

CONCERTS

AT THE UNIVERSITY

SPRING—SUMMER 2015

Tuesday 10 March 2015

1.10pm

Reid Concert Hall

Roberto Prosseda · piano

Programme of works by **MENDELSSOHN**.



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
Edinburgh College of Art



Supported by the Italian Institute

Mendelssohn in England and Scotland

Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1809-1847)

4 Lieder ohne Worte

Op. 19 No. 6 'Venetianisches Gondellied'

Op. 38 No. 2

Op. 38 No. 6 'Duetto'

Op. 53 No. 2

Trois Fantaisies ou Caprices Op.16

No.1 in A minor- Andante con moto

No.2 in E minor- Scherzo: Presto

No.3 in E major- Andante

Variations sérieuses Op.54

[Theme in D minor and 18 variations]

Fantaisie Op.28 'Scottish Sonata'

Con moto adagio

Allegro con moto

Presto

Among the great Romantic composers, Felix Mendelssohn is still, unfortunately, largely neglected. This is particularly true regarding his piano output. This program aims to present some of the most popular piano works by Mendelssohn, like the *Lieder ohne Worte*, the *Variations sérieuses* and the *Fantasia* Op. 28.

With his *Lieder ohne Worte*, Mendelssohn invented a new genre, melting the exquisite Romantic Lyricism with a high variety of expression and moods. The 4 Lieder here presented show the different approaches and styles that Mendelssohn is able to reach in such a short form.

The three *Fantaisies ou Caprices*, Op.16 were composed in England in 1829, and dedicated to the three young Taylor sisters, whose guest Mendelssohn was during a short holiday in the Lake District. Mendelssohn was not keen on revealing his sources of inspiration too explicitly, but in this case we know the details of what he is intending to describe, and they merit some attention. The first Fantasia, in A minor/major, is dedicated to Ann Taylor, and supposedly presented by the composer. The A minor opening, which closely recalls the beginning of the contemporary "Scottish" Symphony, might possibly evoke the scent of the bouquet in the pianissimo diminished-seventh arpeggio. The second Fantasia is a typically "elfin" scherzo in E minor, inspired by the yellow tecomas that Honoria Taylor used to wear in her hair. The calmer and more idyllic third Fantasia is inspired by a hill-stream that Felix and Susan Taylor crossed during a horseback riding.

The *Variations sérieuses* are perhaps the highest peak of Mendelssohn's entire output for piano. The theme with 18 variations was composed in 1841 commissioned by the Viennese publisher Mechetti for the "Album-Beethoven", to contribute to the Beethoven Monument in Bonn, then realised in 1845. Here we can actually find several reminiscences from Beethoven's 32 Variations in C minor, as well as from Bach's *Ciaccone* in D minor. In the *Variations sérieuses*, Mendelssohn's masterly command of counterpoint and classical structures is combined with a restlessness and a harmonic tension that make this music a clear forerunner of the achievements of Johannes Brahms some decades later.

The Fantasia Op.28 in F sharp minor, entitled *Sonate écossaise* in the first version of 1830, is another peak of Mendelssohn's piano output, and demonstrates the composer's ability to combine a complete mastery of classical forms with a personal, innovative conception of thematic development. This Fantasia Op. 28 is in effect a genuine sonata, in that both the first and third movements are in sonata form, and the second movement is a Scherzo that recalls its counterparts in Beethoven's sonatas. Nevertheless, Mendelssohn here takes an extraordinarily original approach to sonata form, particularly in the first movement, where the unsettled opening arpeggios given an almost improvisatory feel, culminating in the massive dynamic explosions of the middle section. The principal theme is an ancient, desolate, with a vaguely Ossianic feel, possibly derived from the traditional Scottish material that Mendelssohn came across during his Scottish

journey of 1829. The restless, dramatic mood of this movement stands in contrast to the graceful rhythmic vitality of the following Scherzo, characterized by continually accented weak beats, which add an occasionally humorous note. In the final movement, a stormy Presto con fuoco, the constant, whirling tension is sustained by forceful contrapuntal rigour. The Op.28 Fantasia is one of the most unsettling and radical works in the entire Romantic piano repertoire, and once again demolishes the old chestnut (that started with Wagner) that Mendelssohn is a composer incapable of reaching real dramatic depths.

Roberto Prosseda

Italian pianist **Roberto Prosseda** (b.1975) is internationally known for his complete recording of Mendelssohn piano works for Decca. Prosseda's rediscovery of the pedal piano with subsequent Hyperion recordings, combined with his innovative use of digital technologies with robotic-pianist "Teo Tronico", have made him one of the most interesting and diverse pianists on the world stage today.

Prosseda first made headlines in Europe with his sensational discovery of previously lost works by Felix Mendelssohn. Embarking on a project with Decca to record them, a decade later, in 2013, he had completed nine widely acclaimed Decca albums of Mendelssohn's piano works including the 2009 Gewandhaus recording of the 3rd Piano Concerto in E minor, conducted by Riccardo Chailly. In addition to this Deutsche Grammophon selected twelve recordings by Prosseda to add to the box set "Classic Gold" (2010) and Decca had released his interpretations of works by Mozart, Schubert, Schumann and Chopin.

Roberto Prosseda recently performed with some of the world's most important orchestras: the London Philharmonic Orchestra, New Japan Philharmonic, Moscow State Philharmonic, Bruxelles Philharmonic, Calgary Philharmonic and the mighty Leipzig Gewandhaus. In Italy he performs regularly for the prestigious Teatro alla Scala di Milano, the Accademia di Santa Cecilia in Rome and Teatro la Fenice in Venice.

In 2013 his book, "Il Pianoforte" was published by Curci Editori and for Euroarts he has been involved in three documentaries dedicated to Mendelssohn, Chopin and Liszt. He often presents lectures and performances about the difference between reproduction and interpretation, featuring the new Robot-Pianist "TeoTronico".

www.robertoprosseda.com