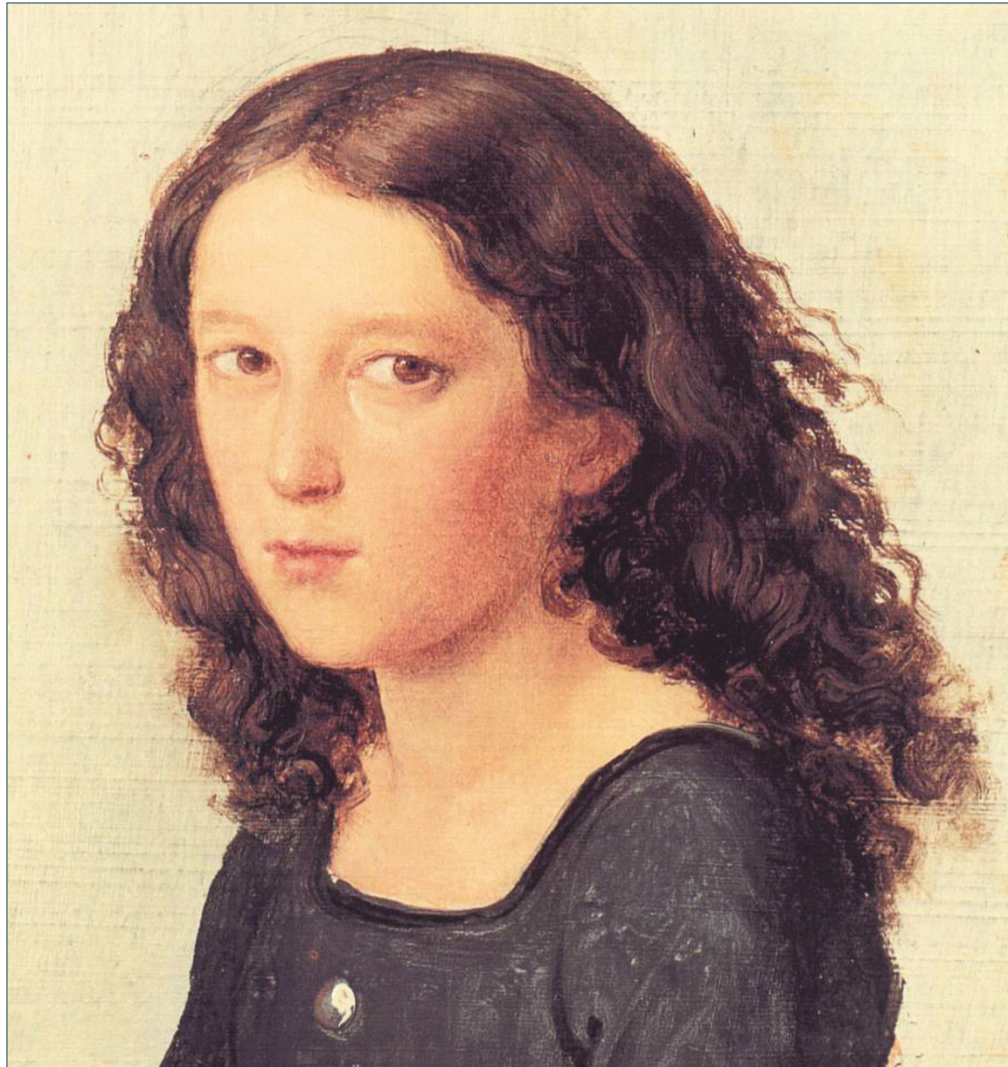


# MENDELSSOHN

## Early Piano Music

Sergio Monteiro



## Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847)

### Early Piano Music

Felix Mendelssohn was born in Hamburg in 1809, and was brought up in Berlin, where his family settled in 1812. He was the eldest son of the banker Abraham Mendelssohn and grandson of the great Jewish thinker Moses Mendelssohn, and took the additional name Bartholdy on his baptism as a Christian. In Berlin he enjoyed the wide cultural opportunities that his family offered, through their own interests and connections. Mendelssohn's gifts, manifested in a number of directions, included marked musical precocity, both as a player and as a performer, at a remarkably early age.

Mendelssohn's early manhood brought the opportunity to travel, as far south as Naples and as far north as the Hebrides, with Italy and Scotland both providing inspiration for later symphonies. His career involved him in the Lower Rhine Festival in Düsseldorf, and for a period he was director of music there, followed, in 1835, by appointment as conductor of the Gewandhaus Orchestra in Leipzig. Here, he was able to continue the work he had started in Berlin six years earlier, when he had conducted a revival of Bach's *St Matthew Passion*. Leipzig was to provide a degree of satisfaction that he could not find in Berlin, where he returned at the invitation of King Friedrich Wilhelm IV in 1841. In 1843, in Leipzig once more, he established a new conservatory, spending his final years there, until his death at the age of 38 on 4 November 1847, six months after the death of his gifted and beloved sister Fanny.

Mendelssohn showed remarkable abilities in early childhood. In music this was exemplified by his skill as a pianist, and his prolific genius as a composer. He had his first piano lessons from his mother. In 1816, during a family visit to Paris, Felix had violin lessons with Pierre Baillot and he and his sister Fanny had piano lessons with Marie Bigot, who had been the first to play to Beethoven his 'Appassionata' sonata. In Berlin again, Felix had composition lessons with Carl Friedrich Zelter, a musician much favoured by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, whose poems he had set to music. Lessons with Zelter began

when Felix was eight, and it was with Zelter that he visited Goethe in Weimar in 1821, and through him that Felix and Fanny in 1819 joined the Berlin Singakademie. While the Mendelssohn family held Bach in great respect – Mendelssohn's mother had by heart a good part of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* – Zelter's influence on Mendelssohn was very considerable and lay at the heart of the Bach revival, promoted by Mendelssohn's performance in 1829 of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* with the Singakademie.

The three movements that can be assembled to form the *Sonata in C minor* date from 1820, when Mendelssohn was eleven. The first of the movements opens with a grandiose Baroque introductory *Largo*, leading to an *Allegro* that has something of Weber or Hummel about it, rather than the expected Baroque continuation. The *Adagio* in D major provides opportunities for technical prowess, and the final *Presto* provides the necessary panache for a conclusion. The *Sonata in A minor* is dated 12 May 1820. The first movement is clear evidence of Mendelssohn's facility at this age as a pianist. The slow movement, with its Classical echoes, has a characteristic charm about it. The sonata ends with a dashing *Presto*, reflecting, as these early works do, the repertoire with which Mendelssohn had become familiar as a pianist. Mendelssohn's *Sonatina in E major* is dated 12 December and designed for his elder sister Fanny, whose gifts as a musician were limited by the conventions of her epoch, as her father had made clear to her.

The *Andante in D major* of 1826 includes at its heart a canon, framed by the gentle textures that provide the substance of the work. It is dated in early January and was intended for Mendelssohn's cousin, Arnold Mendelssohn, son of Abraham Mendelssohn's brother Nathan. The *Prestissimo in F minor* was written in 1824, bearing the date 19 August, a dashing *perpetuum mobile*. The brilliant *Vivace in C minor* is dated 1826, the year of Mendelssohn's *Overture to A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The preceding year had brought a number of compositions, including the opera *Die Hochzeit des Camacho* ('Camacho's Wedding')

based on an episode from *Don Quixote*, and the scintillating *Octet*. These early piano pieces testify to Mendelssohn's early ability as a composer and as a pianist.

The *Fugue in D minor* and the *Fugue in B minor* were written in 1822, and reflect not only Mendelssohn's interest in Bach but also his proficiency in tonal counterpoint, a skill once rightly regarded as a necessary element in musical training. By this time, Zelter had taught Mendelssohn for some years, and something of these lessons had been absorbed, all the while Zelter taking care not to overpraise a pupil of whom he was in fact very proud. Mendelssohn's published *Preludes and Fugues* were written in the 1830s. The earlier fugues included here date from 1824, the date

of the *Fugue in G minor*, and 1826, the date of the impressive *Fugue C sharp minor* and the *Fugue in E flat major*.

Zelter, a pupil of a pupil of Bach, passed on to Mendelssohn Bach's traditional, inherited teaching of counterpoint and chorale harmonisation, their principles very quickly absorbed by his pupil. These techniques remained with Mendelssohn throughout his life, most significantly from his precocious childhood, supported by his remarkable practical abilities as a player. Both elements are exemplified by the early piano fugues.

Keith Anderson

## Sergio Monteiro

Born in Niteroi, Brazil, Steinway artist Sergio Monteiro is director of piano activities at the Wanda L. Bass School of Music, Oklahoma City University. He holds bachelor and master degrees from the School of Music of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, where he studied with Myrian Dauelsberg, winning several South American piano competitions during this time. In 2000 he was awarded a scholarship from the Ministry of Culture to study at the Eastman School of Music, New York, where he earned his Doctor of Musical Arts studying with Nelita True. In 2003 he won the 2nd Martha Argerich International Piano Competition in Buenos Aires, and has since appeared with numerous prestigious orchestras including the Buenos Aires and Lübeck Philharmonic orchestras, the Dresdner Philharmonic and the Chamber Orchestra Kremlin, and performed in venues including the Toronto Centre for the Arts, the Konzerthaus Berlin and the Teatro Colón, Buenos Aires under conductors such as Charles Dutoit and Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos. Monterio has lectured, adjudicated and led masterclasses at schools worldwide. A champion of Brazilian music, he has been honoured by many composers with invitations to give premieres of compositions written for and dedicated to him. Monterio has recently released three critically acclaimed albums on the Naxos and Grand Piano labels that feature the music of Scarlatti [8.573611], Liszt [8.573485] and Oswald [GP682]. [www.sergiomonteiorpiano.com](http://www.sergiomonteiorpiano.com)



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In addition to his prodigious youthful genius as a composer, Mendelssohn was an exceptionally able pianist. Demonstrating an astonishing level of maturity beyond the composer's teenage years, this group of rare works is notable for a sequence of piano fugues with an impressive command of counterpoint and chorale harmonisation, two sonatas which reveal the dual influences of the Baroque and more contemporary models such as Weber and Hummel, as well as a dashing *Prestissimo in F minor* and a brilliant *Vivace in C minor*.

## Felix MENDELSSOHN (1809–1847)

### Early Piano Music

<b>Sonata in C minor (1820)</b>		<b>9:53</b>	<b>9 Prestissimo in F minor (1824) 1:42</b>
<b>1</b> I. Largo – Allegro		4:04	<b>10 Vivace in C minor (1826) 3:01</b>
<b>2</b> II. Adagio		4:17	<b>11 Fugue in D minor (I) (1822) 3:19</b>
<b>3</b> III. Presto		1:29	<b>12 Fugue in D minor (II) (1822) 4:10</b>
<b>Sonata in A minor (1820)</b>		<b>7:39</b>	<b>13 Fugue in B minor (1822) 2:44</b>
<b>4</b> I. Allegro molto		1:56	<b>14 Fugue in G minor (1824) 4:10</b>
<b>5</b> II. Tempo di minuetto		3:51	<b>15 Fugue in C sharp minor (1826) 7:55</b>
<b>6</b> III. Presto		1:49	<b>16 Fugue in E flat major (1826) 6:19</b>
<b>Sonatina in E major (1821)</b>		<b>5:05</b>	
<b>7</b> Lento – Moderato			
<b>8</b> Andante in D major (1826)		<b>4:59</b>	

Sergio Monteiro, Piano



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 Producer: Sergio Monteiro • Engineer and editor: Matt Horton • Booklet notes: Keith Anderson  
 Sources: Mus. Ms. Autogr. Mendelssohn Bartholdy (MWV): F. 1, p. 62–71 (U13, U15, U17) **1–3**,  
 F. 1, p. 43–47 (U8) **4–6**, F. 1, p. 1–8 (U35) **7**, F. 2, p. 157–158 (U32) **11**, F. 2, p. 177–178 (U36) **12**,  
 F. 2, p. 218–219 (U37) **13**, F. 13, p. 119–126 (U51) **15**, Larry Todd: Mendelssohn Early Music for  
 Piano. Cambridge University Press (MWV): U53, 45, 52 **8–10**, U46 **14**, U57 **16**  
 Cover image: Felix Mendelssohn in 1821, aged 12, by Carl Joseph Begas (1794–1854) (public domain)



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Playing Time  
61:21



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