



Mendelssohn: A Life in Music

R. Larry Todd

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An extraordinary prodigy of Mozartean abilities, Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy was a distinguished composer and conductor, a legendary pianist and organist, and an accomplished painter and classicist. Lionized in his lifetime, he is best remembered today for several staples of the concert hall and for such popular music as "The Wedding March" and "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing."

Now, in the first major Mendelssohn biography to appear in decades, R. Larry Todd offers a remarkably fresh account of this musical giant, based upon painstaking research in autograph manuscripts, correspondence, diaries, and paintings. Rejecting the view of the composer as a craftsman of felicitous but sentimental, saccharine works (termed by one critic "moonlight with sugar water"), Todd reexamines the composer's entire oeuvre, including many unpublished and little known works. Here are engaging analyses of Mendelssohn's distinctive masterpieces--the zestful Octet, puckish *Midsummer Night's Dream*, haunting *Hebrides* Overtures, and elegiac Violin Concerto in E minor. Todd describes how the composer excelled in understatement and nuance, in subtle, coloristic orchestrations that lent his scores an undeniable freshness and vividness. He also explores Mendelssohn's changing awareness of his religious heritage, Wagner's virulent anti-Semitic attack on Mendelssohn's music, the composer's complex relationship with his sister Fanny Hensel, herself a child prodigy and prolific composer, his avocation as a painter and draughtsman, and his remarkable, polylingual correspondence with the cultural elite of his time.

Mendelssohn: A Life offers a masterful blend of biography and musical analysis. Readers will discover many new facets of the familiar but misunderstood composer and gain new perspectives on one of the most formidable musical geniuses of all time.

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