

The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn

The Companion to Mendelssohn is written by leading scholars in the field. In fourteen chapters they explore the life, work, and reception of a composer-performer once thought uniquely untroubled in life and art alike, but who is now broadly understood as one of the nineteenth century's most deeply problematic musical figures. The first section of the volume considers issues of biography, with chapters dedicated to Mendelssohn's role in the emergence of Europe's modern musical institutions, to the persistent tensions of his German-Jewish identity, and to his close but enigmatic relationship with his gifted older sister, Fanny. The following nine essays survey Mendelssohn's expansive and multi-faceted musical output, marked as it was by successes in almost every contemporary musical genre outside of opera. The volume's two closing essays confront, in turn, the turbulent course of Mendelssohn's posthumous reception and some of the challenges his music continues to pose for modern performers.

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MENDELSSOHN

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EDITED BY
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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011–4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa
<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 2004

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Minion 10.75/14 pt. System L^AT_EX 2_ε [T_B]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 521 82603 9 hardback
ISBN 0 521 53342 2 paperback

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Acknowledgments

I offer my first thanks to John Michael Cooper for his help in identifying potential contributors, and his encouragement throughout the development of this project. Parts of my own contribution to this volume were read – and improved – by Michael Cherlin, Alex Lubet, and Colleen Seguin. I am grateful to Annett Richter for offering a native speaker’s insights on a number of German passages, and to Heath Mathews and Kurt Miyashiro, who set the musical examples for this volume, and to Lucy Carolan, at Cambridge University Press, for the keen editorial eye she brought to the whole.

Permission to include facsimiles and text in this volume is gratefully acknowledged to the following:

The Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz Musikabteilung mit Mendelssohn-Archiv for permission to reproduce the manuscript pages that appear in Plates 12.1a and 12.1b.

Oxford University Press for permission to include in Chapter 2 material based on Michael P. Steinberg, “Mendelssohn’s Music and German-Jewish Culture: An Intervention,” *Musical Quarterly* 83 (1999), 31–44. © Oxford University Press.

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Chronology

- 1809 Felix Mendelssohn is born in Hamburg on 3 February.
- 1811 The Mendelssohn family moves to Berlin.
- 1816 Felix begins two years of elementary school at the Lehr-, Pensions-, und Erziehungsanstalt. On 21 March, the four Mendelssohn children are baptized. During a family visit to Paris, Felix takes lessons with violinist Pierre Baillot and with pianist Marie Bigot.
- 1818 Fanny and Felix begin lessons with Ludwig Berger. On 28 October, Felix takes part in a concert given by horn player Friedrich Gugel.
- 1819 Carl Wilhelm Ludwig Heyse begins his seven years of service as children's private tutor. Around this time, Mendelssohn begins violin lessons with Carl Wilhelm Henning, soon replaced by Eduard Rietz. From this year date the earliest documents pertaining to Mendelssohn's lessons in composition with Karl Friedrich Zelter.
- 1820 Felix and Fanny join the Berlin Singakademie.
Compositions: chamber works and lieder; *Ich, J Mendelssohn* (Lustspiel) and *Die Soldatenliebschaft* (Singspiel).
- 1821 On 18 June, Mendelssohn attends the premiere of Weber's *Der Freischütz* in Berlin's new Schauspielhaus. He travels with Zelter to Weimar, where, in November, he meets Goethe.
Compositions: *Die beiden Pädagogen* (Singspiel); Piano Sonata in G minor [op. 105]; the first six or seven of twelve string sinfonias (1821–23); *Die wandernden Komödianten* (Singspiel).
- 1822 Regular Sunday musicales have begun in the Mendelssohn household. The family takes a summer holiday in Switzerland.
Compositions: Magnificat in D; Piano Quartet no. 1 in C minor op. 1 (pub. 1823).
- 1823 Kalkbrenner plays at one of the Mendelssohn's Sunday musicales. In August Mendelssohn travels with his father to Silesia.

Sources include Wulf Konold, "Chronik," in *Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy und Seine Zeit* (Laaber, 1981), 10–48; R. Larry Todd, "Mendelssohn; Works," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London, 2001); John Michael Cooper, "Mendelssohn's Works: Prolegomenon to a Comprehensive Inventory," in *MC*, 701–85; Clive Brown, "A Checklist of Mendelssohn's Life and Principal Works," in *A portrait of Mendelssohn* (New Haven, 2003), xv–xxiii; R. Larry Todd, *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music* (Oxford, 2003). The last-named item – the most significant Mendelssohn biography of the last forty years – appeared as this volume was going to press; its impact does not extend beyond the present Chronology and this volume's first chapter.

Square brackets around an opus number indicate posthumous publication (op. 72 was the last work Mendelssohn saw into print). Except where otherwise indicated, works are placed according to their date of completion; where the year of publication differs from this, it is provided in parentheses. A full record of the elaborate revisions to which a large fraction of Mendelssohn's works were subjected is beyond the scope of this chronology. So, too, is an account of every known piece; this Chronology documents only the more consequential events of his compositional career.

- Compositions: Concerto for two pianos in E; Violin Sonata in F minor op. 4 (pub. 1824); *Die beiden Neffen oder Der Onkel aus Boston* (Singspiel); Piano Quartet no. 2 in F minor op. 2 (pub. 1824).
- 1824 Ignaz Moscheles, who will become Mendelssohn's lifelong friend, gives Fanny and Felix several piano lessons.
Compositions: Symphony no. 1 in C minor op. 11 (chamber arr. pub. 1830, parts pub. 1834); Sextet in D [op. 110]; Overture for Wind Instruments op. 24 (first version, rev. version pub. 1839); Concerto for two pianos in A♭.
- 1825 During a March visit to Paris – bookended by two further visits with Goethe – Mendelssohn and his father call on Luigi Cherubini to gauge Felix's musical promise; Cherubini greets Mendelssohn's Piano Quartet op. 3 with enthusiastic praise. That summer, the Mendelssohns move into their new home at 3 Leipzigerstraße.
Compositions: Piano Quartet no. 3 in B minor op. 3; *Die Hochzeit des Camacho* op. 10 (Singspiel; pub. 1828); Octet in E♭ op. 20 (piano duet arr. pub. 1833).
- 1826 On 19 November, Felix and Fanny play a four-hand version of the *Sommernachtstraum* Overture op. 21 for Ignaz Moscheles. Carl Maria von Weber dies in London on 25 June.
Compositions: "Trumpet" Overture [op. 101]; Piano Sonata in E op. 6; String Quintet in A op. 18, first version (rev. 1832, pub. 1833); *Ein Sommernachtstraum* Overture op. 21 (pub. 1832); Te Deum.
- 1827 On 20 February, Mendelssohn's *Sommernachtstraum* Overture and his A♭ concerto for two pianos are performed on the same concert with the north German premiere of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Beethoven dies on 26 March. On 29 April, Mendelssohn's opera *Die Hochzeit des Camacho* receives its first and last public performance. Mendelssohn begins his first four semesters of study at the University of Berlin, including Hegel's lectures on aesthetics.
Compositions: pub. of *Sieben Characterstücke* op. 7 (inc. numbers composed as early as 1824); Piano Sonata in B♭ [op. 106]; String Quartet no. 2 in A minor op. 13 (pub. 1830); "Christe, du Lamm Gottes" (the first of eight chorale cantatas that Mendelssohn would compose between 1827 and 1832); completion of pub. of *Zwölf Gesänge* op. 8 (first six pub. 1826, composed c. 1824–27; nos. 2, 3, and 12 are by Fanny Mendelssohn).
- 1828 After performance of Mendelssohn's cantata for Berlin's 18 April Dürerfest, artist Gottfried Schadow pronounces the young composer an honorary member of the Academy of Art. Schubert dies on 19 November.
Compositions: *Meeresstille und glückliche Fahrt* Overture op. 27, first version (rev. 1834, pub. 1835); *Grosse Festmusik zum Dürerfest*.
- 1829 On 11 March, Mendelssohn directs the Berlin Singakademie in a revival of J. S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, its first hearing since Bach's death. He travels to England in April, makes several dazzling appearances in the course of London's concert season, then tours Scotland and Wales on foot. He returns to Berlin for the winter. On 3 October, Fanny Mendelssohn marries painter Wilhelm Hensel.
Compositions: String Quartet no. 1 in E♭ op. 12 (pub. 1830); *Trois fantaisies ou caprices* op. 16 (pub. 1831); *Heimkehr aus der Fremde* [op. 89] (Liederspiel).
- 1830 Mendelssohn is offered the new chair in music at the University of Berlin, which he does not accept. On 8 May, he sets off on his Grand Tour to the south, visiting his

grandfather Moses' birthplace, Dessau, and meeting Goethe for the last time in Weimar. He sojourns briefly in Munich, Vienna, Pressburg, and Venice before his November arrival in Rome, where he spends the winter.

Compositions: "Reformation" Symphony in D [op. 107]; *Rondo Capriccioso* in E op. 14 (based on an "étude" of 1828); *Drei Kirchenmusiken* op. 23 (pub. 1832); Psalm 115 op. 31; *Die Hebriden* Overture op. 26 (in its first version, titled *Ouverture zur einsamen Insel*; pub., after extensive revision, 1833); pub. of *Zwölf Lieder* op. 9 (composed 1827–30; nos. 7, 10, and 12 are by Fanny Mendelssohn).

- 1831 Mendelssohn meets Donizetti in Naples and pianist Dorothea von Ertmann, a friend of Beethoven's, in Milan. He tours Switzerland in the summer, and reaches Paris on 9 December.

Compositions: Piano Concerto no. 1 in G minor op. 25 (pub. 1832).

- 1832 In Paris for the winter, Mendelssohn receives word of the deaths of Goethe and his close friend Eduard Rietz. He performs in London in the spring, where he learns of the death of his teacher, Zelter. Mendelssohn returns to Berlin in late June.

Compositions: *Die erste Walpurgisnacht* op. 60 (first version; rev. 1842–43, pub. 1844); *Capriccio brillant* op. 22; pub. of first volume of *Lieder ohne Worte*, op. 19[b], under the title "Original Melodies for the Pianoforte" (incl. items dating back to 1829).

- 1833 Mendelssohn's reluctant candidacy for the directorship of the Berlin Singakademie comes to naught; Zelter's long-time assistant Rungenhagen is elected in January. In May, Mendelssohn conducts the Lower Rhine Music Festival, returns to London with his father for much of the summer, then returns to Düsseldorf in October to assume the post of the city's music director, a three-year contract.

Compositions: Fantasia in F# minor op. 28, "Sonate écossaise" (pub. 1834); Symphony no. 4 in A, "Italian" [op. 90] (first version; rev. 1834); *Die schöne Melusine* Overture op. 32 (pub. 1836); pub. of *Sechs Gesänge* op. 19[a].

- 1834 In Düsseldorf, amid extensive choral and orchestral conducting, Mendelssohn becomes musical intendant for Karl Immermann's new theater, but abandons the project in frustration in early November.

Compositions: *Rondo brillant* op. 29.

- 1835 Mendelssohn gives his last Düsseldorf concert in July. In August, he arrives in Leipzig, where he assumes his new post as municipal music director and conductor of the Gewandhaus orchestra. Leipzig would remain his home, with occasional hiatuses, for the rest of his life. His father, Abraham, dies on 19 November.

Compositions: pub. of *Lieder ohne Worte* vol. II op. 30;

- 1836 In March, Mendelssohn receives an honorary doctorate from the University of Leipzig. He directs the Lower Rhine Music Festival in Düsseldorf in late May, where *St. Paul* is premiered to terrific acclaim. During his summer stay in Frankfurt, Mendelssohn courts Cécile Jeanrenaud, to whom he becomes engaged at the end of August.

Compositions: *St. Paul*, op. 36; pub. of *Trois caprices* op. 33 (incl. material dating back to 1833).

- 1837 In March, *St. Paul* is performed in Boston. Felix and Cécile are married on 28 March, and honeymoon through the summer.

- Compositions: String Quartet no. 4 in E minor op. 44 no. 2 (pub. 1839); Psalm 42 op. 42 (pub. 1838); Piano Concerto no. 2 in D minor op. 40 (pub. 1838); Six Preludes and Fugues for piano op. 35 (completed, incl. material dating back to 1827); Three Preludes and Fugues for organ op. 37 (completed, incl. material dating back to 1833); pub. of *Lieder ohne Worte* vol. III op. 38; pub. of *Sechs Gesänge* op. 34.
- 1838 In February, Mendelssohn begins his first series of “historical” concerts at the Gewandhaus. Carl Wolfgang Paul Mendelssohn, Felix and Cécile’s first child, is born on 7 February. In Cologne, Mendelssohn conducts his third Lower Rhine Music Festival.
- Compositions: String Quartet no. 5 in E♭ op. 44 no. 3 (pub. 1839); Psalm 95 op. 46 (first version; pub. 1842); *Serenade and Allegro gioioso* op. 43 (pub. 1839); String Quartet no. 3 in D op. 44 no. 1 (pub. 1839); Cello Sonata no. 1 in B♭ op. 45 (pub. 1839); pub. of Three Motets op. 39 (incl. material dating back to 1830); pub. of *Sechs Lieder “Im freien zu singen”* op. 41, his first set of songs for mixed chorus (two more followed in his lifetime: op. 48 in 1840 and op. 59 in 1843).
- 1839 Mendelssohn conducts the premiere of Schubert’s Symphony no. 9 in March. In May, he conducts the Lower Rhine Music Festival in Düsseldorf, then the Brunswick Music Festival in September.
- Compositions: *Ruy Blas* Overture [op. 95]; Piano Trio no. 1 in D minor op. 49 (pub. 1840); Psalm 114 op. 51 (pub. 1841); pub. of *Sechs Lieder* op. 47.
- 1840 All four of Beethoven’s overtures to *Fidelio* are performed at a single Gewandhaus concert in January. In August, Mendelssohn offers an all-Bach organ recital at the Thomaskirche to raise funds for the erection of a new Bach monument.
- Compositions: pub. of Six Male Choruses op. 50; Symphony no. 2 in B♭ op. 52, *Lobgesang* (pub. 1841).
- 1841 After repeated overtures from Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm IV, Mendelssohn reluctantly moves to Berlin for a one-year trial period, during which he is to participate in a vaguely defined plan to revitalize the city’s musical life.
- Compositions: *Variations sérieuses* op. 54; incidental music to *Antigone* op. 55 (pub. 1843); pub. of *Lieder ohne Worte* vol. IV op. 53.
- 1842 In May, Mendelssohn conducts the Lower Rhine Music Festival in Düsseldorf, then travels to London, where he is twice welcomed by Prince Albert and Queen Victoria at Buckingham Palace. In October, Friedrich Wilhelm IV frees Mendelssohn to return to Leipzig for the Gewandhaus season, but names him Generalmusikdirektor (on 4 December), with the understanding that he will return to supervise the new cathedral choir the following year. Mendelssohn’s mother, Lea, dies on 12 December.
- Compositions: Symphony no. 3 in A minor op. 56, “Scottish.”
- 1843 Leipzig’s new music conservatory – which Mendelssohn had formally proposed to Saxon King Friedrich August II in 1840 – opens its doors in April under Mendelssohn’s leadership. He returns to Berlin in November, where he conducts several concerts and assumes control of the cathedral choir.
- Compositions: Cello Sonata no. 2 in D op. 58; incidental music to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* op. 61 (pub. 1844); Psalm 98 [op. 91]; pub. of *Sechs Lieder* op. 57.
- 1844 Mendelssohn continues his work with the cathedral choir through Holy Week, then journeys to England, where he performs extensively. In September, back in Berlin, he finally succeeds in being released from his duties to that city and returns to Leipzig.

- Compositions: Violin Concerto in E minor op. 64 (pub. 1845); pub. of *Lieder ohne Worte* vol. V op. 62; completion of Three Psalms [op. 78].
- 1845 The early part of the year is spent in Frankfurt with few professional obligations. In the fall, he returns to work in Leipzig, but shares conducting duties with Niels Gade. Compositions: Piano Trio no. 2 in C minor op. 66 (pub. 1846); String Quintet no. 2 in B \flat [op. 87]; Six Sonatas for organ op. 65 (composed 1844–45); pub. of *Lieder ohne Worte* vol. VI op. 67; incidental music to *Oedipus at Colonus* [op. 93], and to *Athalie* [op. 74].
- 1846 His health declining amid a forbidding schedule of conducting obligations, Mendelssohn works feverishly at *Elijah*, whose 26 August premiere in Birmingham proves one of the greatest successes of Mendelssohn's life. Medical concerns lead to his retirement from piano performance early in the year. Compositions: *Lauda Sion* [op. 73]; *An die Künstler* op. 68; *Elijah* op. 70 (rev. and pub. 1847).
- 1847 Mendelssohn continues to conduct the Gewandhaus concerts along with Gade. He collapses upon receiving news of his older sister Fanny's death on 14 May. In October, he suffers a subarachnoid hemorrhage and never fully recovers. Mendelssohn dies on 4 November. Compositions: Three Motets op. 69; String Quartet no. 6 in F minor [op. 80]; pub. of *Sechs Lieder* op. 71; pub. of *Sechs Kinderstücke* op. 72 (incl. nos. dating back to at least 1842).

Abbreviations

- KBB* Christian Martin Schmidt, ed., *Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy: Kongreß-Bericht Berlin 1994* (Wiesbaden, 1997)
- MC* Douglass Seaton, ed., *The Mendelssohn Companion* (Westport, CT, 2001)
- MhW* Todd, R. Larry, ed., *Mendelssohn and his World* (Princeton, 1991)
- MNI* Eric Werner, *Mendelssohn: A New Image of the Composer and his Age*, trans. Dika Newlin (London, 1963)
- MQ* *The Musical Quarterly*
- MSt* Todd, R. Larry, ed., *Mendelssohn Studies* (Cambridge, 1992)
- NZfM* *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*
- PM* Carl Dahlhaus, ed., *Das Problem Mendelssohn* (Regensburg, 1974)
- TMH* John Michael Cooper and Julie D. Prandi, eds., *The Mendelssohns: Their Music in History* (Oxford, 2002)

