PORTFOLIO OF RECORDED PERFORMANCES AND EXEGESIS

Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel and Clara Wieck-Schumann:
a study through performance of their selected piano works

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ABSTRACT

This project pursues an investigation into the piano works of Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel and Clara Wieck-Schumann, whose music had been largely forgotten until its revival as part of a recent renewal of interest in women composers. While the musical and individual styles of these two composers vary considerably, their music can still be usefully compared within the broad context of nineteenth-century Romanticism. The detailed study of their piano works poses questions relating to issues of performance practice, an area that has still not been widely explored in the literature surrounding their music. The aim of this project will therefore be to identify and address such issues from the perspective of the performer.

The research carried out in this project is performance based. Performance, being a significant component of the research, functions as a tool and serves as an outcome of the project. The submission is presented in two parts. Part A consists of three CDs and contains recorded performances of selected piano works by Mendelssohn-Hensel and Wieck-Schumann. The repertoire included in the CDs covers three different genres by both composers; namely, piano sonatas, trios and miniatures. Part B is an exegesis. The commentary contained in this section combines theoretical, historical and practical perspectives that document the processes of research and performance undertaken as part of the project.

Existing research on the repertoire, while gathering momentum, has centred largely on compositional techniques or gender-related studies. Aspects of performance have been substantially neglected. The present study draws heavily on existing scholarship, informed by the intimate experience of the music that comes from performing it. It addresses insights
generated through the process of rehearsing and performing Mendelssohn-Hensel’s and
Wieck-Schumann’s piano works, and examines the musical characteristics and compositional
styles of the two composers. The similarities and differences between their works within each
genre are identified and assessed based on key musical elements such as form, tonality,
texture, notation, rhythm, dynamics, articulation, tempo, and pedalling. Also included is a
discussion of the interpretation of the scores and the stylistic issues encountered while
studying and performing these works.

The primary outcomes of this research reside in the recordings and exegesis and differ
fundamentally from the purely musicological perspectives that characterise most of the
previous work devoted to Mendelssohn-Hensel and Wieck-Schumann. The project represents
the first study to investigate the two composers and three of their most characteristic genres
by combining the perspectives of performer and researcher, making it a distinctive
contribution to the comparatively small but steadily growing body of research into these two
composers. It is hoped that this project will serve as a guide and reference for pianists
wishing to study the piano works of the two composers, stimulate publishers to commission
complete editions of the composers’ music, and to provide pointers towards possible areas of
further investigation.
DECLARATION

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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**EDITORIAL NOTES**

To avoid confusion, the two composers in question are referred to as Mendelssohn-Hensel and Wieck-Schumann following the German styling of their names. Although Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel chose to be published as Fanny Hensel, to refer to her as either Hensel or Mendelssohn may cause confusion, since her celebrated brother Felix Mendelssohn, husband Wilhelm Hensel and German tenor Heinrich Hensel share these surnames. Clara Wieck-Schumann is likewise referred to by her hyphenated surname to distinguish her from her father and her husband.

The dates of all Mendelssohn-Hensel’s and Wieck-Schumann’s piano works are listed in Appendix 1. In the text, dates given in brackets for musical works refer to dates of composition, as cited in the H-U catalogue (Hellwig-Unruh 2000) for Mendelssohn-Hensel, and Reich’s catalogue (2001) for Wieck-Schumann. For all other composers, dates refer to dates of publication as they appear in Grove Music Online.

Titles of compositions have been translated into English only when germane to the argument. For clarity, English has been used for generic titles such as Piano Sonata and Piano Trio. The titles of character pieces (such as *Ponte Molle*) have been italicised. In the case of character pieces without titles that are identified by their tempo designations (such as *Allegro molto vivace ma con sentimento*), italics have again been used. Italian terms in common usage (such as tempo, coda) are not italicised, terms indicating dynamics (such as *piano*) are. In the case of *piano*, the italicisation distinguishes between the dynamic level and the instrument.
In the case of Wieck-Schumann, some works were published as Romanze and some as Romance; Romance is used within the text for uniformity. The piece published as Wieck-Schumann’s Romanze ohne opuszahl (1853) is referred to as Romance in A minor, her Romanze h-moll (1856) as Romance in B minor.

Some of the character pieces selected for study were published by different publishers over a period of time and appear in different collections under different titles. Works falling into this category include Mendelssohn-Hensel’s Lyrische Klavierstücke, Vier Römische Klavierstücke, and Vier Lieder ohne Worte, Op. 8, as well as Wieck-Schumann’s Quatre Pièces Caractéristiques, Op. 5, and Drei Romanzen, Op. 21. The individual pieces are then referred to according to the order in which they appear. For example, the three lyrical pieces in Mendelssohn-Hensel’s Lyrische Klavierstücke are referred to as Lyrische Klavierstücke no. 1, Lyrische Klavierstücke no. 2 and Lyrische Klavierstücke no. 3 respectively. However, the CD contents listed in Part A: Recordings, give the tempo indications and/or titles of each individual piece as appropriate.

Upper case is used for all major and minor keys in the text, in accordance with the practice adopted in Grove Music Online, avoiding the confusion that occurs in English; for instance, between “a minor” and “A minor”.

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