



Carsten Schmidt, artistic director

2009 Summer Sounds

Mendelssohn's Magic

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Thursday August 27 at 7pm  
Trinity Episcopal Church

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**with**

Amadi Azikiwe, viola  
Gabriel Dobner, piano  
Michael Haag, bass  
Erin Keefe, violin  
Madison Singers, directed by Patrick Walders  
Vladimir Mendelssohn, viola  
Diane Pascal, violin  
Lori Piitz, piano  
David Schrader, organ  
Paulo Steinberg, piano  
James Wilson, cello

**PROGRAM of works celebrating the bicentennial of  
Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1809-47)**

Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, op. 61  
(arranged by the composer for piano four-hand)  
Piitz, Steinberg

*Mein Gott, warum hast Du mich verlassen*, op. 78 no. 3  
Madison Singers

Organ Sonata in C Minor/Major, op. 65 no. 2  
Schrader

*Intermission*

Selected Lieder  
*Morgengruss*  
*Auf Flügeln des Gesanges*  
*Erste Verlust*  
*Minnelied*

Haag, Dobner

String Quintet in B flat, op. 87  
Pascal, Keefe, Mendelssohn, Azikiwe, Wilson

## NOTES

We are fortunate to be living through a Mendelssohn-year, the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth in 1809 in Hamburg (which counts Brahms, too, as a native son). The family's Jewish heritage set them apart in this mercantile port-town. Felix's grandfather was the famous philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, which guaranteed a steady stream of intellectuals, artists, and poets passing through the house. Felix's father moved the entire clan to Berlin in 1811, and, for better or for worse, he chose to distance himself from that heritage by converting the family to Christianity. Mendelssohn's religious identity seemed less important during his lifetime than it did in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when anti-semitism obscured the vast oeuvre of masterworks which had been bequeathed to Germany and the world. We are doubly fortunate, then, that such ideology is no longer in power.

The boy's musical abilities were noted early but not overly stressed—perhaps the contrary example of Leopold Mozart came to mind. However, once Felix's talents began translating into earnest and viable compositional outlets, he was placed under the care of Carl Zelter in 1817. Zelter was steeped in “old-school” counterpoint; his influence on a boy not quite nine years old must have been profound. Mendelssohn's skill in updating Baroque counterpoint to a 19<sup>th</sup>-century approach toward harmony and large-scale form was due in part to the rigorous training handed down by Zelter. The teacher also introduced Mendelssohn to the aging Goethe when he was just 12 years old. Young Felix dazzled the venerable poet with his technical and artistic ability; he also kindled a special fondness that bridged the generations.

## MIDSUMMER NIGHTS DREAM

Chances are very good that you have heard at least part of the opening piece on tonight's program, even if you have never attended a classical music concert. Mendelssohn's Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a landmark in the symphony repertory, celebrated as much for the quality of the music itself as for the circumstances of its creation. To call Mendelssohn precocious is to grossly understate the matter. A gifted sketch artist with a deep sense for literature and history, Mendelssohn had also been raised with an appreciation for Shakespeare and, particularly, the Bard's comic masterpiece here in question. The Overture, written in 1826 at the ripe age of 17, forever established Mendelssohn's status as a true musical prodigy. A full complement of incidental music to Shakespeare's play was eventually added in 1843, much of it wonderfully touching and deserving a more frequent place on symphony programs. Most impressive is the composer's ability to rekindle—after seventeen years!—the youthful flair that runs through every bar of the Overture. One might have thought this Overture something of a mi-

raculous fluke had not Mendelssohn been able to attain the same perfection in other works.

The Overture's structure follows the basic form of a rondo, whose main motive—the gradually expanding progression of four chords—recurs at several interior points, in addition to being both the very first and very last music heard. Onto this motivic head Mendelssohn appends rapid string figuration in muted strings, a mysterious passage that may fairly be called the definitive music of the fairy realm. Evocative, too, are the written-in braying of donkeys (recall how Bottom the Weaver is “translated”). Mendelssohn, with a maturity and self-assuredness beyond his years, moves effortlessly between light and shadow, between the understated tones of the sprite's music and the full-blown grandeur of Oberon and Titania. The sheer exuberance of the work takes an active effort to resist, and the occasional moments of introspection and minor-mode color reinforce how clearly Mendelssohn has his finger on the dramatic pulse. My favorite moment arrives just a minute before the end, when Mendelssohn pulls up the reins on this scherzo and ushers in a hushed, reverential scene: soft woodwind chords, a low plucked bass note, and an ethereal high violin line that falls slowly by step. I know he placed this melodic episode where he did for dramatic effect, and I admit that it still gets to me every time.

Since the overture is presented tonight in the composer's own arrangement for two pianos, the color of his orchestration is not as palpable. But an experienced listener and skilled performers—such as we have tonight—can perhaps imagine themselves into the full splendor of Mendelssohn's vision. As a further side note, in the years before sound recording and modern transportation, piano arrangements like this were the main way you heard symphonic music. Mendelssohn certainly understood the relative inaccessibility of major orchestras to most people, and he made this arrangement as a way to spread the music into every home of modest means.

## SACRED CHORAL MUSIC

Mendelssohn occupies an interesting and complex position in the history of German sacred music. For one thing, we often cite him as the chief motivating force behind the original Bach rediscovery, which began when Mendelssohn led a performance of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* in 1829. That moment was truly a watershed in the evolving relationship between living composers (and audiences) and music of the past. Though Mendelssohn was hardly alone in feeling such an historical appreciation to be long overdue, he was then and now the most visible figure involved in a project whose significance still resonates today. He had for years been avidly collecting manuscripts of Bach, Schütz, even Palestrina. This was much more than mere antiquarian interest, for Mendelssohn was also a composer

of choral works based on sacred texts and looked to the past for guidance. As he put it, "If I have written several pieces of sacred music it is because I needed to do so, in the same way as one sometimes needs to read a certain book, the Bible, for example, or some other, and only that book can satisfy one."

It must have been slightly ironic for him to be crafting Christian church music given his family's religious roots. Born into a Jewish family but later converted (as noted above), Felix was called upon in the winter of 1843-44 to supervise Protestant church music throughout the Prussian realm. It was not a position much to his liking, however, and he resigned after only five months. Such circumstances help us date a work like Mendelssohn's setting of Psalm 22 very precisely. "Mein Gott, warum hast Du mich verlassen" was written between 13 and 18 February 1844. It includes three movements; additional tempo changes within the movements convey an even more sectional feel. Mendelssohn does his best to resurrect the old psalmody style of solo intonation answered by full chorus. Opening in a stark E minor (an important key for Bach in the *Matthew Passion*), the first movement only occasionally moves into a brighter tonal realm and ends with an incomplete cadence. The middle movement continues to explore the effect of antiphonal exchange between a solo quartet and the chorus. Mendelssohn inserts some striking chromatic progressions in depicting the psalmist's debilitated state. Finally both textures—solo recitation and divided choirs—recur in the third movement, which, with the overall progression from minor to major, helps project the psalm's valedictory tone. Only at the last moment does Mendelssohn recapture the minor color with a modally inflected "Amen" cadence.

#### ORGAN SONATA

Another aspect of Mendelssohn's quasi-sacred music is his organ music. These sonatas and prelude and fugue sets do not serve any liturgical purpose, but they are most strongly indebted to the works of past masters (especially Bach and Buxtehude) who were both organists and professional Kapellmeisters. Moreover, nearly all organ music was and still is performed in churches. Mendelssohn's desire to write for the "king of instruments" stemmed from visits to several prominent cathedrals in England. By the time a 20-year-old Mendelssohn made his first trip to London in the fall of 1829, organs and organ music had reached low ebb in popular interest. A general decline in religious observance in post-Enlightenment culture, as well as the ravages of near continuous warfare, facilitated the general state of disrepair affecting instruments throughout Germany, France, and the Netherlands. Mendelssohn wrote about his encounters with shelled-out churches and bullet-ridden pipes that seemed beyond repair. But in London Mendelssohn connected with a group of historically-minded musicians, headed by Samuel Wesley, interested in Bach's revival and in maintaining the lineage of great organ

music. Various, somewhat sporadic compositions for organ followed, though it was not until the winter of 1844-45 that Mendelssohn undertook his long projected set of organ sonatas (published in 1849 as op. 65).

The second sonata, in C minor/major, partakes equally of both new and recycled material. Of its four movements, which progress gradually from an extremely slow Grave to the Allegro moderato finale, only the first two were newly written that winter. The others were put together from Mendelssohn's own stockpile: the third movement derives from a piece written in Rome in 1831, whereas the fugue finale is lifted from a set of contrapuntal works penned in 1839. Bach's spirit hangs over the whole work, for instance in the florid counterpoint of the second movement and the tonality and dissonance of the first movement. The sound of Bach's C-minor Partita no. 2 for keyboard may come to mind, though Mendelssohn certainly had plenty of inspirational models to draw upon.

#### LIEDER

Mendelssohn wrote a great quantity of lieder and, like Schubert before him, was fortunate to have several poetic giants as near contemporaries. The four songs heard this evening are a case in point, setting texts by Goethe, Tieck, and Heine. These are all miniatures, making no in-roads on conventions of form and seeking only to crystallize a single emotional affect. Strophic form abounds. Brief touches of chromaticism are typically functional (serving to change key) rather than decorative or rhetorically charged. These songs tend to reinforce generalizations about the German lied tradition in part because they helped to define that tradition. Anyone with an interest in such works will also find a treasure trove in Mendelssohn's "Song without Words," delightful character pieces for solo piano that feature many of them same textures, forms, and rhapsodic lyricism that are on display this evening.

The touches that make each song an individual gem are subtle. Consider "Morgengruss," which begins in a radiant B major. Unison texture adds to the simplicity and unhurried feel; as Schubert had before him, Mendelssohn binds voice and accompaniment as a gesture of (momentary) unity among the two dramatic forces of the song setting. Occasional lullaby rhythms contribute a serenity that is palpable and, of course, too good to be true. The song's B section departs from the optimism of the opening theme, moving first to F-sharp minor and to a despairing C-sharp minor. Mendelssohn works his way back to the major mode for a rounded structure, but the poetic pretence of renewed joy only reinforces our awareness of the protagonist's deeper sense of self denial. As our hero looks up, hoping for one last glimpse of his beloved, Mendelssohn wonderfully inserts a pregnant pause at the text, "In vain! No curtain moves." Still more brilliant is the way Heine's protagonist invents his own happy explanation of her absence at that

critical moment: "...She is still asleep, dreaming of me." Yeah, buddy, that *must* be it.

Mendelssohn's most popular song, and one most close to the spirit of his "Songs without Words" mentioned above, is "Auf Flugeln des Gesanges." The rippling piano accompaniment may be heard as a kind of trademark of the composer, while the voice's initial melodic leap D-B sets out the sweet lyrical tone from which Mendelssohn never departs. The song is a case study in simple strophic form (AAA') and melodic construction; crucial details are the way Mendelssohn balances the prevailing stepwise motion with carefully placed large leaps.

The loss meditated upon in "Erster Verlust" comes through in accented dissonances (appoggiaturas) with delayed resolutions, indicating a yearning for the unattainable. Most of the action, tonally speaking, takes place in the middle section of this ABA form. The change to minor begins on the word "wound" (Wunde), and Mendelssohn builds considerable tension toward a cadence in F minor that never actually arrives. Like a harmonic resolution that never comes, so too can the hero find no salve for his "lost happiness." Depth of emotion spills out in a final vocal flourish.

As for Tieck's "Minnelied," there is not a great deal more one can say that has not been said. This is not to disparage Mendelssohn's setting, but only to reinforce the consistency and, above all, simplicity that the composer achieved in his lieder. Form is clear (AA plus piano prelude and postlude) and melodic structure achieves a gently undulating flow. The work lacks a familiar minor-mode turn—we get as close as the dominant chord of E minor—for here all is bright and good. Yes, even the German Romantics could endure moments of unmitigated happiness.

#### STRING QUINTET

The character of Mendelssohn's chamber music suggests the carefree fluency of Mozart merged with the dramatic rhetoric of Beethoven. Schumann once remarked that Mendelssohn was "the Mozart of the 19<sup>th</sup> century...the one who most clearly reveals the contradictions of his time and who is the first to reconcile them." Schumann pinpoints a kind of disjunction between Mendelssohn and his era. Indeed, the sound of the op. 87 String Quintet stands in closer relation to works like Beethoven's early string quartets than to pieces written by other composers around 1845 (the date when Mendelssohn penned the quintet). This is not to say that echoes of Mendelssohn's own works are not apparent; the opening textures will evoke the composer's famous Octet for many listeners. And the string writing in the second movement Scherzo takes me back to the first time I studied Mendelssohn's youthful String Symphonies. From a few favorite harmonic progressions to string arpeggios borrowed directly from the great E-minor Violin Concerto, Mendelssohn's fingerprints may be found all over the quintet. But equally strong

are parallels to Beethoven's op. 18 quartets. For instance, Mendelssohn's third movement Adagio in D minor clearly recalls the "Romeo and Juliet" movement—in the same key—of Beethoven's op. 18 no. 1.

Mendelssohn has completely mastered the relation between form and expressive content. Consider, again in the quintet's third movement, how the theme's reprise, following a contrasting and quite touching B section, emerges flawlessly in the lower strings out of a free cadenza in first violin. Or how the major-mode coda subtly suggests motives from the first movement without hindering the sense of forward progression in terms of overall form. During the finale Mendelssohn clearly got back into the spirit of his op. 64 Violin Concerto. Still, despite a few moments of soloistic display in first violin, the composer manages wonderfully to keep an even fully-voiced five-part texture. My only regret is that he did not more fully develop the fugal section heard near the finale's middle. The theme itself—a group of fast notes followed by an upward leap and slowly falling chromatic descent—envisions Old Bach at his most exuberant and would have made for a compelling four-voice fugue. Mendelssohn toys with the subject, passing it quickly back and forth between the string parts. But this finale has other fish to fry and he, perhaps wisely, keeps the Baroque learned style neatly constrained within bounds.

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## TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

### Psalm 22

**1** Mein Gott, mein Gott, warum hast du mich verlassen? ich heule; aber meine Hilfe ist ferne.

**2** Mein Gott, des Tages rufe ich, so antwortest du nicht; und des Nachts schweige ich auch nicht.

**3** Aber du bist heilig, der du wohnst unter dem Lobe Israels.

**4** Unsre Väter hofften auf dich; und da sie hofften, halfst du ihnen aus.

**5** Zu dir schriean sie und wurden errettet; sie hofften auf dich und wurden nicht zu Schanden.

**6** Ich aber bin ein Wurm und kein Mensch, ein Spott der Leute und Verachtung des Volks.

**7** Alle, die mich sehen, spotten mein, sperren das Maul auf und schütteln den Kopf:

**8** Er klage es dem HERRN; der helfe ihm aus und errette ihn, hat er Lust zu ihm.

**9** Denn du hast mich aus meiner Mutter Leib gezogen; du warst meine Zuversicht, da ich noch an meiner Mutter Brüsten war.

**10** Auf dich bin ich geworfen von Mutterleib an; du bist mein Gott von meiner Mutter Schoß an.

**11** Sei nicht ferne von mir, denn Angst ist nahe; denn es ist hier kein Helfer.

**12** Große Farren haben mich umgeben, gewaltige Stiere haben mich umringt.

**13** Ihren Rachen sperren sie auf gegen mich wie ein brüllender und reißender Löwe.

**14** Ich bin ausgeschüttet wie Wasser, alle meine Gebeine haben sich zertrennt; mein Herz ist in meinem Leibe wie zerschmolzenes Wachs.

**15** Meine Kräfte sind vertrocknet wie eine Scherbe, und meine Zunge klebt an meinem Gaumen, und du legst mich in des Todes Staub.

**1** My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? *why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?*

**2** O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.

**3** But thou *art* holy, O *thou* that inhabitest the praises of Israel.

**4** Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them.

**5** They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded.

**6** But I *am* a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people.

**7** All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head *saying,*

**8** He trusted on the LORD *that* he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.

**9** But thou *art* he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope *when I was* upon my mother's breasts.

**10** I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou *art* my God from my mother's belly.

**11** Be not far from me; for trouble *is* near; for *there is* none to help.

**12** Many bulls have compassed me: strong *bulls* of Bashan have beset me round.

**13** They gaped upon me *with* their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion.

**14** I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.

**15** My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death.

### Psalm 22 (cont.)

**16** Denn die Hunde haben mich umgeben, und der Bösen Rotte hat mich umringt; sie haben meine Hände und Füße durchgraben.

**17** Ich kann alle meine Gebeine zählen; aber sie schauen und sehen ihre Lust an mir.

**18** Sie teilen meine Kleider unter sich und werfen das Los um mein Gewand.

**19** Aber du, HERR, sei nicht ferne; meine Stärke, eile, mir zu helfen!

**20** Errette meine Seele vom Schwert, meine einsame von den Hunden!

**21** Hilf mir aus dem Rachen des Löwen und errette mich von den Einhörnern!

**22** Ich will deinen Namen predigen meinen Brüdern; ich will dich in der Gemeinde rühmen.

**23** Rühmet den HERRN, die ihr ihn fürchtet; es ehre ihn aller Same Jakobs, und vor ihm scheue sich aller Same Israels.

**24** Denn er hat nicht verachtet noch verschmäht das Elend des Armen und sein Antlitz vor ihm nicht verborgen; und da er zu ihm schrie, hörte er's.

**25** Dich will ich preisen in der großen Gemeinde; ich will mein Gelübde bezahlen vor denen, die ihn fürchten.

**26** Die Elenden sollen essen, daß sie satt werden; und die nach dem HERRN fragen, werden ihn preisen; euer Herz soll ewiglich leben.

**27** Es werden gedenken und sich zum HERRN bekehren aller Welt Enden und vor ihm anbeten alle Geschlechter der Heiden.

**28** Denn des HERRN ist das Reich, und er herrscht unter den Heiden.

**16** For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet.

**17** I may tell all my bones: they look *and* stare upon me.

**18** They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.

**19** But be not thou far from me, O LORD: O my strength, haste thee to help me.

**20** Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog.

**21** Save me from the lion's mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns.

**22** I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee.

**23** Ye that fear the LORD, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel.

**24** For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard.

**25** My praise *shall be* of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear him.

**26** The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the LORD that seek him: your heart shall live for ever.

**27** All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee.

**28** For the kingdom *is* the LORD'S: and he *is* the governor among the nations.

## Lieder

### Morgengruss

Über die Berge steigt schon die Sonne,  
Die Lämmerheerde läutet von fern:  
Mein Liebchen, mein Lamm, meine Sonne  
und Wonne,  
Noch einmal sah' ich dich gar zu gern!

Ich schaue hinauf mit späherender Miene,  
"Leb' wohl, mein Kind, ich wandre von hier!"  
Vergebens! es regt sich keine Gardine;  
Sie liegt noch und schläft und träumt von mir.  
—Heinrich Heine

### Auf Flügeln des Gesanges

Auf Flügeln des Gesanges,  
Herzliebchen, trag ich dich fort,  
Fort nach den Fluren des Ganges,  
Dort weiß ich den schönsten Ort;

Dort liegt ein rotblühender Garten  
Im stillen Mondenschein,  
Die Lotosblumen erwarten  
Ihr trautes Schwesterlein.

Die Veilchen kichern und kosen,  
Und schau'n nach den Sternen empor,  
Heimlich erzählen die Rosen  
Sich duftende Märchen ins Ohr.

Es hüpfen herbei und lauschen  
Die frommen, klugen Gazellen,  
Und in der Ferne rauschen  
Des heiligen Stromes Well'n.

Dort wollen wir niedersinken  
Unter dem Palmenbaum,  
Und Liebe und Ruhe trinken,  
Und träumen seligen Traum.  
—Heinrich Heine

### Morning Greeting

The sun is already climbing over the hills,  
I hear the flock of lambs far away;  
My darling, my love, my sunshine and joy,  
I would like to see you one more time.

I look upward, searching,  
"Farewell, my child, I travel from here!"  
In vain! No curtain moves,  
She is still asleep, and dreaming of me.  
—Translation © by Marty Lucas

### On wings of song

On wings of song,  
my love, I'll carry you away  
to the fields of the Ganges  
Where I know the most beautiful place.

There lies a red-flowering garden,  
in the serene moonlight,  
the lotus-flowers await  
Their beloved sister.

The violets giggle and cherish,  
and look up at the stars,  
The roses tell each other secretly  
Their fragrant fairy-tales.

The gentle, bright gazelles,  
pass and listen;  
and in the distance murmurs  
The waves of the holy stream.

There we will lay down,  
under the palm-tree,  
and drink of love and peacefulness  
And dream our blessed dream.  
—Translation © by Marty Lucas

### Erster Verlust

Ach, wer bringt die schönen Tage,  
Jene Tage der ersten Liebe,  
Ach, wer bringt nur eine Stunde  
Jener holden Zeit zurück?

Einsam nähr' ich meine Wunde,  
Und mit stets erneuter Klage  
Traur' ich ums verlorne Glück,

Ach, wer bringt die schönen Tage,  
Jene holde Zeit zurück!  
—J. W. von Goethe

### Minnelied

Wie der Quell so lieblich klinget  
Und die zarten Blumen küßt,  
Wie der Fink im Schatten singet  
Und das nahe Liebchen grüßt!

Wie die Lichte zitternd schweifen  
Und das Gras sich grün erfreut,  
Wie die Tannen weithin greifen  
Und die Linde Blüten streut!

In der Linde süß Gedüfte,  
In der Tannen Riesellaut,  
In dem Spiel der Sommerlüfte  
Glänzet sie als Frühlingsbraut.

Aber Waldton, Vogelsingen,  
Duft der Blüten, haltet ein,  
Licht, verdunkle, nie gelingen  
Kann es euch, ihr gleich zu sein!  
—Johann Ludwig Tieck

### First Loss

Ah, who will bring back those beautiful  
days, those days of first love?  
Ah, who will bring back even just one hour  
of that lovely time?

Lonely, I nourish my wound  
and with constantly renewed laments,  
I mourn my lost happiness.

Ah, who will bring back those beautiful  
days, that lovely time?  
—Translation © by Emily Ezust

### Love Song

How the fountain so lovely sounds  
and kisses the tender flowers,  
how the finch in the shade sings  
and greets the nearby sweetheart!

How the lights curve trembling  
and the grass rejoices in its green,  
how the firs reach out far  
and the lime tree strews its blooms!

In the lime tree's sweet fragrance,  
in the firs loud rustling,  
in the play of summer air  
She appears as a spring bride.

But forest sounds, birdsong,  
Fragrance of blooms, cease,  
light, die away, you can never  
Be like unto her!  
—Translation © Carl Johengen