



FELIX
MENDELSSOHN

Lieder ohne Worte | Phantasie in F-sharp minor, Op. 28

Jiaxin TIAN PIANO



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The Romantic era in music marked a shift toward emotional depth and subjective expression. Moving away from strict classical forms such as the sonata or fugue in favor of more personal and flexible structures was a natural step in the evolution of musical language. Instrumental lyricism emerged from the traditions of song and improvisation – two forms deeply rooted in emotional expression.

Early Romanticism, particularly in Germany and Austria, began to explore a new type of short instrumental miniature, where melody and expressiveness played a central role. Composers like Franz Schubert, Ludwig van Beethoven, and Carl Maria von Weber began writing piano pieces with a vocal quality, often inspired by traditional songs. These works are characterized by subtlety of expression, intimacy, and a vocal-like approach to instrumental writing. Many consider Ludwig van Beethoven a forerunner of this trend. The youngest of the Viennese Classicists, Beethoven developed a model for short-form piano works with simple structures and a focus on melody through his *Bagatelles*, Op. 33, Op. 119, and Op. 126. However, one of the most emblematic examples of this lyrical tendency is Felix Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words*, which became a model for future generations of composers.

Felix MENDELSSOHN-BARTHOLDY (1809–1847) coined the term *Lieder ohne Worte* [*Songs Without Words*], which quickly became synonymous with lyrical piano miniatures. In these short pieces, the melodic line carries the narrative much like in a vocal song – but without the use of text.

Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words* comprise a cycle of eight books, each containing six pieces, composed between 1829 and 1845. These works have enjoyed lasting popularity, not only among experienced pianists but also among students, who often perform the simpler selections. This album presents sixteen selected miniatures from different stages of Mendelssohn's career. Despite the variety of expressive means employed, the lyrical melodic line – supported by a tightly woven accompaniment – remains the defining feature of each piece. The album includes songs with straightforward, symmetrical forms as well as more structurally complex compositions.

The album opens with the well-known piece from Op. 19, No. 6, built on a simple accompaniment and a gently unfolding melody. Similar textures appear in Op. 30, No. 6; Op. 53, No. 2; and one of Mendelssohn's most famous works – Op. 62, No. 6. The miniature from Op. 38, No. 4 stands out for its improvisatory character. The main section is preceded by a short interlude and followed by an epilogue constructed in much the same way. Op. 102, No. 3 displays greater expressive intensity and evokes the character of an early

Romantic étude or a salon miniature. The final piece in the selection – Op. 102, No. 6 – has a ballad-like quality. Here, the boundary between melody and accompaniment begins to blur, and the use of extended, intricate melodic lines sets this work apart from the others.

Among the most free-form genres of the 19th century, the Romantic piano fantasy offered composers great flexibility. Each major figure – Robert Schumann, Frédéric Chopin, Franz Schubert, Franz Liszt, and Felix Mendelssohn – approached the genre from a unique perspective. Schubert's *Fantasy in C Major*, Op. 15, D. 760 (*Wanderer*), follows a loose sonata-cycle structure and incorporates self-quotations from his earlier song of the same title. Schumann's *Fantasy in C Major*, Op. 17, is far more free in form, with each of its three movements functioning independently. The fantasies of Liszt, Carl Czerny, and Sigismond Thalberg lean toward virtuosity; although they often draw on material from other works, their structure is shaped primarily by dazzling technical display.

Mendelssohn's ***Fantasy in F-sharp Minor, Op. 28***, differs structurally from the examples mentioned above. It consists of three movements. The first is a loosely constructed sonata-allegro form, with a main theme marked by melancholy and introspection. The second movement exudes a playful, pastoral mood, at times intensified by rich textures. The final *Presto* combines the rondo form of Classical tradition with the brilliance and

expressive clarity characteristic of the Romantic *brillante* style. Although each movement follows its own formal principles, they all share a common trait: expressive simplicity, which resonates with the spirit of the sixteen *Songs Without Words* featured on this album.

Mendelssohn's piano music – embraced by an increasing number of pianists – is gradually receiving the recognition it has long deserved.

Dariusz Marcinişzyn



Born into a musical family in Beijing, **Jiaxin TIAN** is a rising star among young piano virtuosos and a member of the prestigious Steinway Artists roster. She first gained recognition with her solo recital debut at Carnegie Hall in February 2013. Since then, she has earned a Professional Studies Certificate and a Master of Music degree from the Manhattan School of Music, where she was honored with the school's highest piano award, the Harold Bauer Award.

In February 2014, Tian performed at New York's Lincoln Center for the second time – an impressive milestone for a pianist who was only 27 years old at the time. Both appearances were part of

Spring Festival celebrations abroad, organized by the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China.

Tian first achieved major success in February 2012, performing Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 20 in D Minor, K. 466 at the Manhattan School of Music's John C. Borden Auditorium with the school's symphony orchestra under the baton of renowned pianist and conductor Philippe Entremont. After the performance, Entremont remarked:

"I had the privilege of performing the Mozart Piano Concerto, K. 466, with Jiaxin Tian in New York. She is a splendid pianist with enormous potential. Her pianistic presence is amazing – after five seconds, I knew I liked this girl and her sound."

Several years later, Tian began studying piano with Maestro Entremont.

Over the past several years, Ms. Tian has performed in numerous concerts around the world. As part of the *Rising Artists Evening II* on June 2, 2012, she appeared with the New York Concert Artists Symphony Orchestra, conducted by the acclaimed Kazuo Kanemaki. Her performance was praised by both local and international media. Earlier, in 2009, she made her solo debut in Beijing with a performance of *The Yellow River Concerto*, described by reviewers as "exceptional and spectacular, with subtle musicality and a unique timbre."

She was later invited to reprise this work in January 2012 at China's National Centre for the Performing Arts. In July of the same year, she returned to

Beijing and performed both *The Yellow River Concerto* and Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 20 in D Minor.

Tian has earned recognition in numerous piano competitions, winning awards for her Mozart interpretations at the 2011 Dora Zaslavsky Koch Competition, as well as prizes for solo piano performance at the First Young Artist Competition in Long Island (2011), for duo piano performance (2012), and for piano quintet at the Lillian Fuchs Chamber Music Competition in New York City (2011).

Her outstanding performance in the 2011 Rising Artists Concerto Presentation led to her selection by New York Concert Artists and Associates to participate in the 2012 Rising Artists Event.

In the summer of 2012, Tian released her first CD, *Piano Music from the Heart*, under the China Recording Corporation. That same year, the Chinese Postal Service issued a commemorative postage stamp in her honor. In addition to performing, Tian has begun to explore music education. In 2011, she was invited to give a lecture and master class in Beijing titled *Black and White – My Piano Dream*.

On April 28, 2014, she appeared at the *French Spirit* concert at China's National Centre for the Performing Arts to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Sino-French diplomatic relations. Performing alongside her mentor Philippe Entremont, Tian delivered a flowing and expressive interpretation of a Mozart piano concerto. Although the two had performed together previously, this marked the first time they shared the stage in China.

In June 2014, she gave a solo recital at the Harvard Club in New York. In August, she performed at Tianjin Concert Hall. A month later, she was officially named a Steinway Artist, joining the company's distinguished global roster. That same September, she gave the premiere performance of *Chinese Dream* with the Harbin Symphony Orchestra under conductor Yang Yang.

In November 2014, she participated in the Steinway & China Gala Concert at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing, celebrating the 10th anniversary of Steinway's presence in China. There, she again performed *Chinese Dream*, this time with the China National Symphony Orchestra conducted by Yongyan Hu.

