

The Composer, Pianist and Conductor Fanny Mendelssohn (1805-1847)

Her Life and Her Work

Thank you for your interest in the composer, pianist and conductor Fanny Mendelssohn (1805 Hamburg -1847 Berlin).

1. I would like to introduce her and highlight Fanny Mendelssohn's musical genius. She was the only woman composer of the 19th centuries, the German romantic period, who can stand on an equal footing alongside all the other male composers, whose music is being played everywhere every day. When I first began looking for women composers, whose work and fame is equal to that of the male giants in music, not even one woman came to mind. How could this be? I had never realized the full significance of this and even began to doubt my knowledge about classical music.
2. I want to discuss how and why her father, Abraham Mendelssohn (1776-1835), discouraged his brilliant daughter from composing, giving public concerts and conducting.
3. I also want to trace the many other obstacles Fanny Mendelssohn had to overcome before she was free to begin to publish her work. This is where the young Charles-François Gounod (1818-1893) became very important for her. During their time together in Italy she received at last the much needed adoration and recognition, through his repeated requests she learned to play freely for others, and she became more assured to play her own compositions more often.

While reading about Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) and his sister, Maria Anna Mozart (1751-1829) – who was a good composer according to her brother, and he encouraged her to continue writing – I suddenly remembered the name Fanny Mendelssohn. I googled her and knew instantly that I had found my woman! That was four years ago and from that day on I cannot stop reading about her and listening to her music and I tell everyone about her. Why had I not paid attention to her earlier when we all know her brother, the composer Felix Mendelssohn, whose compositions were played more often in the 19th century than those of any other composer? How could it happen that her music was lost for over 130 years after her sudden death in 1847, how could her genius remain hidden for over a century?

A good example of how trapped we get in our thinking is the following event. This summer, on August 8th, a magnificent “All-Mendelssohn Concert” was presented at the Hollywood Bowl, with Felix Mendelssohn’s *Overture to A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, his *Violin concerto in E minor* and his *4th Symphony, the Italian*. Karina Cannelakis conducted the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Great music, but can you tell me what is wrong here? How is it possible that we all accept that an All-Mendelssohn evening automatically means music by Felix Mendelssohn – only? While his older sister Fanny Mendelssohn remains in obscurity, unknown to most classical music lovers?

Fanny Cäcilie Mendelssohn, the oldest child of Lea Salomon (1777-1842) and Abraham Mendelssohn (1776-1835), was born in Hamburg into one of the most illustrious and prominent German families, that contributed over many generations, for almost 300 years until today, to the cultural and intellectual life, not only in Germany but in all of Europe and world-wide. The Mendelssohn’s were truly cosmopolitan, they spoke several languages, their house was an intellectual center in Berlin during the first half of the 19th century. Her paternal grandfather, Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), was the

famous German philosopher of the age of enlightenment and a close friend of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804).

Her mother Lea, an outstanding pianist, realized early that Fanny was a musically gifted child, and in the beginning Abraham Mendelssohn followed his daughter's progress at the piano proudly. However, he gave up the idea of nurturing his brilliant daughter's exceptional musical gift when her brother Felix (1809-1847), who was born three years later, also began displaying extraordinary musical talents. From then on Abraham Mendelssohn concentrated all his efforts, parental pride and hope on his son. Fanny was five at the time when her father moved his attention away from her to her younger brother. She was forced to learn to assert herself early in life, fighting persistently and courageously for her - I would like to say - equal rights. No matter how difficult it was to surmount the restriction that society and families put on women in all areas of life – until very recently – Fanny Mendelssohn was born to live a life for music and was willing to give up most everything else for it.

Bella Salomon (1749-1824), Fanny's maternal grandmother, had the largest collection of Bach scores at the time. During her daily piano practices, Fanny always began with Bach before moving on to other composers. In 1818, when she was 13, she played all 24 preludes of the first part of Bach's well tempered piano from memory – as a present for her father's 42nd birthday. No one ever had to tell her to practice, only not to overdo it. With this performance, which, if we count just the minutes of each fugue, took well over an hour, Fanny gave an example of her excellent skills at the piano, her insight into Bach's music, her stamina and her musical memory, which never failed her. We can compare her musical memory to that of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791).

Fanny knew she was very good and sent her compositions to her father, who was away on frequent business trips throughout Germany, France, the Netherlands, Belgium and England. On July 16th, 1820 – she was 15 at the time – her father sent her a letter from Paris, saying,

“What you wrote to me about your musical occupation with reference to and in comparison with Felix was both rightly thought and expressed. Music will perhaps become his profession, whilst for you it can and must only be an ornament, never the foundation for your being and doing ... and your very joy at the praise he earns proves that you might, in his place, have merited equal approval. Remain true to these sentiments and to this line of conduct; they are feminine, and only what is truly feminine adorns a woman.”

Getting married and raising children was the only occupation for a woman. This was especially true if a woman was born into the upper strata of society, where wealth was guaranteed and money was no issue. These reprimands in Abraham Mendelssohn’s letter are proof that he knew that his daughter was as good as Felix – or we could say that **Felix was as good as Fanny!** She received several such letters from her father and understood that she would have to look for a husband who would allow her to keep her music and composing at the center of her life. Eight years later, in November of 1828, again for Fanny’s birthday, her father repeated in another letter from Paris the same advice,

“You must do more to pull yourself together, to collect yourself; you must work more seriously and assiduously to realize your actual calling, that of a housewife. Do this as long as you can freely, and before you are compelled ...”

These words must have sounded like a threat, tearing her apart. On the one hand she wanted to be a good and faithful daughter and please her father, on the other hand she could not honor his wishes. He was a stern father, who expected his daughters – but also his sons – to remain true and loving, devoted and obedient to him all their lives.

When Fanny Mendelssohn was 16 she met the future Prussian Court painter, Wilhelm Hensel (1794-1861) – who was 11 years older – at an exhibition of his works. He took her around explaining his drawings, even asking her opinion, and she knew that she had found the man she would marry. She never changed her mind against all opposition from her parents. Their major concerns were that Wilhelm Hensel was protestant and came from a poor family. Fanny received many marriage proposals, one even by the famous poet Heinrich Heine. However, she declined Heine's proposal because he was too sarcastic for her taste and denied publicly that women had any intellectual capacities. Her sister Rebecka did not want to marry Heine either. It is interesting to note that their youngest brother Paul later married Heine's younger sister Albertine.

In 1823 Abraham Mendelssohn established the *Sonntagsmusiken* or Sunday concerts to provide a stage to perform for his four musical talented children. In order to accommodate larger audiences, he bought the biggest residence available in Berlin. The spacious garden salon was large enough up to 300 people. Family members and illustrious friends and acquaintances, like the Humboldt brothers, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), visiting virtuosos and composers came. All of Berlin and those who happened to be in town from all over Europe clamored to be invited. Even if these concerts took place in a semi-private setting, they were highly professional, with professional musicians and an international, sophisticated, elegant and critical audience, who assembled on a bi-weekly basis. People came, expecting the best entertainment, to see and to be seen in Berlin society.

In the spring of 1829, Fanny Mendelssohn was 24, she composed one of her great works, the *Ostersonate* in A major or *Easter Sonata*. This was several months before her marriage to Wilhelm Hensel. However, after her sudden death in 1847, the true authorship of this composition soon became a mystery. The *Easter Sonata*, along with most of her music, was not published during her lifetime and soon forgotten. Her father, and later both her brothers, Felix and Paul, forbid her to publish her works.

Today, musicologists agree that it was quite extraordinary for a young woman to write a piano sonata only two years after Ludwig van Beethoven had died in 1827. Beethoven had written 32 piano sonatas, Fanny had memorized most of them. Other composers were intimidated by his expertise and daring innovations and did not write any piano sonatas for a decade after his death. Fanny, who adored Beethoven, wrote a massive, complex, energetic, bold and adventurous piece, judged today as a major work of huge ambition.

When the sonata was found again by the record collector and producer Henri-Jacques Coudert in a Paris bookshop in 1970, it was described as masculine, violent and ambitious, attributes suited for a male composer. Coudert knew right away that it was a masterpiece, and, as it said "F. Mendelssohn" on the cover, he assumed immediately that it was an up to then unpublished work by Felix Mendelssohn, which made it even more exciting. Coudert bought the piece and arranged for the French pianist Eric Heidsieck to record the first known version of *Easter Sonata* in 1973.

[Eric Heidsieck plays Mendelssohn - Klaviersonate 1828 "de Pâques" - mov. I & II](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJPq_ZbQX0E)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJPq_ZbQX0E

Published on YouTube on Jan 12, 2014 by Luca Ciammarughi

Eric Heidsieck, piano (Steinway).

However, Felix Mendelssohn had never mentioned an *Ostersonate* in any of his writings. The Mendelssohn's knew who they were and kept all of their correspondence, every single letter and note any of them ever wrote and received, all neatly sorted and organized in large green volumes, the so-called green books.

During the women's movement of the 1980s in Germany, women musicologists began to demand access to Fanny Mendelssohn's archives. Studying her works had been difficult if not impossible up to then, because from 1967 until his retirement in 1988, Rudolf Elvers was in charge of the the music division at the Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz in West Berlin, and would not open the archives that housed Fanny Mendelssohn's legacy. Elvers dismissed her compositions as the work of a mere housewife, insisting that her music was mediocre, that it consisted only of short pieces, incidental music, stressing that it was not worthy to be performed anymore and should be forgotten, because she herself had determined that it should neither be played again nor published after her death. These were blatant lies because Fanny Mendelssohn had pleaded with Felix to play her work, which he never did, and to allow her to publish. She always composed with the public in mind. Eventually the women succeeded and gained access to Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel's legacy.

In 2010, Angela Regina Mace, a young American musicologist and graduate student from Duke University, not only identified the manuscript as Fanny Mendelssohn's handwriting, but also noticed that it contained a bound volume of 30 numbered pages that were missing from another manuscript, known to have been composed by Fanny Mendelssohn. When Mace heard the sonata, she also recognized Fanny Mendelssohn's musical voice. We owe it to the persistent research of Mace, which took her all over Europe and the eastern part of the United States, that she rediscovered the sheet music at a private collector home in Paris.

Pianist Sofya Gulyak, the first female winner of the Leeds Piano Competition, played a rousing rendition of the the 20-minute long *Sonata* at the Royal College of Music in London. 188 years after Fanny Mendelssohn wrote the *Easter Sonata*, it was publicly performed and broadcast as her work for the first time on Wednesday, March 8th, 2017, for the celebration of International Women's Day. Among those in the audience was Fanny Mendelssohn's great-great-great granddaughter from the Hensel line, Sheila Hayman, a filmmaker and novelist. She discussed the story of her great-great-great-granddaughter's *Easter Sonata* with the BBC and wrote about it for the "Guardian", adding, "She was an amazing woman, who persevered despite continued discouragement, and now, suddenly, she is in the limelight, celebrated like a super star!" The news about the *Ostersonate* went around the world in every medium. Unfortunately BBC took the recording, that they had put on the Internet, down again 5 days later.

I had been unaware of the fact that *Ostersonate* had been attributed to Felix Mendelssohn, just because the name "F. Mendelssohn" was written on the cover of one of the three parts that were found in different places in Europe. After all, Fanny had written the sonata several months before her marriage to Wilhelm Hensel on the 3rd of October 1829, and F. Mendelssohn was her name too!

I knew of the *Ostersonate* because I had read about it in Fanny Mendelssohn's diary two years earlier. The entry was dated April 13th, 1829. At the time I had marked it, writing next to it: "Fanny's *Ostersonate*". On the 10th of April 1829, family and friends had gathered at their home at Leipziger Straße 3, to bid farewell to Felix, who was leaving on another extended trip. As always, Fanny had gone to his room with Felix, helping him pack. After waving good bye as the coach rolled away, they returned into the house, and 3 days later Fanny described the rest of the afternoon and evening in her diary as follows,

“... Hensel came after dinner, later Marx, Droysen, Albert Heydemann; Gans came by for an hour. Droysen brought me the sweetest, most adorable poem about Felix, which put me into a most pleasant mood, because a melody for it came to mind right away. I played my *Ostersonate* ...” (Tagebücher, p. 14)

Thanks to Angela Mace’s groundbreaking research, the *Easter Sonata* is now accepted as Fanny Mendelssohn’s work. It is up to us to keep talking about her and to play her music and make sure it becomes part of the repertoire of every orchestra worldwide. The composition cycle *Das Jahr (The Year)*, written between August and December 1841, comprises 13 pieces, one for each month and an epilogue. It is over an hour long and equally noteworthy. Fanny Mendelssohn was the first to write such a cycle, which soon became very popular with many composers.

Most recently I found out that the Salastina Music Society, founded by Maia Jasper White and Kevin Kumar, will perform the *Ostersonate* on March 31st 2018 in Pasadena. Another performance will take place on April 1st, 2018 in a private home in Woodland Hills. Here is the link:

<http://www.salastina.org/concerts>

then click on concerts and scroll down to March/April 2018.

I wrote to Maia Jasper White, hoping to get for the music score for the *Easter Sonata* from her, because I had been searching for it, contacting the most well known music stores in Berlin and London but none were able to procure it for me. After the *Easter Sonata* was aired over BBC on March 8th, 2017, I had increased my search, unfortunately unsuccessfully. To my great surprise Maia Jasper White told me that they did not have it either, but that Angela Regina Mace had promised to send it to her months ago, however they never received it. And so we are still waiting to get the score for Fanny Mendelssohn’s *Ostersonate*! I shall write to Angela Mace about it.

After 8 years of courtship, in 1829, Lea Mendelssohn finally relented under pressure from other family members, and agreed to the marriage between her daughter and Wilhelm Hensel, who would become famous in his day. As Prussian court painter at the Akademie der Künste, he had a good income – one of Lea’s demands – and Fanny would not marry anyone else and would have stayed unmarried for the sake of her music and to escape similar admonition from a husband that she had received from her father. They were married on the 3rd of October, 1829. Their marriage is said to have been very happy. She frequently played for Wilhelm for hours while he was painting in his studio, which her father had built right next to her music room.

I would like to give you a quick insight into the planning for the Sunday concerts, for which Fanny Mendelssohn was solely responsible after Felix had left Berlin for good in 1831. She changed the whole format and sent out personal invitations to the members of Berlin’s society and the Prussian court. She planned everything, which included choosing the musical program, rehearsing with the choir and orchestras, the solo singers and instrumentalists, as well as planning for food, drinks, wine, and flowers. In 1834 she hired the orchestra of the Königstädter Theater to perform her C major overture. She led the concerts as pianist and conducted as the need arose. We have the music programs that Fanny Mendelssohn put together, listing also how often she chose music from the various composers.

After one performance she wrote in her diary that over 300 guests had attended, among them Franz Liszt and Clara and Robert Schumann. She recorded proudly that 22 coaches had entered their courtyard, including the Humboldts’, as well as eight coaches with 11 princesses. The family not only knew most contemporary musicians and composers personally, but also poets, painters, philosophers, architects, bankers and professors from every field, historians, politicians, mathematicians, scientists and medical doctors during

this highly creative and inventive period of European history, the beginning of modern times.

Fanny Mendelssohn, however, lived not only for music. She loved to travel, preferably by train, and could hardly wait until all cities in Europe would be connected by rail. Train travel, she said, was faster, cheaper and more comfortable and she understood that from then on even people who could never afford to travel in the past, would be able to do so now. Steam ships across the Atlantic to New York, the Channel to England or across the North sea from Hamburg to London became safer and faster and more affordable. The idea of a united Europe, was very important to people everywhere in the 19th century. By 1850 the railroad connected all major European cities, having brought Europe closer together within two decades. For the first time people knew when they would arrive in Berlin, Leipzig, Paris, London or Trieste. She longed for knowledge in every field, like her grandfather Moses. To satisfy her thirst for knowledge, she attended the public lectures given by Alexander von Humboldt and other professors at the Singakademie. On December 23rd, 1827 she wrote a detailed enthusiastic report about these extraordinary events to the family friend and diplomat Carl Klingemann (1798-1862) in London,

“You must have heard of Alexander von Humboldt’s (1769-1859) lectures on physical geography. But do you know that at his majesty’s request (Friedrich Wilhelm III, 1797-1840) he has begun a second course of lectures in the hall of the Singakademie attended by everybody who lays any claim to good breeding and fashion, from the king and the whole court, ministers, generals, officers, artists, authors, beaux esprits (and ugly ones too) students and ladies, down to your unworthy correspondent? The crowd is fearful, the public imposing, and the lectures are very interesting indeed. Gentlemen may laugh as much as they like,

but it is delightful that we too have the opportunity given us of listening to clever men. We fully enjoy this happiness, and must try to bear the scoffing. And now I will give up completely to your mockery, by confessing that we are hearing a course of lectures from a foreigner about experimental physics. These lectures are likewise attended chiefly by ladies. He reads in a newly built room, well lighted with gas.”

This was at a time when women were not allowed to attend public schools and universities, but Friedrich Wilhelm III had made it possible – also for the women at his court. Fanny Mendelssohn often remarked on such modern conveniences as the gas lanterns on city streets that made them safer, and gas lighting in public buildings like auditoriums, theaters, concert halls, and museums that before you could only visit during day time. But more importantly, for the first time ever, people had adequate lighting in their homes during the evenings to use the hours after dark as they wished and be more creative and productive.

Just as Abraham Mendelssohn had not allowed his daughter Fanny to take up a career in music composition and public performances, Felix steadfastly continued to refuse to help his sister, even after their father’s death in 1835. Felix’ position toward his sister was unfortunate because he knew that Fanny was his equal. Felix never played a piece by his sister as music director and/or conductor in Düsseldorf, Berlin, Frankfurt, Dresden, Leipzig, Paris, Birmingham and London, to name some of the cities, although Fanny continued sending him her latest works, asking, almost pleading with him to perform her music. Now and then he would publish one or two of her Lieder, including them in his publications under his name, 6 altogether, except for once, when he published one of her Lieder with her name among his works and then made a big deal about it, which infuriated Fanny. “One song is like no song at all,” she screamed at him,

and threw the book at his feet.

Queen Victoria was an excellent singer and Prince Albert a great pianist. Felix Mendelssohn had become a personal friend and Victoria always asked him to bring new songs for her to sing. Once this led to an awkward situation when he asked Queen Victoria to tell him, which of the songs she liked best and it turned out to be one of Fanny's. (SH II, S. 190ff)

In the light of their close working relationship it is even more perplexing that Felix Mendelssohn would not acknowledge his sister's genius publicly, when he praised and helped other women to publish and to perform in public, among them Jenny Lind (1820-1887) whose career he followed closely, he praised the composer Johanna Kinkel, and adored the mezzo soprano Maria Malibran (1808-1836), he furthered the career of Clara Schumann Wieck (1819-1896) and Louise Farrenc (1804-1875), to name just a few.

So we can say that Felix' behavior toward his sisters was a family problem more than a problem of society. Johanna Kinkel gave a vivid account of Fanny's art of conducting, describing the fascination that emanated from her,

“I valued Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel's performance more highly than that of the greatest virtuosos and the most beautiful voices. She had a very special way of conducting. She was able to get through to the deepest part of the artistic spirit of a composition and enable it to flow into the souls of the singers and listeners. A sforzando of her small finger ran like an electric shock through our souls and carried us away like no wooden knocking of a baton on a music stand will never be able to do it.”

By the way, women were not allowed to conduct, they were only allowed to play one instrument in public, the piano!

Fanny's greatest longing in life was to travel to Italy. She and Wilhelm had been planning a trip to Italy, in particular to Rome, even before they were married. But life was not so easy 200 years ago and travel was much more complicated. They had to delay their journey several times because Fanny suffered from severe nosebleeds due to high blood pressure that often lasted for days. She had at least two miscarriages, a girl was still born, and then their son Sebastian Ludwig Felix Hensel was born two months early in (1830-1898) and needed special care. It is a miracle that he survived. There were also months when Hensel had to finish a commissioned painting and both Fanny and Wilhelm had decided that they wanted to pay for the trip themselves, so they had to save the money. They were finally able to go on the trip in 1839/40. For Fanny the months in Rome were the happiest in her life. It was a combination of Italy, the sun, the climate and food, the new friends, their adoration and recognition of her skills and her genius, and being far away from the men in her family that had allowed her to be herself at last.

There were large French and German communities in Rome, but the most memorable event was when she met the composers Charles Gounod who won the Prix de Rome in 1839, and George Bousquet (1818-1854), who was also a music critic and conductor and had won the Grand Prix de Rome in 1838, and Charles Dugasseau (1812-1885), a genre painter and student of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres.

The three young Frenchmen soon became Fanny's and Wilhelm's constant companions. Gounod adored the way Fanny played the piano and praised her compositions. He sat at her feet while she played, often until after midnight, he kissed her hands and embraced and adored her and couldn't get enough of her music. She wrote home to her mother,

“I played until midnight. The problem is, that these young men never forget anything I played for them even months ago. Gounod is so delighted about music like I have hardly ever experienced it. He loves my little Venetian piece and above all the concerto by Bach that I’ve had to play ten times already.”

They strolled through Rome singing and dancing during full moon, with millions of glowworms all around them. One night Gounod suddenly climbed up an acacia tree, dropping down large blossoms on them. They must have kept Rome awake many a night.

Coming to Rome from Paris at age 21, Gounod had never heard *Fidelio* or Beethoven’s violin concertos. In those days, news about art, literature and music did not travel as fast as today. Charles Gounod is today best known for his *Ave Maria* based on a work by Bach, as well as his opera *Faust* and *Marche funèbre d'une marionnette* that was used by Alfred Hitchcock.

Gounod told Fanny one day that he wanted to write a *Faust Opera*, but would not begin until he would be able to read *Faust I and II* by Goethe in the original. Fanny began teaching him German right away and she mentioned her own compositions from *Faust II*. When Gounod came to visit the Mendelssohn Hensel’s in Berlin three years later, Fanny remarked in her diary that she had never met a Frenchman who could speak and read German aloud so fluently and without an accent.

It is no wonder that everyone was excited over her piano playing and begged to hear more and more when we read what her contemporaries liked about her style and expertise,

“Fanny Mendelssohn, who composed most of her music for private, domestic use, was free to explore an increasingly ambitious tonal palette, with striking juxtapositions of unrelated harmonies and chromatically colored progressions. The songlike qualities of her music are manifest in her piano pieces, some of them are technically challenging and suggest the brilliant style for which she was celebrated by those fortunate enough to attend her musical salon.” (Larry Todd, *Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, Piano Music* p. iv)

However, I disagree with Todd’s explanation that Fanny was freer than her brother Felix in exploring and composing because she wrote for “private, domestic” use. Fanny Mendelssohn always wanted to publish and did not only plead with her brother to perform her music, but also sent her manuscripts to other friends in England and France to have her music played and published.

The 21 year old Gounod knew little of Beethoven’s music when he met Fanny Mendelssohn, who was 34 at the time, but soon came to admire him and Bach deeply. Beethoven was after Bach the great family favorite of the Mendelssohns’, but not known yet in other European countries, except of course in Austria. The opera *Fidelio* and the *Sonata in C major* were new to Gounod. He was overwhelmed by Beethoven’s music. Once he got so excited, almost intoxicated over the music, that was so new and unexpected to him, that, for lack of words, he exclaimed, “Beethoven est un polisson!” (rascal). Fanny Mendelssohn wrote in her diary,

“In the evening I played a great deal, finishing with Bach’s concerto, and all the people went quite mad about it, though they had heard it so often, and pressed about me shaking and kissing my hands. Gounod, lively as he is, declared himself quite at a loss for words to express his appreciation of my influence over him and

his happiness in our society. Gounod, romantic to a degree and full of passion, seems quite upset by his introduction to German music. It has startled him like a bombshell, and I should not wonder if it does great damage.” (SH II, S. 115 ff.)

They strolled through Rome during full moon often, with millions of glowworms all around them and the heavy scent of exotic flowers. One night Gounod suddenly climbed up an acacia tree, dropping down large blossoms on them. They must have kept Rome awake many a night. They spent many afternoons and hours after a late dinner together plying music, and Gounod encouraged and pleaded with Fanny Mendelssohn to publish her works. Upon his repeated urging to play and compose, she finally overcame her shyness and began to play her own music more frequently.

Gounod, Bousquet and Dugasseau also took turns sitting while Wilhelm Hensel drew their portraits and Fanny played through nearly all of Fidelio and four Beethoven piano sonatas.

After the Italian year, Fanny Mendelssohn’s struggle to find her own way was over. Back in Berlin, with the additional continued support of Robert von Keudell (1824-1903), a young Prussian diplomat and excellent pianist, Charles Gounod and Wilhelm Hensel, Fanny was free at last to publish, going against her father’s and her brother’s wishes. In 1846 she began sorting her compositions for 6 books to begin with. Two publishers made her brilliant offers and could not get enough of her work. (SH II, p. 325) For them it was instantly a highly profitable and successful venture. At last she was able to contribute her share to the family income. Wilhelm Hensel provided the artistic decorations on the cover pages in the Romantic style.

At the height of her greatest success – as she was about to enter public life – Fanny Mendelssohn died suddenly on May 14th, 1847, after suffering a massive stroke while she was rehearsing her brother's *Walpurgisnacht* with orchestra and choir for the upcoming Sunday concert. She did not die – as many have thoughtlessly suggested – at the height of her career, but rather at the beginning of what would have been a brilliant career, full of energy and hopes to compose much more and to publish her complete works.

With her early death the greater part of her over 560 compositions was left unpublished in her estate, in private collections, or kept by family members and soon forgotten.

Felix was devastated by Fanny's sudden death, all the emotions surfaced, he never recovered from the loss. The only work he wrote is the one we know today as *A Requiem for Fanny*. He died 6 months later also of a stroke. Some experts say that his death was caused by intense sadness over the loss of his sister. Wilhelm Hensel never painted another oil painting after his wife's death, he had lost his anchor, all sense of direction and purpose in life. Fanny had carried the two men, enabling their careers to the fullest, giving them energy, stability and encouragement.