



Bisel Classics

Felix
**MENDELSSOHN-
BARTHOLDY**
OUVERTURE
zu den Hebriden
Opus 26

PIANO
4 HANDED

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Preface

In 1829 Mendelssohn embarked upon his Grand Tour, a journey calculated to broaden the horizons both figuratively and intellectually. Preparing the way for his career, Felix had admitted as much to his confidante Moscheles who was an established and prominent figure in London's musical scene and who had an important part to play in Mendelssohn's London concerts. Bouyed up by her recent betrothal to the Prussian court artist, Wilhelm Hensel, Fanny meanwhile, tasked Carl Klingemann with the day to day care of the composer whilst in England:

We are soon going to send you Felix... The prospect of his absence, as you may well imagine, casts a deep shadow on this sunny time of my life. I know that you love him for your own sake and for his, but now you must love him even more, as he had no one in England who has loved him ere ⁱ this, and you will be to him Alpha and Omega... Take good care of him, and let him find one warm heart for the many he leaves behind!

Berlin: March 22, 1829ⁱⁱ

(Hensel 1882; pp.169-170)

Taking in London's musical life and culture with various social outings and sightseeing provided a leisurely preamble to the main business where he conducted the London premiere of '*A Midsummer Night's Dream*', followed a month later by performances of Weber's '*Concert-Stück*', Beethoven's '*Emperor Concerto*' and the '*Double Concerto*' in E major, with Moscheles at his side. With the concert

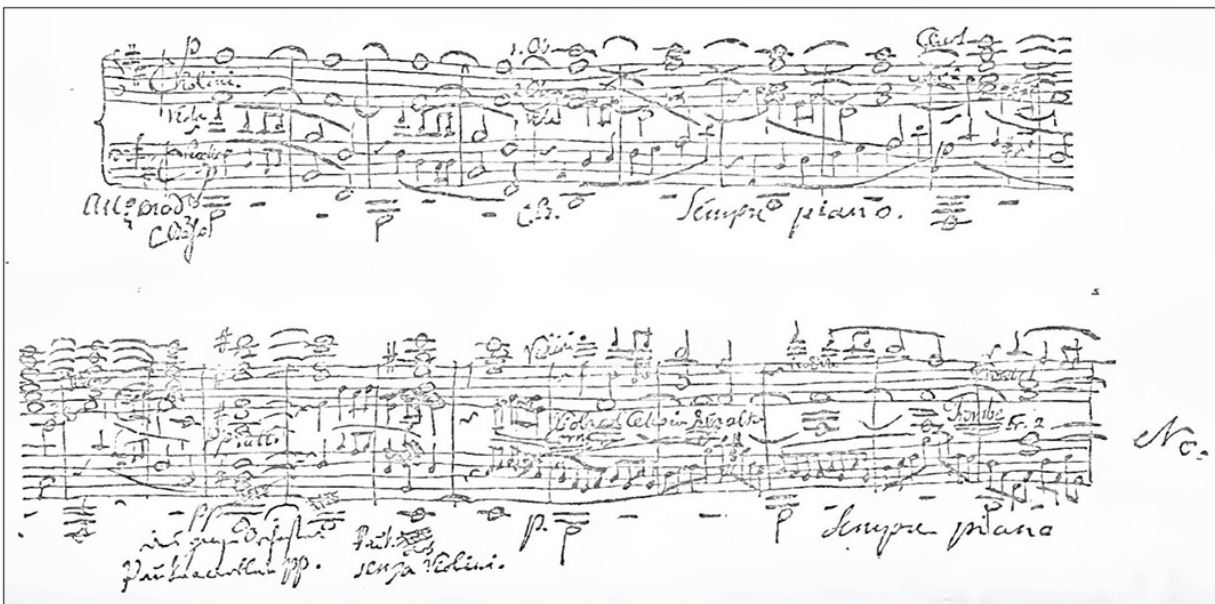
season completed, Mendelssohn and Klingemann then travelled north, to Scotland. At Holyrood Palace, the composer found the inspiration for his Scottish Symphony and together, he and Klingemann travelled thenceforth to Oban where, infused by the spirit of the dramatic Hebridean coastline in a letter to his sisters, Mendelssohn set down his first thoughts for an overture:

In order to make you understand how extraordinarily the Hebrides affected me, the following came into my mind there.

Felix

Oban: August 7, 1829.

(Hensel 1882; pp. 207-208.)



The attribution to Fingal's Cave was added in 1833 at the prompting of his publisher. There is no mistaking the magical effect the visit to the uninhabited island of Staffa where the cave is located had on the travellers however. As Klingemann described two days after their visit:

Staffa, with its strange basalt pillars and caverns, is in all the picture-books. We were put out in boats and lifted by the hissing sea up the pillar stumps to the celebrated Fingal's Cave. A greener roar of waves surely never rushed into a stranger cavern - its many pillars making it look like the inside of an immense organ, black and resounding, and absolutely without purpose, and quite alone, the wide sea within and without.

Klingemann.

Glasgow: August 10, 1829

(Hensel 1882; p.204)

Work on the overture continued for over a year however with the first version '*Die Hebriden*' being completed on 11th December, 1830 with a revised version following just five days later on the 16th December. It seems the intractable character of the counterpoint prevented Mendelssohn from completing the work sooner but in this respect, he proved himself an assiduous and diligent worker. His objective of realising in a pictorial sense the natural forces in the fabric of the music came after much deliberation and effort. The third version renamed '*The Isles of Fingal*' was realised only on the 6th June 1832 but this was the genesis of the piano four hands version arranged by the composer and used as the source of this edition which followed on the 14th June and which came to be known by the title '*Fingals Höhle*', followed finally by a fourth version, renamed again as '*The Hebrides*' on 20th June.

Mendelssohn experienced several adventures on his Grand Tour but none are perhaps remembered more fondly today than this Overture. It has become a signature tune of sorts, evoking the traveller's journey to a place uninhabited by

mortals, sandwiched between the brooding sea and louring sky.

Stephen Begley, June 2012.