

Music 320

Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel

(1805-1847)

Biography:

- Received early piano instruction from mother; later famous teachers
- Discouraged from composing and especially publishing by Brother (Felix) and Father; encouraged to publish by Mother and Husband.
- Fanny was a prolific composer (>400 works, mostly unpublished), and a virtuoso pianist (one public performance)
- Fanny and her husband travelled to Rome in 1839; trip influenced her greatly: contact with many other musicians and artists; she was much admired by them as composer and performer, she was also a representative of German culture at a basically French school
- When she returned to Germany she began to change: eventually she became determined to start publishing, though she only lived another year after that decision

Composer Traits:

- Mother Lea was a student of one of JS Bach's sons. This led to more awareness and use of Baroque genres. The Mendelssohn kids also used Mozart and Beethoven as models: led to use of classical forms
- Fanny's harmony was more progressive than that of many of her contemporaries
- Family had musical gatherings on Sundays: Fanny performed (it was "okay" because it was a private performing venue). Most of her compositions were written with private gatherings in mind
- Main output was songs and piano works

Songs:

- *Nachtwanderer* (Night Wanderer); text by Eichendorff

Things that make it romantic, other traits:

- Wanderlust theme
- Uneven phrase lengths
- Modulation to rel minor
- Text painting with dim chord on “grau” (gray)
- Setting is modified strophic
- ***Warum sind denn die Rosen so blass?*** (“Why are the roses so pale?”); text by Heine
 - Fluctuation between major and minor, also slow and fast tempi
 - Very expressive of romantic hopelessness of text.
- ***Morgenständchen*** (“morning serenade”); text by Eichendorff
 - Driving rhythm, perpetual motion
 - Form is aba (ternary)
 - Music reinforces vivid images in text.

Piano Works:

- ***Das Jahr*** (“The Year”), composed between August and December 1841 (after her return from Rome). Some representative movements:
 - February: a scherzo in presto tempo. This is month of Roman Carnival; there were wild street celebrations, people wearing costumes
 - March: month of Easter. Represented by Lutheran Chorale (“Christ ist erstanden”): indebted to Bach, but continues with variations on that chorale Begins with rhapsodic introductory material with very rich harmony