation to direct the Music Division of the new Academy of Arts in Berlin, an institution designed to secure Berlin's place as Germany's cultural centre. If it had succeeded as originally planned, Mendelssohn would have become the most powerful musician in the land, as his appointment made him director of the Music Faculty, composer for the Royal Theatre, director of the Royal Orchestra, and conductor and organiser of the Cathedral Choir.



King Wilhelm I

1797 - 1888

In 1841 the Mendelssohns moved to Berlin where Felix began to outline his ideas to the king, only to find himself thwarted by a mass of court bureaucracy and a monarch who, having initiated the idea, was losing interest in its practical realisation. After two frustrating years in Berlin, Mendelssohn persuaded the king to release him from many of his duties, and he moved back to Leipzig to complete a project dear to his heart for some years – the creation of a Music Conservatory.

In the midst of that year's domestic upheaval, responsibilities and publicity, Mendelssohn somehow found time to write some of his best music: the Variations Sérieuses for piano, the incidental music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the D major cello Sonata. The 'New Grove Dictionary' says of it that the Sonata 'communicates a concentrated impression of the dramatic tensions and contradictions through which he lived during those years'.



We hear the slow movement – perhaps inspired by a Bach chorale and recitative – a noble Adagio whose rolling piano chords support a touching soliloquy from the cello.

WE listen to Johannes Moser and Lorenzo Cossi playing at a concert in Calgary (Canada) .

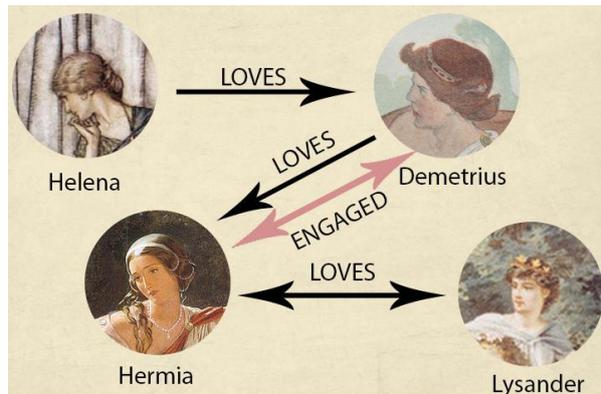
The Youtube link for the complete Sonata is:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8dttKlNNZo

Wedding March from "A Midsummer Night's Dream"

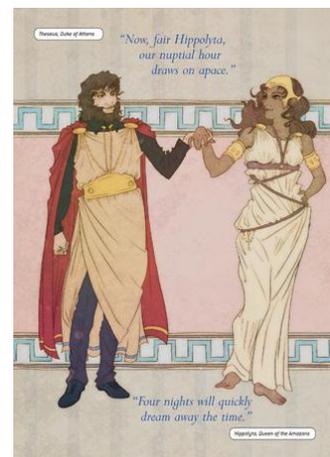
A Midsummer Night's Dream deals with the universal theme of love and its complications: lust, disappointment, confusion, marriage. The plot focuses on three parallel stories: the trials and experiences of two sets of lovers camping in a magical forest, the world of the Fairy King and Queen and their elves, and a group of rough craftsmen attempting to stage a production of "Pyramus and Thisby" for the wedding of the Duke of Athens.

Hermia is in love with Lysander, but her father wants her to marry Demetrius. To escape the arranged marriage, she and Lysander elope into the woods. Demetrius follows them, and he is pursued by Helena, who nurses an unrequited passion for him. A love quadrangle develops among the young lovers when mischievous Puck plays Cupid.



"The course of true love never did run smooth" says Lysander. Meanwhile, a group of amateur actors rehearses a badly-written play in the woods, and soon all find their lives changed by the doings of Oberon and Titania, the warring king and queen of the fairies. Magic, action, love and humour are the ingredients for this unforgettable spell.

In 1826, Felix Mendelssohn composed a concert overture, inspired by Shakespeare's play, that was first performed in 1827. In 1842, partly because of the fame of the overture, and partly because his employer King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia liked the incidental music that Mendelssohn had written for other plays that had been staged at the palace in German translation, Mendelssohn was commissioned to write incidental music for a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that was to be staged in 1843 in Potsdam. He incorporated the existing Overture into the incidental music, which was used in most stage versions through the 19th century. The best known of the pieces from the incidental music is the famous Wedding March which in the play is an intermezzo between Acts IV and V, which we hear played by the Moscow City Symphony Orchestra conducted by Michail Jurowski.



Listen to again on Youtube at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=rIM5cWB2wmM

Violin Concerto in E minor Opus 64



During the summer of 1838, Felix Mendelssohn wrote to his longtime friend and collaborator Ferdinand David: "I should like to write a violin concerto for you next winter. One in E minor runs through my head, the beginning of which gives me no peace." Indeed, it would not give him peace for another six years, when he at last found time and inspiration amidst his busy concert schedule to complete it. He consulted David regularly throughout the composition process regarding violin technique and, ever the perfectionist, continued to make minor adjustments to the concerto unto its premiere in Leipzig on March 13, 1845. Composed at the height of Mendelssohn's brilliant career, the concerto became an instant classic and remains one of the cornerstones of the repertoire.

Eager to create musical continuity throughout the concerto, Mendelssohn composed passages that link one movement to another without pause. As soon as the orchestra plays the final chord of the first movement, a bassoon leads a magical transition to the tranquil world of the slow second movement. The soloist then plays what many have described as a beautiful song without words, offering respite from the drama of the first movement.

The second movement transitions to the finale with a passage that at first evokes the moody atmosphere of the first movement. The main theme returns, leading to a thrilling coda.

—Calvin Dotsey (Houston Symphony.org).

We hear the 2nd and 3rd movements played by Norwegian violinist Vilde Frang with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Sir Simon Rattle. The venue is the historic (renovated) Lutheran Church at Roros in Norway.

The link to the complete concerto is: www.youtube.com/watch?v=O_qYEXbywFU



Elijah "It is Enough"

An oratorio which premiered in 1846 at the Birmingham Festival. It depicts events in the life of the Biblical prophet Elijah, taken from the books 1 Kings and 2 Kings of the Old Testament. In the story Elijah accuses the king of having angered God by allowing the worship of the pagan god Baal – the god of Ahab's wife, Jezebel. In a gripping episode on Mt Carmel the prophets of Baal are destroyed. With mounting fury Queen Jezebel tells the people that Elijah must perish because he destroyed the priests of Baal.

Elijah flees into the wilderness, where he longs for death. The aria "It is enough, now O Lord, take away my life", beautifully portrays his despondency with a poignant melody accompanied by a cello.

We hear it sung by baritone Alex Lawrence. The Youtube link is:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCVhM5Wxars

Piano Concerto No. 1 in G minor Opus 25

Felix Mendelssohn's famous G-minor concerto is a showpiece which demonstrates the composer's pianistic brilliance. In three movements played without a break, it is one of the most revered concerti of the early Romantic Era. Lovely writing for the instrument abounds at every turn, and a thrilling finale makes for a great pianistic workout!



We hear the third movement (finale) played by Alexandra Dovgan at the Grand Piano Competitions in 2018 with the Svetlanov Symphony Orchestra conducted by Alexander Sladkovsky. Alexandra is only 10 years of age. She won the competition from 14 other finalists aged up to 16 years. Watch her play the complete concerto at:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=NSEzk8d3L1k&list=RDNSEzk8d3L1k&start_radio=1&t=795