

The Life and Times of Felix Mendelssohn



A lecture by

Dr Richard Moore

William Elder Building

56-58, Castlegate

Berwick, TD15 1JT

Friday, 25th January 2019

10 am to 12 noon

This lecture by Dr Richard Moore is the perfect *aperitif* for the performance on Saturday 26th January of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* by Berwick Arts Choir.

Felix Mendelssohn was not only a genius. He was charming. Queen Victoria considered it an honour to receive him and to pick up his music when it accidentally fell to the floor. His initial visits to the British aristocracy allowed him to premiere new works that dazzled audiences with their musicality, grace and elegance. Not surprisingly, Mendelssohn loved England from the moment he first arrived in London.

Mendelssohn was born of Jewish parents, Abraham and Lea Salomon Mendelssohn, from whom he took his first piano lessons. Though the Mendelssohn family was proud of their ancestry, they considered it desirable to mark their emancipation from the ghetto by becoming Christians. Accordingly, Felix, together with his brother and two sisters, was baptized in 1816 as a Lutheran. In 1822, the entire family adopted the surname Bartholdy, following the example of Felix's maternal uncle, who had chosen to adopt the name of a family farm.

Mendelssohn was (like Mozart) a child prodigy, his musical gifts being augmented by a keen response to literature and landscape painting. In the lecture we shall consider the art movements of the time and the international cultural scene. There will be particular reference to Berlin and Paris. In the latter he took further piano lessons and apparently became acquainted with the music of Mozart.

In 1821 Mendelssohn was taken to Weimar to meet Goethe, for whom he played works of J.S. Bach and Mozart and to whom he would dedicate his *Piano Quartet No. 3. in B Minor*. Then in Paris in 1825 he met Luigi Cherubini. The next year he reached his full stature as a composer with the Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Mendelssohn is not only to be thanked for his own music but for his wider aesthetic influence. On March 11, 1829, he conducted the first performance since Bach's death of the *St. Matthew Passion*. He also travelled extensively, meeting several cultural icons, including Carl Maria von Weber and Sir Walter Scott. He also gave the first London performances of Beethoven's *Emperor* and *G Major* concerti. The popularity of his oratorio *Elijah*, first produced at Birmingham in 1846, established him as a composer whose influence on English music came to equal that of Handel.

No lecture on Mendelssohn can ignore the music but the main emphasis here will be on his personal life and relation to the contemporary *Zeitgeist*. We shall hear of his immense grief at his father's death, his marriage to the daughter of a French Protestant clergyman and his tremendous love for his gifted sister Fanny. We shall also hear of the feverish pace of his life and his views on social, cultural and religious issues. Finally we shall look at his chatty and informative letters and consider his last months clouded by the death of Fanny in May 1847. This catastrophe caused his energies to desert him. He fainted when he heard of it and, following the rupture of a blood vessel, soon died, universally mourned.

As well as this lecture, BEA has another event connected to BAC's concert: a talk on *The Music of Felix Mendelssohn* by Hazel Rowland on 10th December, 2018

BAC members are entitled to a concessionary rate of £4 for each lecture. In addition, there is concessionary pricing for anyone attending one or both lectures as well as the BAC performance, as follows:

Richard's lecture + BAC performance £12

Hazel's and Richard's lecture + BAC performance £16

All are welcome and no previous knowledge is assumed.

If you supply us with your personal data (name, address or email), we will hold this in accordance with our privacy policy, available [here](#) or by request to BEA, 7 Ravensdowne, Berwick-upon-Tweed TD15 1HX. If you have any queries, please email berwickea@gmail.com or phone Cian McHugh on 01289 303254

To book online, [please click here](#)

To book by mail, please fill in the booking form below, and mail to BEA, 7 Ravensdowne, Berwick-upon-Tweed TD15 1HX along with a cheque in favour of BEA.

Name

Address

Tel No

Email

Cheque enclosed £ 6 (*Richard 's Lecture*)

£12 (*Richard's Lecture + BAC performance*)

£4 (*BAC member*)

£16 (*Both lectures and BAC performance*)

