



COMPOSER SPOTLIGHT



FANNY MENDELSSOHN HENSEL

1805-1847

Style: Romantic



Limitations for Women

Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel wrote over 450 pieces of music, but her status as an upper-class woman meant many of her pieces would go unpublished during her lifetime; in fact, it was frowned upon for an affluent woman of her time to embark on a career as a teacher, composer, or performer. As a result, six of her songs were published under the name of her brother, Felix Mendelssohn!

A Great But Unknown Pianist

While growing up in Berlin, Fanny Mendelssohn's mother was her first piano teacher. By the age of 14, she could play all 24 Bach Preludes and Fugues from memory. She was also praised for her piano technique but seldom performed outside her family's Sunday concerts.



Wilhelm Hensel
self-portrait

Fanny's Fan Club

Fanny's father and brother often did not support her music career, but her husband, Wilhelm Hensel, a respected painter, encouraged her to publish her compositions. Also, one of Fanny and Felix's teachers, Carl Zelter, appears to have praised Fanny's talent a bit more than Felix's. Zelter is quoted as saying "[She] could give you something of Sebastian Bach. This child is really something special."

A Force of Nature

Felix listened closely to his sister's criticism and nicknamed her Minerva after the Roman goddess of wisdom. She once assisted a conductor with a rehearsal of Felix's oratorio St. Paul. Fanny called out to the conductor exclaiming, "My God, it must go twice as fast!" She later told Felix, "I assured them that they should be ruled by my word, and they'd better do it for God's sake." Despite social prejudice, Fanny Mendelssohn still managed to be a powerful influence within her musical sphere.

Significant Works:

- Das Jahr
- Notturmo in G minor
- Six mélodies pour le piano, Op. 4 and 5