



MENDELSSOHN

Concerto for piano and Orchestra No. 1, Op. 25

Felix Mendelssohn was born on February 3, 1809 in Hamburg and is the second to four children to Abraham Mendelssohn and Lea Salomon. Mendelssohn grew up in a scholarly environment and had frequent visitors at his family's home in Berlin including musicians, scientists, and mathematicians. As a child, Mendelssohn was given the nickname "discontented Polish count" for his aloofness and his short temper. However, he was an enthusiastic artist and had a keen interest in painting and watercolours. Mendelssohn was known as a child prodigy as he began taking piano lessons with his mother at the age of six. Around 1819, Felix and his sister studied counterpoint and composition with Carl Friedrich and this greatly influenced his future career. His early maturity began at the age of nine where Mendelssohn made his first public appearance by participating at a chamber music concert accompanying a horn duo. He was also a productive composer at a young age as he would produce his own works that were performed at home with a private orchestra. At the ages of 12 to 14, he wrote 12 string symphonies for various concerts, and although his works were ignored for over a century, they are now widely recognized and played in concerts. At the age of 13, he wrote his first piano quartet and in 1824, at the age of 15, Mendelssohn wrote his first symphony for a full orchestra. When Mendelssohn was 16, he wrote his first work showing his genius status called "String Octet in E-flat major". This work, along with his overture to Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" would eventually become his best known early works. In 1824 Mendelssohn was taught by composer and piano virtuoso, Ignaz Moscheles, who later became his lifelong friend and colleague. Aside from music, Mendelssohn studied art, literature, and philosophy. He showed great interest in classical literature and translated Terence's *Andria* which led him to study at Humboldt University of Berlin from 1826 to 1829. In 1821, Mendelssohn was introduced to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and helped transform several of Goethe's poems to music. In 1829, with the help of Zelter and actor Eduard Devrient, Mendelssohn was able to arrange and conduct one of Bach's performances of "St. Matthew Passion" in Berlin. This created immense success for Mendelssohn and he became well known at the age of 20. Upon Zelter's death, Mendelssohn thought he would succeed him as conductor of the Berlin *Singakademie*. However, in a vote in January 1833 he was defeated. Mendelssohn went off to direct other performances including "Lower Rhenish Music Festival" in Dusseldorf. In 1829, Mendelssohn first visited Britain and made himself a deep impression on the British musical life by composing, performing, and editing for British publishers the oratorios of Handel and the organ music of J.S Bach. During the final years of his life, Mendelssohn suffered from poor health and on November 4, 1847, he died in Leipzig from a series of strokes.

Piano Concerto No. 1 in G minor (op. 25) was written in 1830, around the same time as his fourth symphony ("Italian"), and premiered in Munich in October 1831. The three connected movements use several relatively new formal techniques in their brief span. The concerto quickly obtained popularity, as it contains many sections of improvisation, one of Mendelssohn's specialties. The piano enters after only a few bars of orchestral introduction, although it was a standard procedure in the classical-era concerto to precede the solo's entrance by a tutti. The rest of the movement is fairly typical of concertos in its use of a modified sonata form, with a second, contrasting lyrical theme first heard from the piano over repeated accompaniment, and later in the wind instruments. As the movement approaches the end, a transition takes it not to a full close, but instead, with a brass fanfare and a piano continuation of the same, to the second movement, the *Andante*. The second movement opens with a melody in the lower strings, in E major, soon taken up by the piano. This is drawn out with breadth, and a middle section in C provides a contrast. The original melody, somewhat varied, returns to close the movement. *Presto — Molto allegro e vivace* opens with a fanfare in A minor. The piano joins in, at which point the mood lightens, and the closing rondo - *Molto allegro e vivace* - begins. This is regular in form, and the returns of the refrain are varied. Several themes from the first movement return towards the finale.