

PROGRAM NOTES

Overture in C Major Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel (1805-1847)

Fanny Mendelssohn was Felix Mendelssohn's elder sister, and according to contemporary accounts was as gifted, if not more so, than her brother. Constrained by cultural expectations to remain in the home, Fanny did not perform publicly and did not publish her compositions. She composed over four hundred works, most of which were songs and chamber compositions. The Overture in C Major is Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel's only work for orchestra, and was most likely intended for her family's weekly private salon concert for Berlin's elite society.

A few years later in a letter to her brother Felix, she described a subsequent performance of the overture in which she had been invited to conduct:

Had I not been so shy, and embarrassed with every stroke, I would've been able to conduct reasonably well. It was great fun to hear the piece for the first time in two years and find everything the way I remembered. People seemed to like it—they were very kind, praised me, criticized a few impractical passages, and will return next Saturday. Thus I took part in an unexpected pleasure.

This work remained unpublished until the 1980's, when it was reconstructed from a greatly revised score in Mendelssohn's own hand, and was first recorded by the Women's Philharmonic (conducted by Jo Ann Falletta) in 1992.

The Overture in C begins with a graceful slow introduction, followed by a charming and lively segment in sonata-allegro form.



Fanny Cäcilie Mendelssohn Hensel (1805-1847) was born into a wealthy, educated family, as the oldest of four children. Her grandfather, Moses Mendelssohn, was a German Jewish philosopher at the center of the German Enlightenment. Fanny's father Abraham, a prosperous banker, relocated his family to Berlin in 1811 to escape Napoleon's occupation of Hamburg. In 1816, the family was baptized as Lutheran and adopted the surname Bartholdy.

Fanny and her younger brother Felix were raised in an exceptionally stimulating atmosphere and both became highly accomplished composers and pianists. By the age of fourteen, Fanny had memorized all 48 of Bach's Preludes and Fugues and had begun composing. Despite the cultured world in which the Mendelssohn family circulated, her father would not allow Fanny to publish under her own name and perform in public. He believed that a professional career was unsuitable for a young lady, and that she should remain at home as the "light of her family."

At the age of 17, she met a struggling painter, Wilhelm Hensel. After years of family opposition due to his lack of wealth, they were married and moved into a house in the family compound. Fanny's husband supported and even fostered her love of music. He would reportedly leave her with a blank piece of musical paper each day, which he hoped would be filled with notations by the time he'd returned home. Fanny became one of Berlin's most popular musical benefactors, establishing a salon that drew from the city's elite. These private concerts provided Fanny the opportunity to perform her own compositions, which totaled over 400 works including piano music, oratorios, chamber music, and one work for orchestra (the Overture in C Major).

In 1846, after an approach by two Berlin publishers and without consulting Felix (who had been opposed to her publishing her music), she decided to publish a collection of her songs as her Op. 1. After publication, Felix wrote to her "[send you my professional blessing on becoming a member of the craft [...] may you have much happiness in giving pleasure to others; may you taste only the sweets and none of the bitterness of authorship; may the public pelt you with roses, and never with sand." Around that time, she began to suffer recurrent nosebleeds, which is now recognized as a symptom of high blood pressure. On May 16, 1847, while rehearsing a performance for Felix's oratorio, *The First Walpurgis Night*, she suffered a fatal stroke. Her untimely death left Felix heartbroken, and he died just six months later from the same cause.

Most of Fanny Mendelssohn's music remained unheard and unpublished until the 1980's, when a renewed interest in her life brought her music to the public.

Symphony No. 70 in D Major, Hob 1:70 **Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)**

In November of 1779, a major fire destroyed both of the theaters at Esterháza, the home of Franz Joseph Haydn's patron Prince Nikolaus Esterházy. Haydn's harpsichord, concertmaster Luigi Tomasini's violin, and a great deal of music including most of Haydn's operas and all of the parts to his Esterházy symphonies were lost. This fire was not the first to have impacted Haydn. In August of 1768 and July of 1776, the town of Kismarton, where Haydn's home was located, was destroyed by fire. Haydn lost many manuscripts in those fires, including the score of his only double bass concerto.

Prince Nikolaus immediately began to rebuild the theaters, and Haydn, who greatly admired his patron, composed Symphony No. 70 to mark the laying of the opera house's new foundation. The premier was noted in the first violin part as 18 December 1779, a month after the fire and also Nikolaus's birthday.

Symphony No. 70 is in the four-movement format that Haydn standardized and is scored for flute, two oboes, bassoon, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings. Trumpets and drums add festivity to the first movement, but are believed to have been added later as the drums at Esterháza were lost during the fire. The second movement is a double variation canon and sections vary between d minor and D major. The third movement returns to D major in the form of a minuet and trio, with the trio written in unison or in two simple, matching parts. The variety comes with Haydn's different combinations of instruments. The final movement is a rondo built upon a virtuosic fugue. It's beginning tonality (major or minor) is somewhat unclear but ultimately ends with D major triumphant. Some scholars have linked this movement explicitly to the fire, suggesting that the shift from minor to major offers hope for the future.



Franz Joseph Haydn (1732–1809) was born in humble circumstances as the son of a wheelwright and a local landowner's cook. By the age of seven, Haydn had such a fine voice that he entered the Choir School of St Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, where he would remain until his voice broke at the age of sixteen.

After leaving St. Stephen's, Haydn worked as a freelance musician, music teacher, and composer. His first formal position came in 1757 when he was hired as Kapellmeister (music director) for Count Morzin. During this time, Haydn wrote his first symphonies, as well as concertos, piano sonatas, and possibly his first two string quartets. He married Maria Anna Keller on November 26, 1760, which proved to be an unhappy marriage.

In 1761, Haydn began his lifelong relationship with Hungarian Esterházy family, a position at which he would spend nearly 30 years of his life. He lived with the family at their remote palace Esterháza, and his musical activity followed the tastes of his patron Prince Nikolaus. When Nikolaus acquired a baryton in 1765, Haydn was required to provide works for the instrument, resulting in over 200 works for the baryton. Ten years later, Nikolaus became interested in producing operas, and Haydn composed, directed, and trained the singers for the performances.

In 1779, Haydn signed a new contract with the Esterhazy family, finally allowing him to accept commissions from other patrons and publish his own music. This freedom led to a fruitful period for the composer, where he resumed composing string quartets and symphonies. Prince Nikolaus died in 1790 and was succeeded by his son Anton, who dismissed many of his court musicians in an effort to economize. Since Anton had little need of Haydn's services, he allowed Haydn to travel. In 1791, Haydn accepted a lucrative offer from German violinist and impresario Johann Peter Salomon to conduct new symphonies with a large orchestra in London, where Haydn's music was already very popular. The trip to London, along with a subsequent visit in 1794, proved to be greatly successful and generated some of his best-known works, including the *Surprise, Military, Drumroll* and *London* symphonies as well as the *Rider* quartet; and the *Gypsy Rondo* piano trio.

Prince Anton had died soon after Haydn returned to Vienna, and his successor Nikolaus II proposed that the Esterházy musical establishment be revived with Haydn serving again as Kapellmeister. Haydn accepted the position on a part-time basis. He spent his summers with the Esterházy's in Eisenstadt, composing six masses for them.

By this time, Haydn had become a public figure in Vienna. He spent most of his time in his home and wrote works for public performance. In collaboration with his librettist and mentor Gottfried van Swieten, he composed his two great oratorios, *The Creation* (1798) and *The Seasons* (1801). During this time he also completed the Trumpet Concerto and his last nine string quartets including the *Fifths, Emperor, and Sunrise*. He stopped composing in 1803, after which he prefaced his correspondence with a little musical quotation (from one of his part-songs): "Gone is all my strength; I am old and weak." He died in Vienna on May 31, 1809.

Haydn was the composer who more than any other, epitomizes the Classical era. Perhaps his most important achievement was that he developed and evolved in countless subtle ways the most influential structural principle in the history of Western music: the sonata-allegro form. He is known as the father of the string quartet and standardized the form and format of the symphony.

Later composers such as Ludwig van Beethoven, Franz Schubert, Felix Mendelssohn, and Johannes Brahms would follow in the path that Haydn, though his humor, vision, and sheer genius laid for them.

Symphony No. 4 in A Major, Op. 90 (“Italian”) Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

As a child prodigy often compared with Mozart, Mendelssohn had been performing on the piano and composing since before he was ten years old. In 1829 at the age of twenty, he conducted the revival of J.S. Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion*, which had been a great success and earned him an international reputation. Abraham, his father, suggested that Felix travel in order to decide where he wanted to live and urged Felix to make known his name and talents and “press forward” with his work.

Mendelssohn first traveled to the British Isles, where his work was greatly admired. While there, he composed the *Hebrides Overture* and the *Scottish Symphony*. Following a recommendation from mentor and close friend Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Mendelssohn travelled to Italy in 1830, where he sketched his Piano Concerto No. 1 and began his *Italian Symphony*. Writing to his sister Fanny, he stated, “the Italian symphony makes rapid progress; it will be the happiest piece I have ever written, especially the last movement.” Yet upon his return to Berlin, Mendelssohn expressed dissatisfaction with the symphony and set it aside. He resumed work on it when the London Philharmonic Society invited him to present a new symphony.

The *Italian* was premiered in London on May 13, 1833 with Mendelssohn conducting, and several other London performances soon followed. Although it was a great success with audiences, Mendelssohn remained unhappy with the work and felt the first and last movements needed to be totally rewritten. He struggled with the score for years, complaining that the *Italian* symphony cost him “some of the bitterest moments I have ever endured.” He would not allow it to be performed in Germany, and it was not performed in his homeland until two years after Mendelssohn’s death.

This symphony is a four-movement work in the style of the Classical symphonies of Haydn, Mozart, and early Beethoven. The first movement reflects the warmth of the Italian sun and its people as well as the exuberance of a young man experiencing the world. The second movement, *Andante con moto*, is more introspective. Its melody is in a minor key and is supported by pizzicato strings. The third movement is a classic minuet in all but name. Mendelssohn described the final movement as a saltarello after an energetic Neapolitan folk dance, but the perpetual motion of this movement is actually more suggestive of another dance, the tarantella. It is unusual for a symphony set in a major key to end in minor, but this is exactly what Mendelssohn does in the *Italian*, thoroughly disproving the idea that minor keys should be reserved for melancholy music.



Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) was born the son of a banker, Abraham, who was himself the son of the famous Jewish philosopher, Moses Mendelssohn. Felix's family, however, converted to Lutheranism before his birth. The family relocated to Berlin in 1811, where Abraham adopted the surname Bartholdy in an effort to renounce his heritage stating, "There can no more be a Christian Mendelssohn than there can be a Jewish Confucius."

Mendelssohn began taking piano lessons from his mother when he was six, and at seven was tutored by Marie Bigot in Paris. He and his sister Fanny studied composition with Carl Friedrich Zelter in Berlin beginning in 1817. His first public concert appearance took place when he was nine, participating in a chamber music concert accompanying a horn duo.

As a teenager, Mendelssohn's works were performed at weekly concerts in his home with a private orchestra for the elite society of Berlin. He composed twelve string symphonies between the ages of twelve and fourteen. He completed his String Octet in E-Flat Major when he was sixteen, and at seventeen he wrote an overture to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

In 1829, Mendelssohn, with the support of his teacher Zelter and actor Eduard Devrient, organized a performance of J.S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*. The concert, which Mendelssohn himself conducted, was a great success. This was the first performance of the work outside of Leipzig and was pivotal in the revival of Bach's music in both Germany and throughout Europe. It also earned Mendelssohn an international reputation at age twenty.

During the following years, Mendelssohn travelled throughout Europe to England, Vienna, Florence, Milan, Rome, and Naples. In each city, he met local and visiting musicians and artists. This time proved to be very fruitful, during which Mendelssohn composed some of his most celebrated works including the *Hebrides Overture* as well as the *Italian* and *Scottish* symphonies.

In 1836, Mendelssohn met Cécile Jeanrenaud, the daughter of a French Reformed Church minister. The couple married in 1837, and that same year Mendelssohn composed his *Piano Concerto No. 2 in D Minor*. He then spent six years from 1838 to 1844 composing the *Violin Concerto in E Minor*. Prior to the piece's completion, Mendelssohn founded the Leipzig Conservatory of Music and became its director. After completing the violin concerto, Mendelssohn conducted a series of concerts for the Philharmonic in London. He presented his newly written oratorio *Elijah* at the Birmingham Festival in 1846, and performed for Queen Victoria and Prince Albert in 1847.

In May of 1847, Mendelssohn's sister, Fanny, died suddenly while conducting his oratorio *The First Walpurgis Night*. Her death left him bereft and his health began to deteriorate rapidly. Six months later, on November 4, 1847, Mendelssohn died in Leipzig after a series of strokes.

**Program Notes by Dr. Sarah M. Schettler,
Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra, Second Flute**