



JULIUS BENEDICT

Piano Works

Sonata No. 1 • Andante and Rondo Brillante • Rêverie

Nicolò Giuliano Tuccia



Romantic Piano • 1

Julius Benedict (1804–1885)

Julius Benedict was born in Stuttgart on 27 November 1804 and died in London on 5 June 1885.

Of German-Jewish descent, Benedict's early studies bestowed an impeccable musical heritage. Studying piano and theory with J.C.L. Abeille in Stuttgart, by the age of twelve he was considered a virtuoso pianist. He was encouraged by his father, a wealthy banker, who sent him to Johann Nepomuk Hummel in Weimar during 1819. Following his father's wishes, Benedict began studies with Carl Maria von Weber in Dresden during 1821, with whom he went to Berlin for the production of *Der Freischütz* in June that year, and visited Beethoven in 1823. At that time Benedict was able to begin an acquaintance with the young Felix Mendelssohn, who greatly impressed him. By 1824 Benedict had circulated among some of the foremost German musicians of the era and had assisted with performances of Weber's opera *Euryanthe* in Vienna.

Benedict's impressive career trajectory continued with conductorships at Vienna's Hoftheater in 1824 and Naples' San Carlo and Fondo Theatres from 1825 to 1834. Clearly a composer of great facility, there were however checks to his advancement in the three operas he wrote at that time. The first used the style of Weber, and failed in Naples, and the second used the style of Rossini, and failed further afield in Stuttgart.

A move to Paris in 1834 proved unhelpful, bringing Benedict into an already crowded musical scene richly endowed with composers and pianists such as Liszt and Chopin. Astutely, Benedict took the advice of virtuoso singer Maria Malibran and relocated to London in 1835, a move that immediately proved more advantageous.

Benedict's career in Britain over the next 50 years goes to the heart of music making in the so-called *land ohne musik*. That phrase, first emanating possibly during the 1860s from German music scholar Carl Engel, then resident in England, and later from Oscar Schmitz at the turn of the 20th century, referred as much to folk as classical music in Britain, but did contain a touch of chauvinism from the writers at a time of German pride in unification. What can be in no doubt, however, is the evidently rich tapestry of music-making in Britain as evinced from Benedict's busy schedule of work. A hugely industrious and active musician, John Francis Barnett wrote that:

... in later life he was one of the busiest musicians of the time ... It was said by some he composed during the night and taught during the day; notwithstanding he continued to be present at nearly every important concert or fashionable reception given by patrons of musical art ... Benedict was a man of engaging manners, and, of course, quite a society man; yet ... he was at all times most accessible.

Victorian Britain presented challenges and opportunities for European musicians, and Benedict would have known he was treading a well-worn path in seeking career advancement in London. His better-known precursors included Handel, J.C. Bach and Clementi, all of whom made their home there, plus Haydn and Mendelssohn who visited and were feted. The British public was accustomed to acknowledging European influence in musical circles, although in the widely influential area of church music British-born organists and choir directors carried considerable prestige, with their churches full and local choral societies and associations burgeoning.

London itself had around 19 theatres by 1851, the year of the Great Exhibition that was housed in the Crystal Palace. Driven by Britain's world-first industrial revolution, London's population surpassed all other cities by 1825 and was a hive of commercial activity, matched by the expanding industrialisation of Britain's northern towns and cities. The wealthy middle classes demanded increased availability of life's good things, including music, with concert halls and orchestral societies becoming established.

In this context the country also showed a rising interest in the serious training and education of musicians. In 1822 John Fane, 11th Earl of Westmorland, helped by ideas from the French harpist and composer Nicolas-Charles Bochsa, initiated an academy of music in London following recent models founded in Paris and several other European cities. Among those supporting the project was enthusiastic violinist Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington, and the Academy was granted a royal charter by George IV in 1830. In later life Benedict himself was involved with a second London music college: the National Training School for Music. Inevitably such institutions encountered challenges in their early days and in 1880, along with Charles Halle, Sir Michael Costa and Otto Goldschmidt, Benedict reported that the National Training School lacked executive cohesion. Its principal, Arthur Sullivan, resigned the following year and the school later morphed into the Royal College of Music.

It was into this supercharged atmosphere of expansion and commerce that Benedict launched his career in 1835, and given his innate purposeful and perceptive personality accompanied by networking skills and undoubted musical talent it is unsurprising he enjoyed success. It took time though for him to master the local musical vernacular, with his undoubted success, the grand opera *The Lily of Killarney* not appearing until 1862. By then he had also become enmeshed in Britain's seeming fascination with choral cantatas and oratorios where his expert musical skills stood him in good stead, both as a conductor and composer.

Benedict was appointed conductor of Opera Buffa at The Lyceum Theatre in 1836 and musical director at the Drury Lane Theatre in 1838, during a period when the operas of Michael William Balfe and William Vincent Wallace were prominent. Benedict's first opera at The Lyceum in 1837, *Un anno ed un giorno*, performed earlier in Naples, was succeeded by three English operas of his own, *The Gypsy's Warning* (Drury Lane Theatre, 1838), *The Brides of Venice* (Drury Lane Theatre, 1844) and *The Crusaders* (Drury Lane Theatre, 1846). An appointment at Her Majesty's Theatre in 1852 was followed by two further operas, including his most popular stage work *The Lily of Killarney*, produced at Covent Garden in 1862. But his following and final opera, *The Bride of Song* (Covent Garden, 1864), did not match this success.

Given his in-demand status as an opera conductor Benedict also directed the premieres of many highly successful operas by other composers, such as Balfe's *The Bohemian Girl* and Wallace's *Maritana*.

Benedict's admiration for the music of Felix Mendelssohn remained unabated, and in 1848 he conducted a performance of *Elijah* in Exeter Hall, with Jenny Lind making her first appearance as an oratorio singer. Shortly thereafter he gave a lecture on Mendelssohn, published in 1850 as *A Sketch of the Life and Works of the Late Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy*. Somehow during his busy schedule he also found time to edit and write on other matters, including a valuable biography of Weber.

Unsurprisingly, Benedict's conducting activities extended to regular engagements with music festivals, the most lasting of which was with the Norwich Festival from 1845 to 1878. Between 1855 and 1865 he directed his own Vocal Association, modelled on a German Gesangverein, and conducted its concerts at the Crystal Palace. He conducted for the Liverpool Philharmonic Society from 1867 to 1880, reinvigorating its programmes and general well-being, although unhappily his successor Max Bruch had a far less successful and lengthy tenure.

Benedict's composing agility and facility were put to good use as he embraced the British enthusiasm for the sacred oratorio, a form first popularised by Handel a century previously. Indeed, at some point he converted to Christian beliefs himself. His cantata *The Legend of Saint Cecilia* was performed at the Norwich Festival in 1868, and the oratorio *St Peter* at the Birmingham Festival of 1870. Unfortunately, the great success this enjoyed at the time was somewhat mitigated by an unedifying dispute that continued for some while concerning the oratorio's libretto. Compiled from biblical sources, the text, originally by Henry Fothergill Chorley, had undergone further rewriting by Joseph Bennett. Benedict found himself in the middle of rancour between the two which spilt over into the press. Nevertheless, at this distance, it serves to demonstrate genuine public concerns about the importance of music, art and morality at the time. *Graziella*, a cantata, was given at the Birmingham Festival of 1882, and was later produced in operatic form at the Crystal Palace in August 1883.

Benedict did not ignore other major musical genres, with a symphony he wrote being performed at the Crystal Palace in 1873. Furthermore, the area of light opera had always beckoned and in the autumn of 1875 he corresponded with W.S. Gilbert about collaborating on a comic opera. Gilbert, however, had too many projects and the matter did not progress.

Benedict's pianism was notable, and for many years he accompanied the Monday Popular Concerts at the St James's Hall. He was Jenny Lind's accompanist at the beginning of her extensive American tour, which took place from 1850 to 1852, but relinquished this role to her future husband, Otto Goldschmidt, in 1851. As an accomplished pianist Benedict never lost his interest in playing, teaching and writing for the piano. That many of his piano pieces were routine arrangements and fantasias connected with popular melodies, songs and arias should not be held against him. They were a means of supplementing an income in the days when freelance musicians were not well remunerated. Evidence that his own financial position was not robust can be found in his need for financial assistance at the end of his life. In 1884 the Sir Julius Benedict Testimonial Fund was set up, with royal patronage, with a benefit concert at the Royal Albert Hall.

Undoubtedly, Benedict's impeccable musical lineage and exemplary training made a lasting impact on his musical outlook. Unlike some of the popular composers of his day writing for the music theatre, Benedict possessed a first-class compositional technique and considerable facility and ingenuity in his creative work. This is borne out in Benedict's later compositions in oratorio and cantata form where he exercises facility in contrapuntal writing that would not have been possible in his operas. In the operas themselves, however, his facility in writing in the Rossinian manner gradually morphed into a style better suited to the ballad-

opera format favoured by British audiences at the time, flowering fully in *The Lily of Killarney*, where he cleverly achieves an Irish musically reminiscent undertone. Similarly, arguably his best religious work, *The Legend of St Cecilia*, achieves genuinely polished Mendelssohnian finesse. Indeed, it has been suggested that Benedict had synthesised Rossini, Weber and Mendelssohn in his later years, producing a convincingly polished mid-century language that resonated with his audiences. He did not seek to break new ground, but was content to produce masterful music in the language of his time that would connect with his listeners.

Benedict was knighted (along with George Elvey and William Sterndale Bennett) in 1871.

Married twice, Benedict had three daughters (Adeline, Georgina and Alice) and two sons (Ernest and Julius) with his first wife, Therese, who died in 1852. He married his second wife, Mary Comber (née Fortey) (1857/8–1911), in December 1879. At the time of Benedict's testimonial fund being established in 1884 an article in *The Musical Times* stated:

In reviewing the 50 years of Sir Julius Benedict's career in this country, during which music has grown from an aristocratic luxury to a popular necessity, it must be recollected that he has ever been one of the most active agents in its progress; for as executant, composer, teacher, lecturer, and writer he has made a name which will be permanently enrolled in the annals of art.

A London County Council blue plaque commemorates Benedict at 2 Manchester Square, Marylebone, where he lived for many years.

Many of Benedict's original piano pieces show creative spirit and warm feeling, such as *Rêverie* (published in 1848). He was also quite willing to revise and repurpose older piano music if the occasion demanded. For example, Nicholas Temperley, noted specialist in 19th-century British music, indicates that the *Piano Concerto No. 3 in A flat, Op. 90* (1867) includes a third movement from Benedict's *Rondo Brillante, Op. 5* (Vienna, 1827), and a first movement from his *Concertino No. 1, Op. 18* (Leipzig, 1831).

Benedict's piano style owes much to his teachers Hummel and Weber. The figuration and layout are more restrained than the thunderous octave cascades of Liszt and his followers. Delicate melodic runs and singing cantabiles with attractive modulations are Benedict's trademarks, and these would have been quite manageable by good amateur pianists of his day. Mendelssohnian chromaticism was the furthest Benedict would venture in terms of harmonic and melodic innovation.

Piano Sonata No. 1 in E major, Op. 2

Published in 1824 by Edition Peters and dedicated to Amalie of Zweibrücken-Birkenfeld (Maria Amalie Auguste), Duchess of Warsaw, this youthful work was written during a pivotal period for Benedict when he was completing his studies with Weber and seeking career advancement. The lengthy score highlights his precocious talent, emphasised by *Elève de Mr. C. M de Weber* on the cover. Although the style shows strong influences of Hummel and Weber, Benedict demonstrates several features involving musical originality, including his adept modulatory techniques and a spirited scherzo-infused *Menuetto* movement. Perhaps the opening *Allegro vivo* movement in 6/8 time is the most conservative, with a serious contrapuntal first subject in E major followed by a *dolce* second subject in B major, a traditional development and then recapitulation. The more richly romantic second-movement *Andante* is also in sonata form, with a rather doleful E minor first subject and a sweeter lyrical second subject in D major. The *Menuetto: Presto* in B minor is highly original and full of verve and vigour. The *dolce grazioso* trio section in B major contains some beguiling key changes demonstrating Benedict's facility in that area. The calm pastoral mood of the *Finale* contrasts strikingly with the usual ebullience of last movements. An interesting aspect of the recapitulation in this sonata form movement is the way Benedict creates a melange of both first and second subjects in E major to finish with, rather than a more conventional recapitulation of each subject separately as was the custom with Mozart and other Viennese School composers. As a result, there is a feeling of added musical density and substance at the end of the movement.

Scherzo in E major

This may be the *Scherzo* published in Hallberger's *Salon Books 4 and 5* (Monatsbericht, 1859) by Edition Hallberger of Stuttgart. The light-hearted mood is underscored by rhythmically repeated chords and single notes giving the triple time a dance-like effect. The style is Mendelssohnian, the *da capo* three-part A–B–A form is straightforward, and the piece is well suited for better amateur pianists of the day.

Etude für die linke Hand allein

Published in an unidentified collection during the 1880s, this study would have tested even more skilful home pianists, although it cleverly avoids the need for complete virtuosity. The middle section of its A–B–A form is designed to impress, with its seeming two-handed tune-and-accompaniment effects.

Etude in A flat major

The impetus of repeated chords and a very enticing theme propel this music with gusto, although always with taste and finesse. Only its highly excitable final outburst distinguishes it from music Mendelssohn himself might have written.

Rêverie, Op. 39

Published in 1848 by Breitkopf & Härtel, this contemplative and quite expansive piece shows the greater maturity and depth of expression Benedict had acquired by this time. Delicate figuration permeates both the first subject in B major and the second subject in F sharp major, and Benedict's facility and eloquence in modulation is on full display throughout.

Gigue écossaise

This is a typically lightweight salon piece replete with comedic and caricaturistic elements that ensure immediate listener engagement. Such compositions helped maintain some financial stability for Benedict as he pursued more serious work.

Andante and Rondo Brillante in A flat major

Benedict introduced two piano concertos in 1867: *Piano Concerto No. 2 in E flat major, Op. 89* was performed by the remarkable English pianist Arabella Goddard at the Crystal Palace, and *Piano Concerto No. 3 in A flat major, Op. 90* also dates from that year. Both concertos contained material from earlier works, with the third movement of *Concerto No. 3* originating from Benedict's earlier *Rondo Brillante, Op. 5* (Vienna, 1827). Benedict's later arrangement for piano solo, heard here, is dedicated to the Liverpool Philharmonic Society, where, as mentioned, he became conductor in 1867. It presents the *Andante* and *Rondo Brillante* movements *with orchestral accompaniments ad libitum*, allowing orchestral passages to be played by the pianist. Cast in A flat minor, the highly embellished, aria-like *Andante*'s main theme is almost Chopinesque in its general figuration, with a cantabile melody in the right hand and broad sonic scope. An extended cadential section leads into a scampering orchestral *tutti* introducing the following *Rondo Brillante* in A flat major. The main *Rondo* theme concentrates greatly on the piano's treble tonalities, a strength in instruments of the 1820s and 1830s which lacked the sonorous basses of later designs. This theme, occupying section A of the rondo form movement, positively glitters in the treble register although, as often with Benedict's teachers Hummel and Weber, there is also lofty restraint. An orchestral *tutti* presents section B with new material, returning briefly to the main *Rondo* theme before the solo piano introduces section C with further material. This moves through a good deal of modulation and is performed with increasing bravura demonstrating Benedict's inventive powers. An orchestral *tutti* then returns to section B material and the piano subsequently enters with the main *Rondo* theme in E flat major, modulating back to A flat major for a coda. The momentum continues to build with added energy and exuberance for a brilliant final flourish.

Rodney Smith

Nicolò Giuliano Tuccia



Photo: John Geblier

Nicolò Giuliano Tuccia is an accomplished pianist, educator and cultural organiser. As president of Forlì Cultura, he has launched numerous artistic projects, including the renowned Guido Agosti season, which has drawn significant public and critical acclaim. He enjoys an extensive performance career, and has appeared on prestigious stages across Europe, including the Istituto Italiano di Cultura in Berlin, Casa Menotti in Spoleto and Schloss Bensberg in Cologne, collaborating with leading orchestras and conductors. Tuccia's repertoire spans from Baroque to contemporary works, with highlights such as Ravel's *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, Schumann's *Kreisleriana* and Prokofiev's *Third Sonata*. He has also recorded Brazilian music and premiered original compositions for piano and orchestra. Beyond performance, Tuccia is deeply committed to teaching and nurturing young talents, fostering their artistic growth through masterclasses and mentorship. Driven by a passion for community engagement, he has successfully merged his artistry with cultural management, creating accessible, high-quality musical experiences. Whether on stage or behind the scenes, Nicolò Giuliano Tuccia continues to shape the cultural landscape with dedication, vision and artistry.

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Julius Benedict studied with Hummel and Weber, beginning as a virtuoso pianist and then becoming a conductor and operatic composer. In 1835 he moved to England where he spent the next 50 years as a much-admired composer, teacher and writer. His most famous work is the opera *The Lily of Killarney* but the music for his own instrument displays a precocious talent. This is most evident in the *Piano Sonata No. 1 in E major*, where novelty and beguiling modulations co-exist with the influence of his teachers. The smaller pieces exhibit his taste, finesse and maturity, while the *Andante and Rondo Brillante* is a glittering showpiece.

Julius
BENEDICT
(1804–1885)

Piano Sonata No. 1 in E major, Op. 2 (1823)	33:10
1 I. Allegro vivo	10:30
2 II. Andante	8:52
3 III. Menuetto: Presto	3:22
4 IV. Finale: Allegretto	10:26
5 Scherzo in E major	2:27
6 Etude für die linke Hand allein (pub. 1880s)	4:05
7 Etude in A flat major	2:25
8 Rêverie, Op. 39 (pub. 1848)	6:39
9 Gigue écossaise (pub. 1904)	2:11
10 Andante and Rondo Brillante in A flat major	15:35

Nicolò Giuliano Tuccia, Piano

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