Fanny Mendelssohn

Name: After her marriage to Wilhelm Hensel, her name became Fanny Hensel.
Born: November 14th, 1805, Hamburg, Germany
Died: May 14th, 1847, Berlin, Germany
Period of Music: Romantic Era

"It must be a sign of talent that I do not give up, though I can get nobody to take an interest in my efforts." – Fanny Mendelssohn

Biography:
Fanny Mendelssohn is mostly known as the beloved older sister of Felix Mendelssohn. The Mendelssohn family was wealthy, well-educated, and active in cultural affairs. Fanny was born in 1805 in Hamburg, Germany where her brother was also born four years later. In 1811, the Mendelssohn family moved to Berlin, Germany because of a threat of war. Fanny was well-educated studying everything from music to physics.

When she and her brother Felix were very young, their mother Leah began to give them music lessons. Fanny's talent was apparent early on. By the age of 13, she was a very talented pianist. She wrote her first song, in honor of her father's birthday, in 1819, at the age of 14. But it wasn't until 1827 that her first two songs were published with her brother Felix listed as the composer. Composing was not considered respectable for a young lady, so she did not list her own name.

In 1822, when Fanny was 17, her father began a tradition of Sunday afternoon concerts in their home. Sometimes these concerts would feature music written by Fanny or Felix. Family friends, poets, writers, and other creative people were hosted by Fanny's mother. Fanny continued the Sunday afternoon concert tradition for the rest of her life, taking over the role of hostess after her mother's death in 1842. Although she was an excellent pianist, Fanny rarely performed in public concerts, and limited her performances to the Mendelssohn Family Sunday concerts.

Fanny married an artist named Wilhelm Hensel in 1829. The following year, she had her only child, Sebastian Hensel. Together they traveled throughout Europe, and eventually spent several years in Italy.

During the first half of the 19th century, women were discouraged from writing music. People believed women did not have the appropriate artistic ability. Fanny's father and brother discouraged her from writing music. Thankfully, Fanny's mother and husband persuaded her to continue. Her husband convinced her to submit some of her compositions to be published, which she did, and eventually several of her songs were published under her own name.

Like other female composers of her era, Fanny composed piano music and songs which were designed to be performed at small, private gatherings. This music was considered a lower art form and was much more appropriate for women to
During this time, concert hall music, which was more complex and considered a higher art form, was composed almost exclusively by men. Although she was a talented musician and composer, she spent more time promoting her brother's music and often neglected her own. Many of Fanny's compositions remain unpublished and her manuscripts can be seen in The New York Public Library and at the Library of Congress.

Throughout her life, Fanny was an ardent supporter of her brother Felix's music, and Felix relied upon her musical advice. Although she wrote several oratorios and cantatas, as well as some small instrumental works including trios and quartets, Fanny Mendelssohn is most well-known for her songs and piano compositions.

She died of a stroke at the age of 41 while rehearsing one of Felix's compositions for a performance at a Mendelssohn Family Sunday concert. Until her death, Fanny and Felix remained close to one another. The news of Fanny's death was too much for Felix to handle and he became ill and died just six months after his beloved sister Fanny.

**Quick Facts:**
- Fanny composed over 500 musical works. Few were ever published during her lifetime but most were performed at the Mendelssohn Family Sunday concerts.
- She was greatly influenced by the music of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Ludwig van Beethoven.
- Fanny was a better pianist than her brother, Felix, so most of her piano compositions are harder to play.

**Selected Compositions for Listening:**

Selected Playlist URL: [https://tinyurl.com/fannylisten](https://tinyurl.com/fannylisten)

- Das Jahr: September
- Dämmrund senkte sich von oben
- Notturno in G Minor
- Sonata in G Minor: I. Allegro molto agitato
- Ich kann wohl manchmal singen
- 4 Lieder: Waldseligkeit
- String Quartet in E flat major: II. Allegretto
- Piano Trio in D Minor for piano violin and cello: III. Lied: Allegretto

**Other Suggested Listening:**


**Learn More about Fanny Mendelssohn:**

- Citron, Marcia J. “Mendelssohn-(Bartholdy) [Hensel], Fanny (Cäcilie)”. *Grove Music Online*, Deane Root, editor, 2007.