

MENDELSSOHN

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Concerto in E major for two pianos & orchestra

Concerto in A minor for piano & strings



BRENDA LUCAS



JOHN OGDON

Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields

director

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Directed by Neville Marriner

SIDE ONE

Mendelssohn Double Piano Concerto

(John Ogdon and Brenda Lucas, pianos)

1st Mov. Allegro Vivace

2nd Mov. Adagio non troppo

3rd Mov. Allegro

Zelter, Goethe's friend and Mendelssohn's composition teacher, wrote of his pupil's Concerto for 2 pianos in E: "His individuality becomes more and more apparent, and blends itself so well with the spirit of the age that it seems to come out of it like a bird from the egg." Very true; but rather remarkable that the composer who had summed up the Zeitgeist was a lad of fourteen. On the other hand, what was there that was not remarkable about the young Felix, whose *senior* juvenilia, like the Octet and the Midsummer Night's Dream Overture, are more advanced for their age of composition than anything of Mozart or Schubert?

The Octet and Overture, though, bear opus numbers and belong within the canon of works that Mendelssohn allowed to be published. The single and double piano concertos on this record remained unpublished during the composer's lifetime. The existence of the works was known but the manuscripts slept amongst nearly fifty volumes of Mendelssohn juvenilia in the Berlin State Library for a hundred years until a Prince Charming—a relative of the composer—managed to magic copies of these pieces from behind the Iron Curtain.

CONCERTO FOR TWO PIANOS IN E MAJOR

The first performance of the E major Concerto for 2 Pianos and Orchestra—a fuller orchestra this time, with woodwind, horns, trumpets and timpani—also took place at a Mendelssohn family concert. It was Fanny's birthday (14 XI 1824) and so she (19) and Felix (15) sat down to play the concerto composed the previous year. No formal corners are cut: everything is fully worked out. Flourishes for the pianists are frequent, although no cadenzas are written into the score (for the first public performance, in London in 1829, young Felix persuaded his partner, Moscheles, to write a cadenza while Felix tinkered with a tutti to make it fit) where one would expect them towards the end of movements.

Cover photograph of Brenda Lucas and John Ogdon taken by Anthony Crickmay

SIDE TWO

Mendelssohn Piano Concerto

(John Ogdon, piano)

1st Mov. Allegro

2nd Mov. Adagio

3rd Mov. Allegro ma non troppo

The Adagio is interesting in that a tripartite movement consists of Piano I playing section A, Piano II playing section B and the two combining their material in a final section, a variation of ABA form. The finale exploits harmonic, formal and decorative devices that foreshadow, as in the solo piano concerto, later works by Mendelssohn. Mozart, too, is recalled many times in the first movement and in the Adagio, notably when Piano II moves into the distant key of E flat with dramatic effect.

PIANO CONCERTO IN A MINOR

Mendelssohn's grown-up solo Piano Concertos are two in number: the G minor opus 25 dates from 1831, the D minor opus 40 from 1837. This one in A minor has no opus number and was composed when Felix was 13, receiving its first performance at one of the family Sunday Morning concerts. Lea, the composer's mother, wrote letters to all kinds of musicians and invited them to these famous gatherings to make music with the children: Fanny was almost as brilliant a pianist as Felix, Rebecca sang and Paul played the cello. Felix would sometimes conduct (at the age of twenty, he gave the first performance of the Matthew Passion since the death of Bach) and sometimes play the violin. So, we can imagine Felix at the piano with a string orchestra to support him ready to play his A minor Concerto one Sunday in Berlin in 1822. It is a fully worked-out and developed composition; again, this young genius cuts no corners. As the work proceeds one wonders occasionally what models Mendelssohn may have had in mind. Mozart in the first movement? Beethoven, Bachs, J.S. and K.P.E., Hummel, Weber? The recitative in the slow movement surely points to Weber but where did that middle section spring from, with its thrumming strings and dramatic piano solo? Spohr? (The Chopin F minor Concerto did not appear until 1829.) But these questions are side-issues: for the young composer is also very much himself in this concerto and the foreshadowings are as strong as the reminiscences.

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