



SUPER AUDIO CD

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Mendelssohn
Italian and Reformation Symphonies
Charles Munch... Boston Symphony Orchestra



FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847)

Symphony No. 4 in A, Op. 90 "Italian"*

- 1 Allegro vivace 8:05
- 2 Andante con moto 5:56
- 3 Con moto moderato 6:26
- 4 Saltarello: Presto 6:06

(Recorded February 18, 1958)

Symphony No. 5 in D, Op. 107 "Reformation"***

- 5 Andante; Allegro con fuoco 10:43
- 6 Allegro vivace 4:12
- 7 Andante 3:24
- 8 Chorale (Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott):
Andante con moto; Allegro vivace 8:55

(Recorded October 28, 1957)

Octet in E-Flat, Op. 20†

- 9 III: Scherzo: Allegro leggierissimo 4:09

(Recorded March 7, 1960)



Boston Symphony Orchestra

Charles Munch, conductor

(Recorded Symphony Hall, Boston)

†First release on CD

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Menendelsohn's coming of age was doubly a peak in his life. He then traveled about Europe extensively for the first time and stimulated by the experience, composed his greatest orchestral works—his last three symphonies.

Shortly after his twentieth birthday, his father decided that a tour of Europe would "broaden" his horizons, with the result that he spent most of the year 1829 in England, with an excursion into Scotland, and after returning to Berlin, he "did" Italy like a true tourist, from Milan in the north to Sorrento in the south, in the season 1830–1831, also traversing Austria and Switzerland. He had a thoroughly good time, and whether or not his travels broadened him or really begat music, the fact remains that between pleasures he composed his "Reformation" Symphony in England, began his "Scottish" Symphony, and worked upon his "Italian" Symphony in Rome.

It would have been too much to expect him to write music in the character of those countries and peoples. The sunshine of Naples put him in the mood for the "Italian" Symphony, and the absence of fog there delayed the completion of the "Scottish" Symphony. This according to his own remarks lightly made in his letters to his sister Fanny at home. Beyond this, there is no point in looking for racial traits in these works. It was enough that he jotted down rhythms of the national dances and developed them in his own symphonic manner. The finale of the "Italian" Symphony is a delatinized but no less delightful saltarello. In Italy, as had been the case in Britain, he was always the German visitor and enthusiastic observer. He was a popular guest in many a house, admired as a pianist and generous with music, carrying on completely innocuous and unexceptionable flirtations, entertaining to all concerned.

He missed few of the sights and sounds. Visiting Rome during Holy Week of 1831, he took in the church services and noted down the chants. Going later to Naples, Amalfi, Sorrento and Capri, he delighted in the incredible vistas of the Bay of Naples. He described it all, tourist-wise, in "diary" letters to Fanny. To fix the landscape in his memory he made sketches in pen and pencil. He wrote from Rome: "I work hard and lead a pleasant, happy life; my mirror is stuck full of Italian, German and English visiting cards, and I spend every evening with one of my acquaintances." By "work" he meant that his musical imagination was brimming in spite of the diversions crowding upon his time and attention. When he wrote of the landscape, the intense Italian sky, the sea "like a meadow of pure ether as you gaze at it," the gay peasant types, the blossoms of the acacias and citrons which so lured him that it required a spell of rainy weather to

drive him indoors to his writing desk, Fanny wondered whether his music was suffering neglect. He reassured her by telling of "two symphonies which have been haunting my brain," together with several shorter works.

Fanny may not have fully realized that her composing brother had his own way of thinking out his music, and that all was well. He carried his unfinished works about with him in his head, only partly on paper, for the reason that he had an extraordinarily vivid memory of them, in every detail. He was loath to write them out in final score, for he was a perpetual reviser and polisher and was never quite satisfied. He knew that if he began to write a symphony out in full he would find himself changing the treatment as he went along. This hesitation, which was also a dread of the finality of publication, accounts for the fact that the "Italian" Symphony, introduced in London in 1833, was held by him for revision for



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four more years and not performed in its final shape until after his death. He also held the "Reformation" Symphony three years before it was performed and never yielded it to his publisher. When Mendelssohn composed his "Reformation" Symphony in North Wales in September 1829, he had in mind the celebration planned in Germany for the following year of the Tercentenary of the Augsburg Confession, the drawing up of the constitution of the Protestant faith in June 1530. The composer used in the introduction to the first movement the so-called "Dresden Amen," otherwise known to us as the cadence of the Eucharist motive in Wagner's *Parsifal*. Each composer, while living in Dresden, had undoubtedly heard this response of Roman Catholic sources, then also familiar in the Protestant churches of the Saxon capital. It exists in two forms, and the cadence with the familiar rising

sixths was used by both composers. The chorale attributed to Luther, *Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott* ("A sure stronghold is our God"), becomes the subject of the introduction to the Finale. It appears at the beginning, first heard from the solo flute. It undergoes proud returns in the body of the movement, in augmentation. The old chorale melody which Mendelssohn resurrected differs slightly from the form familiar to us in Bach's arrangement of the chorale and his Cantata based upon it.

The celebration of the anniversary did not take place, and the Symphony had its more appropriate introduction as a regular concert piece two years later, in Berlin. The sturdy and noble chorale subject, and the beautiful "Amen" cadence, with all their churchly associations, are developed in unchurchly symphonic fashion. The music bespeaks his personal style, fervid in melody, lucid in orchestration, felicitous in detail, Mendelssohnian in every bar.

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It is difficult to believe—and then to remember—that the magical Scherzo from the E-flat Octet could have been written by a boy of sixteen.

Originally written for violin—as a birthday present for a friend—the Scherzo was arranged for orchestra by Mendelssohn to replace the original Minuet in his Symphony No. 1 at a London Philharmonic Society Orchestra concert he conducted on May 25, 1829. Mendelssohn presented the manuscript to the Society and it lay forgotten in the archives until brought to light and published in 1911.