

13. Der Jäger Abschied, Op. 50, No. 2

Felix Mendelssohn

(1809-1847)

arr. Friedrich Gumpert & William Melton

Mendelssohn Bartholdy, Jacob Ludwig Felix

(born 3 February 1809 in Hamburg; died 4 November 1847 in Leipzig)

Felix Mendelssohn's father Abraham added Bartholdy to the family name when he moved to Berlin and converted from Judaism to Protestantism. The grandson of the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, Felix was a precocious and diversely talented child: he excelled in music, but also in languages and the visual arts. After a succession of teachers he went to Carl Friedrich Zelter, who became a mentor, easing his charge's entry into the Berlin *Singakademie* and even introducing the boy to the great Goethe (who was as charmed by Mendelssohn as he had been unnerved by Beethoven). Musical annals are full of *Wunderkinder*, but as pianist-scholar Charles Rosen has written, 'Mendelssohn was the greatest child prodigy the history of Western music has ever known. Not even Mozart or Chopin before the age of nineteen could equal the mastery that Mendelssohn already possessed when he was only sixteen'. The mastery did not diminish: tours across Europe were hugely successful, and Mendelssohn's leadership of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra and founding of the Leipzig Conservatory were lasting achievements for German cultural life. His contemporaries were understandably shocked at his unexpected death at the age of 38, but Mendelssohn's highly regarded creative output survives him.

'Der Jäger Abschied' ('The Hunter's Farewell') was composed on 6 January 1840 and dedicated to the two leading *Liedertafel* of Leipzig. Its publication as the second of *Sechs Lieder für vierstimmigen Männerchor*, Op. 50 by Kistner of Leipzig followed in the same year. The setting of Joseph von Eichendorff's poem was well received and often reissued, most notably in the critical edition that Mendelssohn's acquaintance Julius Rietz prepared for the Breitkopf & Härtel complete works. Many transcriptions also appeared: several for solo piano (including one by Franz Liszt) or solo voice and piano, and versions for mixed chorus, for wind band and even zither. Still, it is worth noting that Mendelssohn's original was composed for the specific colours of male

chorus and horn quartet (with bass trombone reinforcement). Late 19th century hornists who had performed the work with chorus, like Leipzig Gewandhaus solo hornist Friedrich Gumpert (1841-1906), made the obvious choice to arrange the piece for horn quartet alone. Gumpert's transcription was published as the twelfth of his *Ausgewählte Horn-Quartette*, Vol. 4 (Leipzig: Carl Merseburger, 1888).

Text by William Melton