



Mendelssohn: A Life in Music

By 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works (termed by one critic "moonlight with sugar water"), Todd reexamines the composer's entire oeuvre, including many unpublished and little known works.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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Editorial Review

Review

"Todd's monumental and magisterial biography is itself a celebration of the composer's life and achievement.... Such an exhaustive and definitive biography as Mr. Todd's 'Mendelssohn' will surely become a standard reference work for many years to come."--*Washington Times*

"A highly readable and authoritative account of a brief but remarkably creative life, and an important contribution to Mendelssohn studies."--Hugh Canning, *Sunday Times* (London)

"At long last a great, elegant, and monumental biography. It will take its rightful place as the standard and indispensable guide to Mendelssohn's life and music with a sensitive understanding of the complex historical currents and contexts surrounding the composer. Based on exemplary research this book should put to rest the clichés and injustices that have plagued a great composer's work and reputation. A stunning achievement. A landmark in scholarship and writing on the history of music."--Leon Botstein, President, Bard College, Editor of *The Musical Quarterly*, and Music Director of The American Symphony Orchestra

"Magisterial, exhaustively documented book likely to become the standard biography.... Throughout, Todd interweaves his subject's biographical journey with his performing and compositional activities on an almost daily schedule, exploring in-depth his studies of and dealings with the vagaries of music publishing, conducting assignments, championing of the works of earlier masters such as Bach, and relations with other musicians. The author's musical analysis is clear to the layperson yet includes enough specifics to be useful to serious musicians, while his literate style helps to create an organic whole."--*Library Journal* (starred review)

"A valuable book for those who like a graceful biography, and those who are curious about composers beyond the familiar 'Three Bs.'"--*Seattle Times*

"So full and frantic was the short life of the 'Mozart of the nineteenth century' it would make breathless reading in lesser hands than Professor Todd's. Here not only the music but the pressures of life that created it, the constant travel, the correspondence with friends and family, the witty asides, and even a synoptic and sympathetic view of critical opinion on his main works from his own time until the present day are digested within this much-needed survey, and presented with accuracy, intelligence and insight. A Bible for Mendelssohn's growing and hungry supporters!" --Christopher Hogwood, Honorary Professor of Music, Cambridge University

"R. Larry Todd makes a fine contribution to biography and to 19th-century music history in this detailed survey of Mendelssohn's life. From this book we get not just a new portrait of Mendelssohn as man and artist, but valuable perspectives on his celebrated family, on religious and social issues in Germany in his time, on his contemporaries, and on the state of music in the Biedermeier and early Victorian worlds. Through this study of a single, immensely gifted musician Todd outlines important trends in musical style in the Romantic era, both those that Mendelssohn inherited and those to which he made lasting contributions, from the miraculous Octet written at age sixteen to the Violin Concerto and the late oratorios."--Lewis Lockwood, author of *Beethoven: The Music and the Life*

About the Author

R. Larry Todd was hailed in *The New York Times* as "the dean of Mendelssohn scholars in the United States." A Professor of Musicology at Duke University, he has published widely on Mendelssohn and his time, and nineteenth-century music.

Users Review

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Stevie Mozingo:

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Doris Simmons:

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