Our 20th Anniversary Season Continues:

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YOUR **Mariposa Yosemite Symphony Orchestra** — **Les Marsden, Founding Music Director/Conductor**

FESTIVE
(and delicious)

HOLIDAY CONCERT!

December 21, 2 PM Matinee

The Fiester Auditorium, Mariposa High School, 5074 Old Hwy North, Mariposa

Advance Tickets: $10 for Adults, $8 for Students – available at http://tinyurl.com/MYSO12-21-24

(Ticket Prices Increase at the Door to $15 for Adults, $10 for Students)

THE PROGRAM:

- Rossini: Overture to “Barber of Seville”
- Mendelssohn: Symphony #4 “Italian”
- Mackie: Deck the Halls à la Bach (Premiere)
- Anderson: Sleigh RIde
- Sullivan: Overture to “The Mikado”
- Suppé: Overture to “Light Cavalry”
- Strauss (II): On the Beautiful Blue Danube
- Marsden: Sierra Christmas Party

The Mariposa Yosemite Symphony Orchestra's 20th Anniversary Season continues with our (perhaps) most popular annual event: our Festive Holiday Concert, which just so happens to fall 22 years – to the very DAY – after our first-ever concert on December 21, 2002. How's THAT for a celebration?

THE PROGRAM:

- **Gioacchino Rossini: Overture to "The Barber of Seville"**
- **Felix Mendelssohn: Symphony #4 in A Major - the "Italian"**
- **Ken Mackie: Deck the Halls à la Bach (world premiere)**
- **Leroy Anderson: Sleigh Ride**
- **Sir Arthur Sullivan: Overture to "The Mikado"**
- **Franz von Suppé: Overture to "Light Cavalry"**
- **Johann Strauss, II: On the Beautiful Blue Danube (Waltzes)**
- **Les Marsden: Sierra Christmas Party (which has closed every one of our December concerts since 2002)**

As I noted from the very start, from the VERY first, from our very first ***concert***, which was held exactly (to the very day) 22 YEARS ago on Saturday, December 21, 2002:

> *I want this Holiday concert to be an occasion just for YOU: an event where you can forget about all the last-minute Christmas (and other) Holiday challenges and chores; a break from baking, Christmas card writing, gift-wrapping - all that, to have a wonderful couple of hours away from the cold (and perhaps snow?!) outside and to come INTO the warmth of the company of friends, family, visitors, neighbors. A cozy afternoon to experience the heart-felt feeling which should be within us all 365 days of the year: love and respect for one another, our common humanity and pure, simple joy.*
>
> *All spurred by the gorgeous soundtrack of some of the most melodic, beloved music ever written, and performed right HERE, live in Mariposa - the smallest town in all America with its own symphony orchestra!*
>
> *What better way to get into the spirit of the Holidays than with the beauty, excitement and wonderful passion of live, symphonic music?*

And so: let's now explore these eight works and their composers.

Gioacchino Rossini (1792 – 1868): ***Overture to "Il Barbiere di Siviglia" ("The Barber of Seville")*** (1820)

Or to be precise, the overture to the opera ***Il barbiere di Siviglia, ossia L'inutile precauzione*** ***(The Barber of Seville, or The Useless Precaution)*** Except - if you want to be ***SUPER***-precise: it's an overture which actually began life years earlier as the overture to another opera, and then later, to yet ANOTHER opera – neither of which had anything to do with a future opera which WOULD be ***Barbiere***!

As I've written in the past when I shared my thoughts on another very famous overture by Rossini, that to his opera, ***William Tell***, forever associated with the Lone Ranger (or in French ***Guillaume Tell*** - or in Italian ***Guglielmo Tell****) -* you may remember I noted one of the fascinating things about Rossini is that after years of struggle to achieve huge success, he decided - after composing that opera - ***William Tell*** - to huge acclaim in 1829: he would retire. At the age of 37. An enormously quirky man – and by the very end of his life he had actually become just plain enormous. He loved his pasta.

He composed this opera, ***Il Barbiere di Siviglia*** - (perhaps) his most famous, which boasts an overture which has become instantly recognizable ABOUT nine years earlier, when he was 28. No wonder I've programmed both these overtures by Rossini (and others) on more than a few of our past concerts. They're always great fun to perform, and even MORE fun for you - our audience - to enjoy.

Rossini was born on Leap Day, February 29 1792 into a family predisposed to music: his mother was a singer and his father a horn player. The young Rossini received instruction from spuriously-qualified teachers (including a keyboard teacher who played scales with only two fingers) but by six was performing; composing came only slightly later. His life story could fill volumes, but in brief: he took the model of opera that had been advanced by Mozart (who died the year before Rossini was born) and ran with it – developing it to a remarkable degree in the 39 operas Rossini wrote in a relatively brief career – a career spent victoriously in his native Italy but also in Vienna, London and particularly in Paris. Unlike Mozart (and many others) Rossini's career wasn't cut short by an early death: it ended with that deliberate retirement in 1829 at his peak of success and wealth.

Rossini was to live another 39 years, dying in 1868 at 75 – a cherished international icon. From beginning to end, his output was incredible for the development he put into the very forms and styles of comic opera and seria – opening the door to Giuseppe Verdi's verismo style to come. I can't emphasize how greatly Rossini *(shown at right at about the time of **Il Barbiere di Siviglia**)* served as the bridge from Mozart to Verdi – that is a MASSIVE leap to have made.

In his earlier days, Rossini wasn't too punctilious when it came to composing overtures to his operas. And he was an incredible procrastinator – a quality which has led him to be described (at times) as "the laziest composer who ever lived." But that's not really correct at all: he was hugely productive, writing in those years – sometimes as many as five entire operas a year, for that eventual total just short of 40 full operas in those two decades of productivity. Far more, in fact, than most other famed operatic composers accomplished in an entire lifetime of composition.

Prior to 1817's opera ***La Gazza Ladra*** (another overture to which the MYSO has performed in the past) Rossini's overtures were pretty interchangeable with little to no material in those overtures coming from their operas themselves. And I suppose it's now time for me to explain my opening comment about the provenance/lineage of this overture. The overture to ***The Barber of Seville*** we know and love was actually first written for Rossini's earlier opera ***Aureliano in Palmira***, then recycled intact for his opera about the first Elizabeth of England ***Elisabetta, Regina d'Inghilterra***, before becoming permanently latched onto ***Barber***. And on at least one occasion when Rossini *(shown at left in his final years)* decided to go that extra mile and create an overture specifically for a new opera, he procrastinated – to the point that – well, why not have him tell you himself? As Rossini wrote,

"I wrote the overture to ***La Gazza Ladra*** *the day before the opening night under the roof of the Scala Theatre (Milan's great opera house, still in operation today,) where I had been imprisoned by the director and secured by four stagehands who were instructed to throw my original text through the window, page by page, to the copyists waiting below to transcribe it. If I didn't write the pages, they were ordered to throw me out the window instead.*
For ***Barbiere*** *(****The Barber of Seville****), I did better: I did not even compose an overture, I just took one already destined for my opera,* ***Elisabetta****. The public was very pleased."*

Rather than fight procrastination he embraced it, and especially when composing his overtures. How did Rossini suggest overtures should be composed? Read on:

"Wait until the evening before opening night. Nothing primes inspiration more than necessity, be it the presence of a copyist waiting for your work or the prodding of an impresario tearing his hair out. In my time, all the impresarios in Italy were bald at thirty. (As was Rossini ***himself*** – that's one of his many terrible rugs he's wearing in the picture at left.)

"*I wrote the overture to* ***Otello*** *in a small room of the Palazzo Barbaja, where the baldest and rudest of directors had forcibly locked me up with a lone plate of spaghetti and the threat that I would not be allowed to leave the room alive until I had written the last note. I composed the overture to* ***Comte Ory*** *while fishing, with my feet in the water, and in the company of Signor Agnado, who talked of his Spanish fiancée. The overture to* ***Guglielmo Tell*** *(**William Tell**) was composed under more or less similar circumstances."*

But back to that ageless, timeless piece which has become known for its final association with Rossini's ***Il Barbiere di Siviglia*** – and which, for sake of sanity, we'll just call the Overture to ***The Barber of Seville***. The Rossini opera itself, incidentally, was a work known and loved by no less than Beethoven – which was a high compliment indeed when one considers the fact that Beethoven most appreciated music of only one composer: Beethoven. Rossini's ***The Barber of Seville*** had its premiere on February 20, 1816, conducted by the 23-year-old composer (who had been born on February 29, 1792.) And it was a failure. But it wasn't really Rossini's MUSIC'S fault: it was all due to the politics of opera of the time.

Rossini's great error (or audacity) was in daring to even SET ***The Barber of Seville*** to music. Claques were then in constant use: (usually) paid, organized factions whose sole function was to cheer for their hired cause (a composer, opera, singer or other target in need of some heavy-duty career life-support) or: to attend a performance and boo, hiss and generally: try to ruin one of those things instead: a composer, opera, singer or other target – and especially one who was viewed as competition. In which case some major-league opprobria might be ordered up. The older composer Giovanni Paisiello (*1740 – 1816, shown at right*) had already set the play by Beaumarchais as an opera, but that had been a full 40 years earlier. No matter: the elderly Paisiello was incensed by the mere fact that this young upstart had DARED to compose an opera based upon the very same libretto. And so, all throughout the premiere performance – opening night – of Rossini's ***Barber*** there was non-stop booing, hissing, yelling, jeering – and numerous onstage accidents. It was a catastrophic disaster and the Paisiello-factions went home triumphant in the knowledge that they had destroyed this young punk's opera.

But here's where it turns delicious: no claques were present for the second night's performance, and it was rightfully cheered from start to finish. And from THAT performance on, the opera was proclaimed a massive success. Rossini had composed a phenomenally funny, tremendously clever and musically uproarious opera and the audience that night had a field day. And audiences right to our present day have continued to enjoy one of the greatest comic operas ever composed.

As for Paisiello? He died four months after the premiere – long enough to see Rossini's work be declared the work of a genius. Ha! Take THAT, jealous old man!

French playwright Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais had actually written a trio of "Figaro" plays – *Le Barbier de Séville* (1773-4,) *Le Mariage de Figaro* (1784,) and *La Mère coupable* (1792.) Mozart composed one of his own brilliantly-funny operas based upon that second play (and the MYSO has of COURSE performed HIS ***Overture to The Marriage of Figaro*** during past seasons.) But as already noted, ***this*** music, ***this*** overture to ***The Barber of Seville*** – written previously by Rossini for that pair of unrelated operas: had nothing to do thematically with his new opera. And I have to note that while it's rarely possible to successfully satirize a satire, the late British composer Gordon Jacob (1895-1984) did so spectacularly well in HIS 1960 ***The Barber of Seville Goes to the Devil – Comedy Overture***. It's VERY funny, and at only about four minutes of length, is about as long as the Rossini overture it parodies.

But back to the Rossini: this is one remarkably wonderful overture and continues Rossini's early-created device of the so-called "Rossini crescendo" in which a section is repeated with increasing volume and additional instrumentation, while undergoing a stretto until a wonderful release occurs. It happens twice in this overture – which begins with a customary slow introduction. But even with a stately tempo, it's already FUNNY – a chord repeated full tutti, and then the strings creep up to a response from the winds. Repeat. Oboe plaintive long-held note; finally, all the creeping resolves and – the fast stuff begins. Minor mode at first. But then – oh, why explain? You already know this piece, and it's just plain FUN!

It's a classic of cartoons and pop culture; perhaps the two most famous cartoon versions are the 1944 Woody Woodpecker short "Barber of Seville" (personal sidebar: I was fortunate to meet the great Walter Lantz, creator of Woody Woodpecker – back in the early 1980s – and had a field day discussing Woody with the man who gave life to that character (who was originally voiced by Mel Blanc in Woody's first three "starring" cartoons beginning in 1941, before the voice was performed throughout the 1940s by Danny Webb, Kent Rogers, Dick Nelson and Ben Hardaway and ultimately Lantz's wife Grace, who won an anonymous audition to become Woody's voice beginning in 1950. Though the sound of Woody's manic laugh was that created by Mel Blanc – from the beginning in the 1940s and through 1951. Until the Woody cartoons ceased production in 1972, it was then Grace who gave both VOICE ***and*** laugh to the character. Woody's ***Barber of Seville*** parody was released in 1944, with voice then provided by Ben Hardaway. And to take my small personal connection just one step further: this particular Woody Woodpecker short was directed by Shamus Culhane, who just happened to be married to Maxine Marx – daughter of (Marx Brother) Chico Marx – and Maxine was a dear friend of mine who always referred to herself as MY "East-Coast Ma;" over the years we lived in Manhattan, Diane and I spent many a happy hour with Maxine at her huge pre-war midtown apartment or taking her to a favorite museum or restaurant. And she made a MEAN challah French toast breakfast!)

The OTHER, perhaps even more famous and beloved cartoon treatment was of course: the 1950 "Rabbit of Seville" starring Bugs Bunny and Elmer Fudd, from Warner Brothers. Both cartoons are brilliantly inventive, hilariously funny and both, in their own wildly madcap ways: pay homage to the music itself. It may be impossible, but try NOT to think of either Woody Woodpecker or Bugs Bunny (or poor Elmer Fudd) while enjoying our performance of Rossini's wonderfully joyous overture to ***The Barber of Seville*** – a great way to begin this joyous annual Festive Holiday Concert from *your* MYSO.

Felix Mendelssohn (1809 – 1847): ***Symphony #4 in A-Major, Opus 90*** (1833)

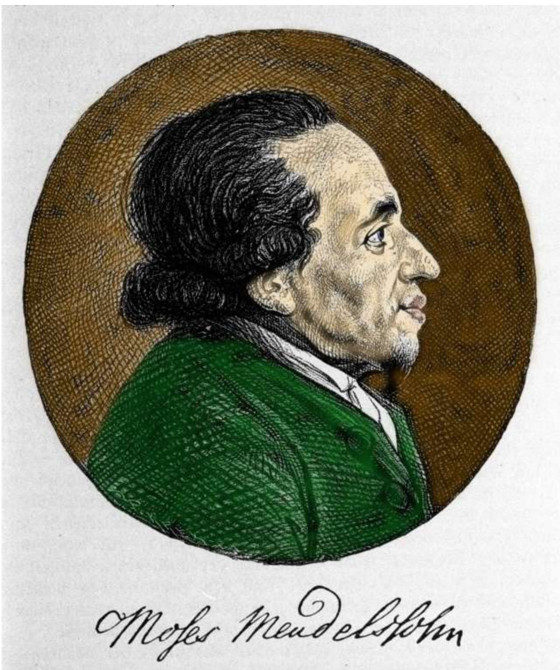
Mendelssohn is one of those great, lesser-understood and certainly undervalued (these days) composers of all time.

Mendelssohn was widely celebrated in his youth as the second-coming – or “new” Mozart - chiefly due to his extraordinarily precocious vocal and instrumental music-making, and of course: for the maturity of his early compositions. One of his best known today is (perhaps) his ***Overture to (Shakespeare’s) “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,”*** an absolute masterpiece of mood, construction, material AND development, classical balance and orchestration – written in 1826 when he was only 17 years old. And Mendelssohn even went so far as to belatedly produce a full set of incidental music to that same play, utilizing that 1826 overture – in 1843. Seventeen years later, at age 34, and brilliantly matching his 17-year-old-self’s material, spirit, mood – an incredible feat, and especially so for someone whose style and work had matured so much since that brilliant, early overture. He’d eventually compose about 750 works, though only authorized 100 for publication during his lifetime. He was extremely critical of his own work, unfortunately.

Felix Mendelssohn was born in Hamburg on February 3rd, 1809 and at the age of two, his family moved to Berlin, then as now a world-class city. His parents’ choice of a first name for the infant was to be prophetic, as “Felix” means “happy” in Latin (just as “Feliz” in Spanish means the same thing, appropriate at this time of year as the greeting “Feliz Navidad.”) And indeed, the child was a happy one, and a striking-looking one as well with a mop of curly hair; he’d mature into a handsome if wistfully graceful young adult. He was also a thoroughly charming human being, from all accounts.

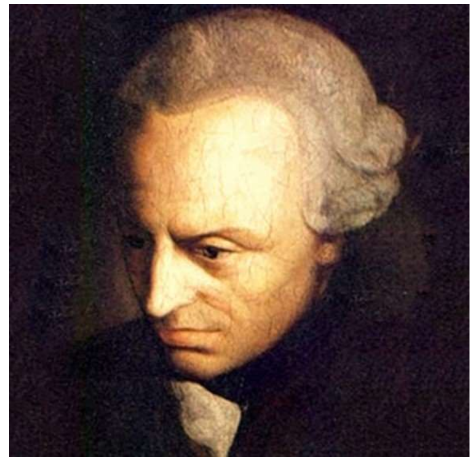
Unlike SO many other composers I've written of, Mendelssohn was completely good-fortune-born: besides his looks, charm, complete musical genius and talent, he was also born into wealth, into complete family support. And that family was both cultured and highly professional. His father was a successful banker and his mother an artist.

There were, however: two strikes against him: his health would be frail, and perhaps worst of all: he was born Jewish during a time in which Jews faced particular scorn - more on that below. His family lineage was impeccable: though in early life his grandfather Moses Mendelssohn was a hunchback peddler, Moses would become one of the most respected and even *worshipped* intellectual minds of 18th and 19th-century Germany. He was referred to as "the modern Plato" due to his writings on the immortality of the soul. He produced revolutionary thoughts and writings on Jews, their identity and religion. He campaigned for the full acceptance of Jews into society and tolerance towards their religion. These writings were so earth-shaking that they're credited with the development of the "Jewish Enlightenment" – the "Haskalah." *(at left, Moses Mendelssohn – artist unknown, after 1775 red chalk original by Daniel Chodowiecki.)*



His words were translated into dozens of languages, and his studies included the fields of metaphysics and aesthetics wherein his research proved to be invaluable. He was widely admired, and in particular, those of his contemporaries who were inspired by him included the distinguished French statesman Honoré Gabriel Riqueti, Count of Mirabeau – who himself was a widely-praised orator, writer and a major figure in the early stages of France's Revolution – as well as the German philosopher, theologian, pastor, poet, and literary critic Johann Gottfried von Herder. Among Herder's associations are the (European) Enlightenment, the *Sturm und Drang* movement of literature and the arts which was a major part of the entire Romantic movement, as well as Weimar Classicism. He was in fact also a "folk" philosopher and poet, who believed that the true German culture lay in that country's common people. From a simple peddler to one of the great philosophers of his time, simply by dint of a remarkable mind.

Moses Mendelssohn also strongly influenced the great German philosopher Immanuel Kant, whose central belief lay in the principle of morality as a principle of practical rationality - providing philosophy with one of its great themes which still influences philosophy of today: the "Categorical Imperative": an objective, rationally necessary and unconditional principle that (Kant postulated) we must follow despite any natural desires we may have to the contrary. Thus tying HIM in with the (primarily) 18th-century philosophic movement known as the "Age of Enlightenment" – which itself was central to the lives and thoughts of our OWN American Founding Fathers. *(At right: Immanuel Kant, 1790 portrait from the School of Anton Graff.)*



And in fact, an understanding of the "Great Enlightenment" gives one a clearer picture of the basic founding philosophy of our own government and country, the aspirations of those who CREATED America – and the role of intellectual thought they propounded as the basis for – these United States of America. Our own government was founded upon (among other influences) British Common Law, the Magna Carta – and (in the case of Jefferson and Franklin particularly) the writings of John Locke. And our own continent's influences (including this new government of what became the United States) made it back to Europe, particularly in the case of Native American tribal organizations and philosophy. The Age of Enlightenment was THE philosophical force of independence, reason, freedom, separation of church and state, science, progressivism – and democracy. But as usual, I digress.

THIS was the great intellectual world in which Felix Mendelssohn's Grandfather Moses *(at right in a 1783 oil painting by Johann Christoph Frisch)* eventually lived, was respected – and so hugely inspired the philosophy of his day as well as the valuable role of his own people – the Jews – in the modern world. From a peddler to one of the most respected minds in the world. But that high degree of intelligence was in his genes, and those he passed on to his progeny - especially regarding the brilliance of his grandson Felix (whom he never met, incidentally: Moses lived from 1729 – 1786.)

But it wasn't only his father's bloodline which favored their offspring: Felix's mother Lea (née Salomon, 1777-1842) was also possessed of a keen intellect, being a noteworthy linguist with the training and ability to read classical Greek literature (in its original language, of course) and – in addition to being an excellent artist, was also a very fine pianist. The intellectual-***philosophical*** genetics may have bypassed Felix's father highly-intelligent father Abraham (*1776-1835, at left in an 1823 sketch by his son-in-law Wilhelm Hensel*) who – being fully-aware of his own limitations, focused on his great strength: finance. By the age of 28, he began working with his brother Joseph who in 1795 had established Mendelssohn & Company - a successful banking establishment later known as the House of Mendelssohn. Abraham joined Joseph in partnership in 1804. It was ***THE*** European banking firm of the 19th century; it was based in Berlin (in the then-German state of Prussia) and in 1815 the brothers moved their highly-successful firm to a brand-new headquarters at Jägerstraße 51 – nearly immediately other financial institutions began flocking to Jägerstraße – which, due to the importance of the Mendelssohns, became THE street of the banking business of Berlin – in essence, the Wall Street of that busy city, and beyond. And believe it or not, the firm was to remain in that very building for the next 124 years. *(At right: the composer's mother Lea, in a portrait by the same artist, made the same year – 1823 – as that of her husband, above.)*

So prominent in European banking was the House of Mendelssohn that by the 1850s they became the Royal Bankers of the Russian Tsar; by the 1870s the firm was THE dominant force throughout Europe in the financial markets for Russian sovereign bonds and railway bonds. And it remained in that highly esteemed role all the way until the Russian government was weakened and then deposed by WWI and the force of Lenin. Amazingly, perhaps – the very same Mendelssohn family descendants ran this still-respected, successful company until 1935, when the first non-family member was appointed chair of the bank.

It was SO successful that it would no doubt still be in operation today had it not been for the rising totalitarian/Nazi power under Hitler, which forced the closure of that establishment in 1938. Why? Because they were Jews. Even though technically, they were not, but more on that shortly below. In 1938, the Nazis – through the process known as "Aryanizing" – forced the company to transfer all its assets to the Deutsche Bank – a "proper Aryan firm" – and then to completely close the House of Mendelssohn forever. All the family's personal assets were taken as well, and the family members were deported. Crushed and ruined, many of those descendants of Moses and his grandson Felix: committed suicide.

Totalitarianism. The ugly mind-manipulating foe of both the personal freedoms and wisdom of the Age of Enlightenment.

But now on to that sticky question of the Mendelssohns' Jewish ancestry.

Remember that grandfather Moses was a proponent of Jewish identity and faith, and a respected philosopher whose thoughts had led to the Jewish "Age of Enlightenment." And Felix's (Jewish) maternal grandfather Daniel Itzig was also a prominent, respected banker and served in that profession within (Prussia's) royal court of Frederick the Great; his position meant that eventually, he was rewarded with the same sort of special privileges afforded to Christians in Germany – for himself and also his progeny and heirs. But that made little difference to four of the six offspring of Moses Mendelssohn - and to Felix's mother Lea. At this point in history as I've already noted – as well as in much of the post-Christian era, Jews were unfairly disparaged, distrusted and shunned.

And so, in order to avoid prejudice as well as to enter into "respectable" society, Abraham, three of his siblings and of course, his wife Lea – converted. To Christianity. Two more of Abraham's siblings kept their Jewish faith, while two became Roman Catholics and the other two were invested firmly within Protestantism including Felix's father Abraham, who saw to it that his children were baptized as Lutherans; in the case of Felix: at age seven. *(As shown at right.)*

Six years later, in 1822 - to further cement their new identity as Christians, they adopted an appendage to their last name: Mendelssohn-Bartholdy. This example had already been set by his mother Lea's brother – Felix's Uncle Jakob Salomon who took created that additional surname Bartholdy from a family property; he had also converted from Judaism to Christianity way back in 1805. In the same way that a place-reference in a last name (for example) Ludwig van Beethoven means, roughly: Ludwig of or from a place called "Beethoven" – most likely the Dutch town of Bettenhoven. Or that the family might have been descended from beet farmers; in Dutch, the name Beethoven actually means Beetroot+Farmer (or Garden.) And FWIW, Beethoven was quite insistent that he be called Ludwig "VAN" Beethoven rather than the German "VON" Beethoven simply because he considered his Dutch family origins superior to those of the "mere" Germans, despite the fact he had been born in Bonn, Germany – and therefore was a German by citizenship!

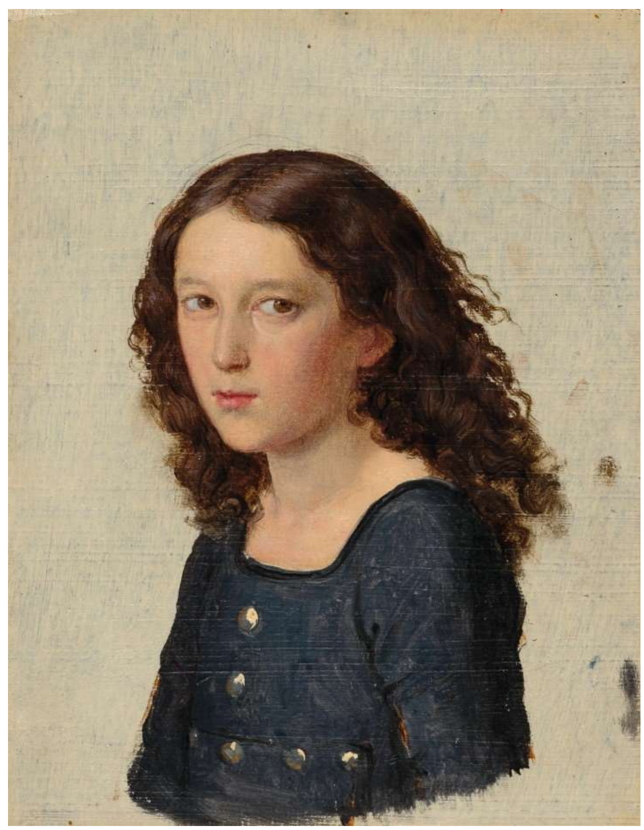
But back to the Mendelssohns: Jakob persuaded his sister Lea and brother-in-law Abraham to append "Bartholdy" to their last name, too: after all, the property ***was*** in the family inheritance and connoted Christian values. Landed property-ownership. And so – they took that name, as noted above: in 1822 when Felix was 13 years of age – ironically, the same age at which he would have received his Bar Mitzvah, or entry into manhood – had the family retained their Jewish faith.

Another major reason for the addition of that "Bartholdy"? It was thought that it would dissociate the family from Moses Mendelssohn – who had been (again) known to be as major a proponent of Jews and Jewishness as there could be. Good thing Moses had been dead for 36 years by THAT point, at least. And truth be told, that family property called Bartholdy? Don't tell anybody, but it was no grand manor or estate, but rather: a simple dairy farm. And also – in case you were noting some of the dates I've cited here, Abraham and Lea wholeheartedly embraced Protestantism at least since the early 1800s, though it took them until 1822 to formally, actually: convert.

Felix received no training in Judaism, underwent none of the Jewish rituals of his earliest days - however as a baptized, "practicing" Lutheran, religion seemed to be of little importance. But as he aged, his recognition of the Jewish blood which coursed through him grew more important to him, though having had Christianity imparted to him as such an essential role in social acceptance and success: appeared to have created something of an inner conflict in Mendelssohn. He composed Old *and* New Testament oratorios (***Elijah***, ***Christus***, ***Paulus***) by which it appears he tried to appease the worlds of both, but as with so many other composers, the content or subject of their works, and particularly religious ones – means nothing about their own beliefs, or complete lack thereof. Berlioz, Brahms, Beethoven – are only three of the many examples of composers who wrote moving sacred/ religious works, though they were unmoved themselves. And that seems to have been the case of Mendelssohn: he composed religious works to bolster his image as a Christian.

As we're to see, there were those, including Wagner – who saw Mendelssohn only as an "inferior" race: A Jew. Not by any means a Christian. But again, I'm getting ahead of myself.

Back to his early years: the boy was an astounding musician, with gifts and a true genius which first erupted nearly from birth. Even PRIOR to that truly glorious ***Overture to (Shakespeare's) "A Midsummer Night's Dream"*** which he composed at a mere ***17***, ANOTHER masterpiece had come from his pen: his ***String Octet in E-flat major, Op. 20*** - composed at the age of ***16*** - and one of my favorite pieces by *any* composer***!*** This is no derivative piece, or an imitative one: this is a wholly-original and simply astonishing work I love so much that I had to put on a recording just now – as I write! He composed the piece for double quartet: two each of first and second violins, violas and cellos. Its form is perfect, the material ranges from joyous to moving, and in the entire 35-minute piece there's not a single flabby passage or unnecessary note. And a year earlier, at 15, he had composed his ***Symphony #1 in c-minor, Op. 11*** which (I don't feel) isn't at quite the same level of ear-pleasure as the ***Octet*** and ***Midsummer Night's Dream Overture***, though it IS a solid, sturdy, well-constructed piece. But wait – there's more! Though the c-minor was his first orchestral symphony, he had already composed 13 others for string orchestra, from the ages of **12 to 14**! They're his ***String Symphonies*** – with small percussion included in the second movement of the 11th. Though those works ARE sometimes performed, they're little more than inspired essays though maturely written, following the formal styles of (for one example) Mozart's ***Divertimenti***, though Mendelssohn's very young and distinctive voice DID come through. There are 12 of these symphonies, but he also fully orchestrated the eighth, making it a baker's dozen of these works. Although technically: there are FOURTEEN: he also composed a 13th String Symphony, though it's really a single-movement, two-part piece following the Baroque "***ouverture***" or ***French overture*** form of slow-fast. In the case of Mendelssohn's 13th in c-minor: *Grave, Allegro Molto*. Though it's just referred to as ***Symphoniesatz*** or ***Symphonic Movement*** today.

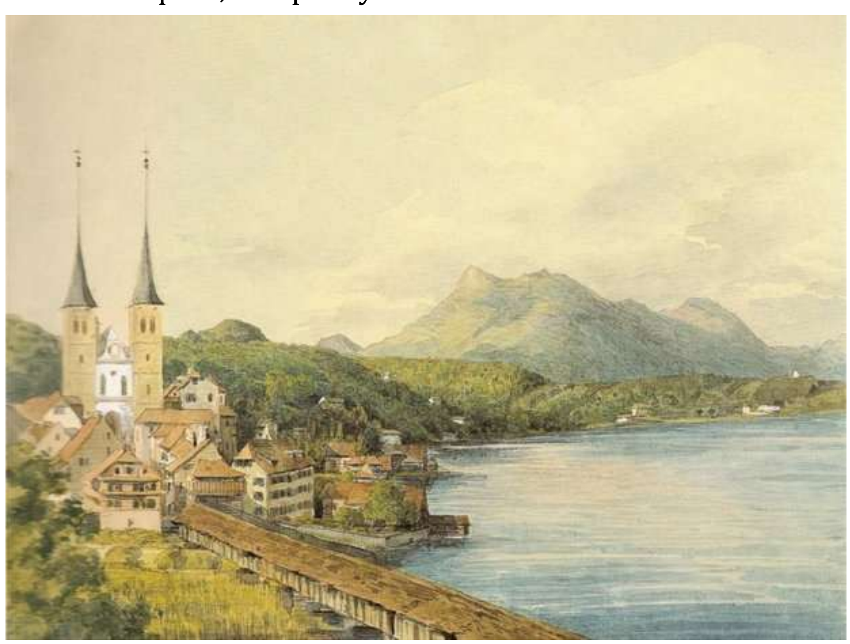


(Above: the 12-year-old Felix depicted in 1821 by his brother-in-law Wilhelm Hensel.)

His other early compositions from these years include the *operas* (or *singspiels* – which means simply *"musical comedies"*) which were intended for private performance within the Mendelssohn circle: family, friends – in the family mansion. This prolific, precocious young composer wrote the following operas at these ages:

At age 11 in 1820: ***Die Soldatenliebschaft (The Soldier's Love)***
At age 12 in 1821: ***Die beiden Pädagogen (The Two Professors)***
At age 13 in 1822: ***Die wandernden Komödianten (The Wandering Comedians)***
At age 14 in 1823: ***Der Onkel aus Boston, oder Die beiden Neffen***
At age 16 in 1825: ***Die Hochzeit des Camacho* (*The Marriage of Camacho*)**
At age 20 in 1829: ***Die Heimkehr aus der Fremde* (*Son and Stranger*)**

Now keep in mind that these aren't just mere little 10-minute diversions. ***Der Onkel aus Boston, oder Die beiden Neffen*** (***The Uncle from Boston or The Two Nephews***) is a full, three-act comic opera with a libretto by Johann Ludwig Caspar. ***Die Hochzeit des Camacho*** (***The Marriage of Camacho***) – based on an episode from Miguel de Cervantes' ***Don Quixote* –** is a two-act, two-hour full-fledged stage work, complete with novel touches which were signs of the maturity of the 16-year-old composer, all the more impressive as he had begun composing it while only 14. It would become the only one of Mendelssohn's operas to be publicly performed and not merely presented as a private family production in his lifetime. Sadly, it was under-rehearsed and suffered from the lead singer's illness and while the house was packed with fans and family who cheered the opera to a triumphant conclusion, that performance at the Berlin Schauspielhaus on April 29, 1827 met with immediate negative reviews though most were directed at the fact that Mendelssohn was a Jew. He of course, did not identify as one. He was so disgusted by the entire farrago that he halted all future performances of the opera, and pretty much lost his interest in composing more – though he did eventually write ***Die Heimkehr aus der Fremde*** in 1829, and began but did not finish an opera on the theme of the Lorelei in his final year (1847.)



BEYOND music, his talents in poetry, painting *(at right – his painting of Lucerne, brushed in his final year - 1847)* and sports were unparalleled. There were also two younger siblings: Rebecka (1811 – 1858) and Paul (1812 – 1874) – though neither distinguished themselves in music. But Felix wasn't the only marvel in the household. His elder sister Fanny (1805 – 1847) was only slightly less gifted in all those areas than Felix. She'd make her own mark as a pianist, composer of well more than 450 works – and eventually, as the wife of the Prussian court painter Wilhelm Hensel. Following her mother's death in 1842 – she – at only 37, became the *Grande Dame* and household organizer for the entire Mendelssohn clan – creating public concerts in which she herself would occasionally appear as pianist. The word (from the French) is *"Salonnière"* – or a female who organizes salon entertainments; drop THAT word at your next cocktail party. She was extremely close to her younger-by-four-years brother Felix. And he to her.

Speaking of that painter Wilhelm Hensel, at the time of their (initial) mutual infatuation, Wilhelm and (the 17-year-old) Fanny seemed wildly mismatched: she was the daughter of a wildly successful and wealthy banker and a converted Lutheran of Jewish blood; he was a near-penniless painter who had been commissioned to create magnificent portraits of the attendees of the court ball at which they met. A MAJOR annual high-society costume ball for the utter crème de la crème of Prussian royalty and wealthy society members. Aside from the hired help like Wilhelm, you truly HAD to be someone to be present at that event.

Fanny had a wonderfully ironic sense of humor and wit; Wilhelm was the son of a pastor from Brandenburg who inclined towards Catholicism. Somewhat fascinatingly, her parents insisted that they cut off all relations for the period of five years – a probationary betrothal of sorts - to make sure that they truly loved each other and could wait; by the time those five years rolled around, it was clear that they were meant for one another. And besides that, Fanny was far more wise and mature than the giddy 17-year-old she had been when she met Wilhelm at that ball – and he, in the ensuing years had become a successful, fiscally-responsible artist who had received royal patronage allowing him to study art and painting in Rome, where he became a member of a group of dedicated and highly talented painters known as the "Nazarenes" – as Catholic as the city of Rome and Italy itself.

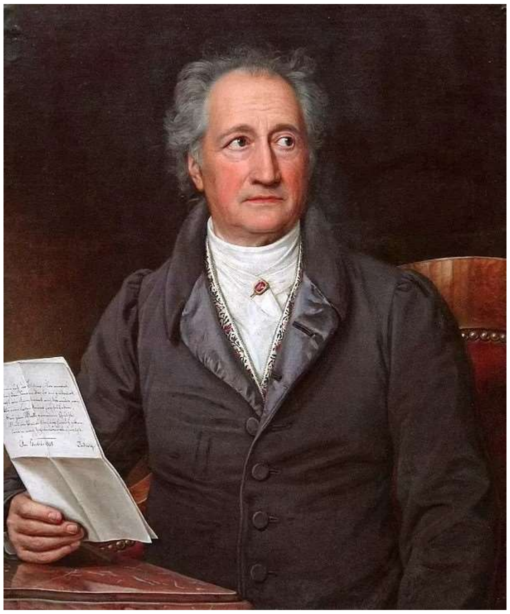
Finally, on October 3, 1829 – they were married, with a union which was a very happy one – even during that long engagement, Wilhelm encouraged Fanny (via letter, NOT in person!) that she must pursue her musical career – which was a great love of her life. This was, of course: highly progressive during a time in history when a marriage was still seen as more of a business proposition - in which the husband inherited his wife's dowry and fortune, and then relegated her to the kitchen and nursery to raise a never-ending stream of offspring, sometimes as many as 20, with (again, sometimes) half the brood or more dying at an early age from illnesses we take in stride today, with highly-successful vaccines and other medical treatments not discovered or available 200 years ago.

Theirs was a mutually-respectful and loving marriage, and lasted nearly 18 years, until her death in 1847. Sadly, and like her brother to come – she was struck down prematurely, dying of a massive stroke at the age of 41. But she left us a massive library of truly excellent compositions, some of which are performed to this day – and NOT to be judged as the amusing works of a woman composer, but as the truly accomplished works of this *human being* known as Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel (she dropped the "Bartholdy" at the time of their marriage.)

But now, let's return to Felix, the true wunderkind and heir to the mantle of Mozart. He mastered the piano in his earliest years, first publicly concertizing on the instrument by the age of nine. He became a solid violinist and organist, and voraciously devoured the orchestral repertoire via scores of works published by that time. At 10, Felix and 14-year-old Fanny joined the alto class of the Berlin Singakademie, a highly-respected vocal society, where they were expected to study vocal music of the classical period and earlier ones, and to learn the fine art of continuo playing – the skill of creating a keyboard (organ, harpsichord or piano) "continuo" part to accompany singers and usually, strings or a small Baroque or Classical-sized orchestra making music along with the singers. The composer would provide the barest of indications of what was to be played, and the continuo player (as well as usually, a basso instrument or two – cello, double bass, lute, etc) would provide the ongoing harmonic support to the rest of the music. A mainstay of the Baroque era, continuo playing gradually went out of style during the Classical period as the compositional and notational style of music changed dramatically.

It was at this time that he came to know the music of Bach, who – despite being deceased for only about 65 years at that time: had become virtually unknown. It became one of the goals of young Mendelssohn's life to restore Bach's music to the current repertoire of all musicians and ensembles. And he did so to his death, and truly is responsible for the single-handed "rediscovery" and popularizing of the music of that Baroque master. An accomplishment which is STILL felt to this very day. Mendelssohn was fascinated by his studies of Bach's scores, and endeavored to learn the great skill of fugal and counterpoint which Bach had elevated to a near-miraculous level. And so Mendelssohn HIMSELF became a master at those very same skills. As well as the skills of contemporary orchestration, music theory and harmony. ALL became his personal tools and were used deftly throughout his entire career. He also made a deep study of Bach's organ compositions and wrote quite a few of his own. Again, this study gave young Felix a profound knowledge of how music was put together, and of the tools which kept it going. And finally, those studies provided the basis for him to move music forward by – in effect – building upon the past.

He and Fanny were close – and it's known that mother Lea would sit as the two practiced together at the same piano, knitting while they worked. They bore (again) something of a resemblance to that earlier wunderkind - Wolfgang Mozart and HIS sister Nannerl, though Felix and Fanny were spared the burden of the Mozarts' domineering task master father.



In 1821 at the age of 12, he traveled to Weimar to meet and stay with legendary literary and cultural icon Johann von Goethe (1749 – 1832, *at left*) who had impressed, and had been impressed ***by*** another great composer during THEIR 1812 meeting: Beethoven. And now a decade later, in this visit which lasted from November 2 through 19 Goethe, polymath and an authority on the arts, immediately recognized the genius of the 12-year-old Felix, too. He had heard of Mendelssohn's precocity and wanted to put him to the test: Goethe revealed three feats he wished to put to young Felix: 1) to improvise a complete fugue at the piano on a theme by Bach, selected by Goethe; 2) to play at the piano a complete orchestral score by memory (which is a very difficult feat considering transposing instruments, the probability of reading at least three or four different clefs all at once, etc;) 3) sight-reading various manuscripts from Goethe's collection, including deciphering a Beethoven manuscript: a draft setting of Goethe's own brief poem "Wonne der Wehmut" ("The Delight of Melancholy") IN Beethoven's legendary scribbles, nearly impossible to make sense of, but which young Felix deftly navigated with ease. He played Bach and Mozart and Goethe was blown away. The elderly Goethe would claim that the 12-year-old Mendelssohn was his favorite (and the best) composer of all time, after he had the chance to study some of the young man's scores. Roll over, Beethoven!

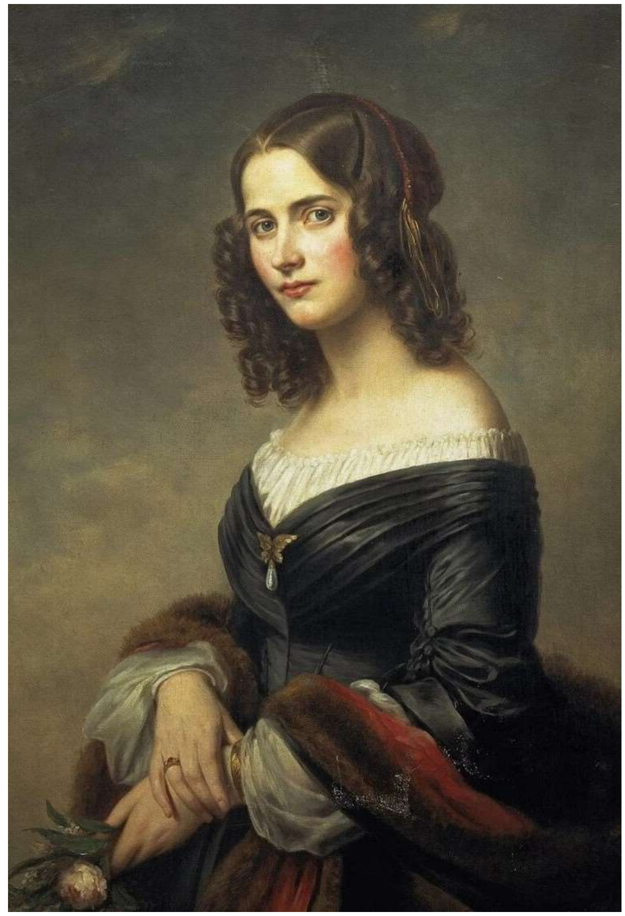
Mendelssohn would dedicate his ***<u>3rd Piano Quartet</u>*** to Goethe four years later (in 1825) and they struck up a lasting correspondence from that first meeting in 1821 which would until Goethe's 1832 death, with Mendelssohn making another three stays with Goethe during those years. Just imagine – a great friendship was born between one of the most famous men in the world (who – at the time – was 72 years old) and the younger-by-60-years Felix Mendelssohn: a 12-year-old musical genius! He also described Mendelssohn with the words, "although he is the son of a Jew, he is no proper Jew" meaning – he recognized Mendelssohn's Protestant conversion, and that was simply that. One might have thought that such a pronouncement by one of the most important, revered voices in Germany might have impacted Mendelssohn's later detractors who castigated Mendelssohn for his ethnic ancestry, but such was not the case, as I'll write far below.

At the time of that dedication of his ***3rd Piano Quartet*** to the great Goethe in 1825, another composer, and a pretty famous one: Luigi Cherubini ALSO came to discover the 16-year-old's incredible musical talent. Felix's well-rounded youthful studies also included (in addition to the piano) Greek, landscape painting, composition and everything I've listed above – and he excelled in all. He was thrilled when, again at the age of 12 in 1821: he met another of his idols: the composer Carl Maria von Weber – he had developed a great love of von Weber's music, and carried it in his heart to the end of his life. His compositional skills were being exercised at a remarkable rate, and in the production of works which had a masterful maturity far beyond his early years. He gradually became known to the public at large, and not only for his precociousness, which was left behind as he aged into his teens and 20s. He became internationally-respected and yes, beloved for his masterful compositions: one of those very rare composers who was actually, rightfully acknowledged as a master composer whose works were performed widely during his lifetime. His travels were far and wide; he made 10 visits to Great Britain alone, beginning in 1829 – and received THIS sobriquet from Queen Victoria herself, a comment which had to have been made late in Mendelssohn's career and travels to England: Mendelssohn is "the greatest musical genius since Mozart" and she also described him as "the most amiable man. He was quite worshipped by those who knew him intimately, & we have so much appreciated & admired his wonderfully beautiful compositions. We liked & esteemed the excellent man, & looked up to & revered, the wonderful genius, & the great mind, which I fear were too much for the frail delicate body. With it all he was so modest and simple."

Felix spoke English well, and grew enamored of England and particularly Scotland. He loved everything about England from its landscapes to its people, and that affection was returned BY the people. His great fascination with Scotland in particular would be well-expressed through his music, and especially via his ***3rd "Scottish" Symphony***. He took a trip through the Scottish Isles and his landing on the island of Staffa and visit to that famous landmark Fingal's Cave set his mind to work, which began with a few scrabbled notes on a postcard, which eventually led to his moody, dark and sea-inspired ***Overture "Fingal's Cave" A/K/A "The Hebrides***". His sea voyages inspired at least one more distinctive piece: his Overture Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage, a beautiful work which Sir Edward Elgar loved, and in 1899 included a bit of Mendelssohn's main tune from that overture in one of his brilliant ***Enigma Variations***.

In 1835 Felix's father Abraham died, which affected his son greatly. Felix was – quite sensitive and always had difficulty dealing with loss. The son had been composing his canata "***St. Paul***" ("***Paulus***") but was at something of a standstill on the piece; Abraham had been VERY eager for his son to complete the work, and his death renewed Felix's dedication to doing so. In 1836, he conducted the work in Düsseldorf, and then on a trip to

Frankfurt, he was introduced to Cécile Charlotte Sophie Jeanrenaud (1817-1853) (*at right*,) whose father was a French Protestant clergyman. At the time of their meeting, Felix was 27 years old and the beautiful Cécile was a mere 18. They took to each other wonderfully, and soon became engaged. Their wedding would follow the next year, on March 28, 1837. His sophisticated sister Fanny, who of course was a bit possessive of her younger brother was nonetheless delighted by her sister-in-law, whom she considered a perfect match for Felix. And THAT meant a great deal. Fanny's own wit and worldliness were disarmed, writing of Cécile: "She is amiable, childlike, fresh, bright and even-tempered, and I consider Felix most fortunate for, though inexpressibly fond of him, she does not spoil him, but when he is capricious, treats him with an equanimity which will in course of time most probably cure his fits of irritability altogether." Theirs WAS a happy union and just as Fanny wrote: Cécile was the perfect spouse for her brother in all ways.



And I can think of no higher praise than Fanny's for this lovely, bright new addition to the extended family: Cécile. Children would follow; Cécile and Felix would become parents to:

1) Karl Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1838 – 1897) who would become a notable historian;
2) Marie Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1839 – 1897) – she never married and never sought a profession;
3) Paul Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1841 – 1880) whose profession would yield impressive results in chemistry;
4) Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy (II) (1843 – 1850) who died in his youth; and:
5) Elisabeth Wach (Née Mendelssohn Bartholdy) (1845 – 1910.)

I DO have to mention the fact that sis Fanny Mendelssohn (1805 – 1847) had only one child who lived to adulthood: Sebastian Ludwig Felix Hensel (1830–1898) who married and himself had many children with his wife Julie von Adelson. And it is to Sebastian that I'm indebted for his fascinating family history based largely upon letters from and to his Uncle Felix to his mother Fanny, as well as journals, etc. The book's 800 pages is in two volumes, and nearly impossible to find, but for those of we who have it (!), it makes for absolutely fascinating reading. As are Mendelssohn's letters, of which I have a sizable collection, particularly from the period of 1833 –1847, and more written from his travels, and which shed light on many of his compositions written or inspired *during* those travels, and especially those in which he describes his inspiration for, and the ideation behind his ***4th "Italian" Symphony*** on this program. *(Fanny and budding writer/family chronicler baby Sebastian are artfully portrayed in this painting at right – a mere STUDY – by husband and father Wilhelm Hensel.)*

So the children of Cécile and Felix, as well as those of Fanny and Wilhelm: were the next generation, and it's important to note that (again) in addition to those kids and THEIR writings, Felix DID leave behind some 7,000 or so letters to Fanny ALONE and much else to document his life and career. His output eventually included (besides those kids - - and those pieces I've already mentioned) the five (orchestral) symphonies; one of the world's most famous violin concertos – his in ***e-minor***, as well as at least two others, the two famous piano concerti and quite a few others and various works for piano and orchestra; he also wrote double-piano concerti (inspired, clearly: by Bach's in the same configuration); well over 180 piano pieces including the ubiquitous "***Spring Song***" - #6 from his 5th Book of "***Lieder ohne Worte***" or ***Songs Without Words*** (also called "***Camberwell Green***" as he composed it while staying with his wife's relatives in London) from his ultimate sets of 8 books, each consisting of 6 songs – plus a few unrelated to the others and many many more: sonatas, etudes, suites, preludes and fugues; and speaking of preludes and fugues: Mendelssohn's output for the organ is ALSO nothing to sneeze at. A huge amount of choral work – from motets and vespers to cantatas and much much more, incidental music, overtures both to his operas and other larger works, to

stand-alone concert overtures. And the sonatas! Not only for solo piano, but for other instruments *and* piano. I fell in love with his two cello sonatas back in high school when a cellist friend of mine got together with me to play through various such works, and those two by Mendelssohn stand out – over these past 50 years – to remain among my very favorites by any composer. Mendelssohn wrote in all forms – and mastered all both via technique and sheer melodic content.

And he was also a highly-gifted conductor: he conducted many of his own premieres, and often conducted abroad (in England to particular acclaim) and in 1835, while only 26 years old, he was offered, and accepted the position of music director (and conductor) of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra – then and now one of the world's great symphony orchestras – especially after Mendelssohn got his mitts on it, expanded its size – and brought it up to previously-unimagined high standards. Such was his prestige even at this relatively young age.

Of his five orchestral symphonies, the latter three are the best-known and most frequently performed; I previously programmed his ***5th Symphony "Reformation"*** way back about 20 years ago for one of our Holiday Concerts; it has that subtitle due to Mendelssohn's use of Martin Luther's chorale "***Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott***" ***("A mighty fortress is our God.")*** Though a beloved, much-performed work today, Mendelssohn's self-criticism led him to eventually be detested by that – and many more of his greatest works.

I've always wanted to program his fourth ***("Italian")*** and third ***("Scottish")*** symphonies as well, and now with the inclusion of the remarkably upbeat (AND downbeat!) ***"Italian" Symphony*** on this program, we're 2/3 of the way there. His ***first symphony*** is fine, but doesn't really "hook" the listener, and the ***second symphony*** is massive – the "***Lobgesang" Symphony*** (***"Hymn of Praise"***) is written for a large Orchestra, Chorus, Soloists and Organ (and lasts about an hour) – despite the fact it really WASN'T written until *after* the rest of the symphonies, but – it was published posthumously as his second and wasn't composed until 1840. And for all practical purposes, its 11-movement structure and form really make it more a religious cantata than a symphony; its text is taken directly from the Bible.

Which brings us to this, Mendelssohn's absolutely wonderful ***4th "Italian" Symphony in A-Major, Opus 90*** (though much of the symphony is in d-minor and a-minor.) This work was inspired by Mendelssohn's visit to Italy, in which he spent about ten months from October 1830 - July 1831. Italy charmed him incredibly, and he was greatly enthused by all he experienced in various areas of that country. His itinerary basically began in Venice, before he wended his way south with time spent in Bologna and Florence before he entered Rome. After Rome, first to Naples and a side trip to Pompeii, before finally visiting Genoa and Milan. He set to work on sketches nearly immediately upon his first day in Venice, and while traveling through the country, took in more experiences and sights – before finally beginning to set notes to paper in the form of a real, structured symphony, composed mostly while he was in Rome. And while in Rome, he experienced and took great joy in all the Italian festivals and carnivals, as well as the color and motion and exuberance. He was also present for the coronation of Pope Gregory XVI – which, while (remember) Mendelssohn wasn't a Roman Catholic, still impressed and moved him. He traveled throughout the country's many different regions and experienced their differences with wonder; that sea-fascination which always held Mendelssohn was of course nearly always-present in that big boot of a peninsular country. One thing he did NOT care for during his Italian stay was, not surprisingly: the dry austerity and lack of emotion in the music of the Catholic church. It nearly made him angry – he of course better than most: knew how human religious passion could and should be experienced. And he was particularly indignant with the fact that Gregorian chant was still performed, much less remembered!

In all that time he spent traveling throughout Italy he began composing the symphony and continued creating musical sketches (as well as watercolors and other artworks) as he was inspired by events and places, but didn't get around to finishing the work until he HAD to: he was under contract to conduct the piece in London. And so he finalized the composition of the work in Berlin on March 13, 1833 – and conducted the premiere of the symphony exactly two months later – on May 13, 1833 – with the London Philharmonic Society. The premiere was a massive success for the 24-year-old, as were all the concerts he conducted in London during his ten lifetime visits there. At that premiere, the audience demanded a repeat of the second movement – they just HAD to hear it again! And thus began (with additional concerts under different conductors throughout the world) this symphony's overnight inclusion into the standard orchestral repertoire.

The "***Italian***," which its composer described as a "blue sky in A-Major," – despite its absolute perfection of form and content, was never published in the composer's lifetime. Though in its early stages he had foretold that it would be "…the jolliest piece I have ever done, especially the last movement. I have not found anything for the slow movement yet, and I think that I will save that for Naples," it would bring him a great deal of discontent. He wasn't satisfied by this version, this initial go at setting Italy to music, and though handwritten parts and scores were out there for performances, and despite what the London premiere audience and others around the globe told him: he really wanted to make a wholesale revision of the symphony (WHY!?! As so many others have commented, over the decades, the spark of first-glow inspiration had already resulted in a perfect work!)

And so he did – at least two and perhaps three revisions. Mostly to the final three movements in July 1834, 1837 and again, in 1847 in his final year, and the "revision(s)" weren't discovered until about a decade after his death. I have to say that though the revisions were his FINAL word on the symphony, his afterthoughts are really ill-suited and steal from the work much of the inspiration of its original form. Fortunately, the original from 1833 is the one that made it into print (in 1851) and the revisions weren't even really taken seriously due to their inferiority to the original. In fact, that FINAL revision wasn't even recorded until 1999 – and it stands as a great example of leaving well enough alone! And that far superior original version which has been performed ever since its 1833 London premiere, and that – of course: is the version we'll perform for you.

The symphony's first movement begins with a brief "pop" – nearly like the uncorking of a bottle of Asti Spumati! That leads us immediately into as Italian a tune as you can get, a repeated upsurging of a major third accompanied by woodwind triplet figurations; it's just magic and immediately recognizable to even the most casual of listeners from its use in pop culture: TV commercials, films, commercials – and perhaps most effectively in the 1979 hit film "Breaking Away," wherein a young bicycle-race aficionado played by Dennis Christopher exasperates his parents (played by the inimitable Barbara Barrie and Paul Dooley) by adopting an Italian accent and mannerisms deep in the heartland of America as he believes all great bicycle-race competition winners are, or SHOULD be: Italian.

When Mendelssohn first landed in Italy in 1830 at the age of 21, he wrote home, in part: "Italy at last!" That initial tune, a happy, upbeat and immediately-ingratiating welcome to Italy is pretty much a manifestation in music of that attitude of joy Mendelssohn experienced. With only a brief two-bar introduction of that repetitive triplet figuration in the woodwinds, the opening tune is played by the violins, with the woodwinds and French horns supplying a beautifully-harmonized and textured underpinning. Sheer happy, sunny, warmth – joy. Now Mendelssohn WAS a Romantic, both in his own personal mien and also in the musical sense. By this time (and chiefly through the "revolution" of Beethoven,) music had left most of the trappings of the classical period behind, and with the embrace of Romantic style, strict adherence to classical structuring (and especially that of the rigidity of the first-movement sonata form most symphonies followed) was loosened. Sure – you'll find most composers throughout the Romantic era, and then again in the neo-classical movement which Stravinsky and others adopted, in which there was a return to the forms of the past in new clothing – still used sonata form, but they explored and developed far more complex structuring of that form.

At this point in his musical expression and technique, Mendelssohn simply created a well-balanced, logical structure of his own – sonata form, but without rigid adherence to the strict form of the past. And so, melody takes precedence over complex development. That first "A" tune then is followed by a quieter, slightly introspective development of that initial upward-rising major third motif, which modulates briefly through a few key harmonies before the strings have had enough, and return to that initial tune with an upwards crescendo of sound and delight. And we're then led to a magnificent fugato which shows Bach's influence on Mendelssohn, and Mendelssohn's utter mastery of Bach-inspired counterpoint. It's a gorgeous section which – after all-out fugal fun, then leads into another display of Mendelssohn's ability to take material and to weave and counterweave it elegantly, and with full allure to the ear. This is done with most of all the previously-heard material from this movement in something of a first-movement apotheosis, and thence to a fully-fledged explosive ending with that central thematic material, back to that happy home key of A-Major.

Movement Two is much more subdued – and at times a nearly mournful one, set by Mendelssohn in the symphony's minor subdominant key of d-minor. There are those who have suggested that Mendelssohn might have been inspired by somber processions in the streets: a pontifical party passing; a march of "penitents" – though Mendelssohn himself left no such defining associations in his writings. I feel that it's a necessary and more serious counterpart to the all-out joy of the first movement, and a bridge to the third movement. Though it is not there to primarily serve such purposes: it stands on its own feet as a beautiful, if slightly yearning reflection which may have no programmatic inspirations whatsoever. The movement begins with a mournful wail which some have likened to the call of a muezzin from a minaret, but there's nothing (again) to really associate Mendelssohn's depiction of Italy with Islamic rites. It's just a brief, simple three note phrase beginning on the dominant of this movement's home key of d-minor: the pitch of "A" rising a half step to "Bb" and then back to "A": this phrase is then elaborated from those three basic pitches with embellished repetition and additional notes suggesting a slow mordent. This then leads into what may be seen as a sad, slow procession; a beautiful, lyrical, legato little tune with its own ever-present plodding accompaniment, usually in a completely contrasting unwavering and constant eighth-note staccato – both of which form the basis for the movement – and which itself is composed of four two-bar phrases. Simplicity in itself. But Mendelssohn works this material subtlety, and with great invention – weaving it into a simply beautiful movement, which finally ends by marching off into the distance, ever-more softly until it dies away altogether.

The Third Movement returns us to the main key of this symphony – A-Major, and is something of a meandering serenata dressed up in the casual form of a minuet and trio. This movement is believed to have been Mendelssohn's expression of the architecture of Italy: the soaring arches, symmetry of structures, the grand impressiveness of both ancient and current design. He begins with a beautiful extended tune which brings to my mind the works of the much-later Brahms: tunes seemingly without endings. The roaming first tune is repeated, and then challenged by the related tune "B," which is a little more insistent and less jovial. We finally come to the trio section, in the dominant key of E-Major. French horns and bassoons introduce a somewhat martial, percussive tattoo, with a clipped, ascending and somewhat playful response from (initially) flute. That military tune is worked and reworked, with trumpets adding to the general serious air. The strings join in and bring the military procession to a full orchestral tutti, before the initial lighter cordial beginning of the trio again takes over, and moves the trio to its conclusion. We then return to the A-Major tonic, and a canonic presentation of the opening amiable meandering tune, presented first in basses and cellos, then violas and finally violins. The minuet section is recapped in brief, with that military tattoo of the trio interjecting before we reach the end of the movement, a quiet, gentle fading away. Pure magic!

And now we come to the breakneck **Fourth Movement**, a finale in a-minor, the unique choice of the minor iteration of the symphony's home key. The movement is labeled as a Saltarello, but actually offers a take on first a Saltarello, and then a Tarantella – with the line blurred considerably. Technically, the entire movement COULD be called a Tarantella. Both are swift Italian dances in minor mode, and Mendelssohn unabashedly offers his own melodies in both traditional dance forms – and both are pure giddiness in this moto perpetuo movement in *presto.* Formally, it's again a creation of Mendelssohn: basically, a stream-of-consciousness take in which development is continuous throughout the movement as the material is introduced, without a true development section OR a recapitulation. Simple: throw the tunes at the wall like spaghetti, and THEN throw the sauce at it too – and due to Mendelssohn's great talent: EVERYTHING sticks.

The opening offers a single measure of short, hammering arpeggiated tutti chords which then give way to a triplet figuration which forms the basis of the entire movement. Those triplets fade down over the next four bars, at which point the lilting first Saltarello tune is introduced by the flutes – *leggiero* (lightly) and *staccato* (with a certain sharpness and detachment of each note.) That tune in a-minor (all five bars below) is built on the brief, simple motif contained in the first five ***notes*** of the first and second flute; this motif alone will figure in a stretto in the final passages of the ending of the movement:

This Saltarello serves as the main tune of the entire movement, and after the strings take over from the woodwind statements and have their own go at it, the tension and volume increase until the entire orchestra erupts with it in a full headlong blast. We then encounter a new tune consisting of descending scalic passages in the strings combining both staccato articulations and slurred notes intermingled; the rhythm of this tune begins with straight eighth notes interrupted by the regular triplets which made up the initial Saltarello theme, all under the complaints of the woodwinds.

He keeps piling on material that's both new and related to what's come before, playing sections against one another, using sections to adapt and develop the material on the run, as well as full-orchestral tutti unity. In this, the entire movement resembles a simple (yet complex, thanks to Mendelssohn's wizardry) dance structure more than any usual form like sonata or rondo – or even variation forms. It's perhaps a precursor to the free rhapsody form which would become a hallmark of the Romantic era.

In any event, the Saltarello movement contains a few material-related bridge or transition sections which Mendelssohn crafts beautifully, all of which build excitement as well as harmonic modulations; it all assists in creating development-on-the-run until we finally reach a a wonderful point at which everything quiets down to *pianissimo*, and a wonderful Bach-influenced fugal passage begins with a terrific tarantella-inspired melody first presented by the first violins, then by the second violins uniquely: they begin that same tune in the tonic, and then THEY shift it to the dominant rather than the usual fugal technique of ENTERING on the dominant. After only three bars of rest the firsts continue with that tune in the tonic – while the seconds drop out to only offer single-note accompaniment on the beat, along with the rest of the strings! The firsts offer that tune in an abbreviated version and then the VIOLAS (properly, fugally) enter on the dominant – as the FIRSTS join the rest of the strings not in creating a fugal development as they should, but: by accompanying on the beat! It's exciting, because there's always the sense of a proper fugue erupting, but we're teased along in expectation, which – again: builds tension. We jump from harmonic (key) to key until finally, the woodwinds and horns can't take it any more, and hammer away with a two-bar tattoo – with the strings playing their false-fugue along for fun; first in e-minor, then later, in A-Major, then D-Major, then eventually: B-Major, and finally – for a while at least: E-Major, effectively, the dominant of the symphony's home/tonic of A-Major – or, in this movement: a-minor.

And again, we're now presented with another more complex fugal/contrapuntal session by the strings with harmonic underpinning by the woodwinds and brass and FINALLY, after a long stretch with the dominant played in sustained pedal tones by the cellos, basses, and other low instruments, we naturally arrive back at this movement's home key of a-minor – with petulant insistence of that dominant key, before it's now conclusive: we are in, and will conclude in: a-minor. Mendelssohn does something that's really wonderful: at the very end of this final movement, he reintroduces a minor-mode variant of that sunny, bright opening theme from the first movement. It gives unity to the entire symphony and while Haydn and Beethoven had used this technique previously, Mendelssohn's use brings special magic to this symphony by utilizing this then-rare technique which would become fairly common by the "golden" period of the Romantic Era roughly half a century later. Forward-thinking, and hugely effective. The volume decrescendos to a very low, quiet tense air of foreboding roughly eleven bars from the end and as the flutes, oboes and clarinets try to return to the initial 4th-movement opening first tune with a dominant-tonic version, the volume slowly increases with the strings' conclusive downwards triplet figuration – a tarentalla-influenced repetitive pattern to the tonic. Until finally, the entire orchestra bursts forth in the final two or three bars with an insistent cadence of short notes, conclusively ending this wonderful movement, and the entire symphony with a bang.

Mendelssohn continued to tour, performing ubiquitously as he had since childhood. Conducting (he was described as a master of THAT interpretive art) and playing piano concerts; he was never easy on himself despite his wife's insistence that he slow down. There's a story I love about Mendelssohn's pianism which was published more than a quarter-century after his death in Dwight's Journal of Music on January 10, 1873, written by Charles Edward Horsley, who knew Mendelssohn.

Background: two of the greatest virtuoso pianists/composers of the day were the Czech/Bohemian Isaac Ignaz Moscheles (May 23, 1794 – March 10, 1870) and Austrian Sigismond Thalberg (January 8, 1812 – April 27, 1871.) Moscheles had also been, early on – a sometimes-instructor of both Mendelssohn and remained great friends to the end of Mendelssohn's life; Mendelssohn would first meet Thalberg in 1838 and they immediately became friends for good, too. Both Moscheles and Thalberg were recognized as the "emperors/kings of the piano" for their remarkable playing – which was radically different from each other, but – well, I'll let Berlioz, that revolutionary of music – describe Thalberg:

"Thalberg is the creator of a new art which I do not know how to compare to anything that existed before him . . . Thalberg is not only the premier pianist of the world, he is also an extremely distinguished composer."

But another difference is that Moscheles was a wonderful improviser at the keyboard, and Thalberg was not. As for Mendelssohn? He was probably thought of more as a composer and conductor by this time, with HIS great skill at the piano was taken for granted. All three knew Chopin well, having initially met in 1830. Liszt – described as the greatest one of them all in retrospect, was still up-and-coming, though many had a negative opinion of him. Mendelssohn wrote:

"Thalberg, with his composure, and within his more restricted sphere, is more nearly perfect as a real virtuoso; and after all this is the standard by which Liszt must also be judged, for his compositions are inferior to his playing, and, in fact, are calculated solely for virtuosi."

Mendelssohn did admire Liszt's virtuosity at the keyboard, but found his music jejune.
In any event, the story goes – as passed on by Horsley who probably felt the need to wait until the deaths of all three pianists before recounting this tale which I've shortened and told in less-florid language -

Moscheles *(left, 1860,)* Thalberg and Mendelssohn were in London and had been announced to perform Bach's Triple Concerto for Three Pianofortes. The three pianists agreed that there would be no improvisatory cadenzas, mostly because Thalberg preferred not to play one. But when the first pause was reached, Moscheles – well, I'll let you hear it right from the (Charles Edward) Horsley's mouth:

"The piece proceeded in a most satisfactory manner until the orchestra made a pause and, much to the surprise of those who knew the compromise, Moscheles commenced a cadence, and in his usual felicitous, musician-like and admirable manner, delighted the audience. Then came Thalberg (shown at right in 1880,) who, though completely taken by surprise, acquitted himself excellently well, albeit his style hardly assimilated with the ideas of the great Leipzig Cantor. During these two performances I watched Mendelssohn's countenance. At first when Moscheles began, he looked much annoyed, but he gradually accepted the situation, and bided his time. When Thalberg had finished, Mendelssohn waited for the long and deserved pause to subside. He then shrugged his

shoulders and commenced. I wish I had the pen of a Dickens, or a Scott (had either of them any knowledge of music) to describe in fitting terms this performance. It began very quietly, and the themes of the concerto, most scientifically varied, gradually crept up in their new garments. A crescendo then began, the themes ever newly presented, rose higher and higher, and at last a storm, nay a perfect hurricane of octaves, which must have lasted five minutes, brought to a conclusion an exhibition of mechanical skill, and the most perfect inspiration, which neither before nor since that memorable Thursday afternoon [actually Saturday afternoon] has ever been approached. The effect on the audience was electrical. At first perfect silence reigned, but as the cadence continued, symptoms of excitement were shown; when the rush of octaves commenced those present rose almost to a man, and with difficulty restrained bursts of applause; but when the end came rounds of cheers were given for the great artist, which sounded like salons of artillery. I walked with Mendelssohn in Hyde Park after this triumph, and on congratulating him he replied: 'I thought the people would like some octaves, so I played them'."

Now before continuing, I have to explain. Though I'm not Jewish myself, I was born with a sense of fairness and equality of all human beings. Sure: we may have differences, but we're all the same basic person, despite skin color, ethnicity, personal beliefs, religious views - and it's *beyond the pale for any one of us to claim that one race is better or worse than another*. And I have a particular empathy ***for*** and bond ***with*** all those who have suffered persecution, torment and genocide simply by being born – a Jew. Or:

Being born - any pre-Columbian peoples; i.e. the entire New World and particularly the genocide of the native populations in North America. As white Europeans began to settle, displace – and ultimately kill or send off to reservations (which were little more than concentration camps) – the people who were ALREADY here. Or:

Being born, as I was: an Armenian, whose people were "ethnically cleansed" a century and more ago in the first major genocide of the 20th Century. A genocide which killed over a million men, women and children and which changed history AND the world outlook. It's documented that while ending his Obersalzberg Speech on August 22, 1939 one week before Germany invaded Poland, Hitler said "Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?" – finding the solution to their pesky existence, as reported, an "instructive" precedent. All others who've been targeted by nationality, ethnicity – period.

I dwell on this issue in general, but <u>*especially in the specific case of Mendelssohn*</u>, who – despite his conversion to Christianity, was still targeted just after his death in a movement so overwhelming that only recently is he emerging from the POST-death SECOND fatal blow he received which caused his music to be scorned and ignored, until recent times. And he should have never been targeted in the first place: Christian, Jew – or ANYTHING.

The society and culture in which Mendelssohn worked and lived was rapidly evolving. As

the young man matured, and despite the family's successful assimilation into German (Prussian) culture, they, and Felix *(at left)* particularly, couldn't seem to leave their family tree behind, and were often the subject of anti-Semitism. And as his brief life progressed, such intolerance by general society grew worse, to the pained heart of Mendelssohn. One of the most vicious of his attackers was none other than the notorious anti-Semite Richard Wagner, only four years Mendelssohn's junior. Wagner *(at right; the precursor to Nazism?)* obsequiously fawned up to Mendelssohn in the 1840s when the composer/conductor was at the height of his powers and fame. Wagner sent Mendelssohn his somewhat old-fashioned, derivative and scarcely interesting symphony in C-Major, but Mendelssohn, for whatever reason – didn't respond. Wagner had already decided that musical revolution had to take place; he saw

the very future of music as nationalistic: German-centric and that the only form music should take to carry out this task was OPERA. Mendelssohn, on the other hand, considered himself a proud German, but was no nationalist/supremacist. His vision of music was to basically stay the course with chamber music, oratorios, solo instrumental and symphonies continuing to make up the bulk of an international mélange of different flavors, tastes – built upon an excellence of writing and communication through sound and word. To hold no barriers to the growth of those forms and styles, but to observe their natural evolution, just as he had studied Baroque and Classical composers learned from, and expanded upon them. For this: Wagner vehemently turned on Mendelssohn, attacking him as a Jew, for the "inferiority" of his race, etc. Mendelssohn brushed off the rumbles from Wagner while he was still alive, but after Mendelssohn's premature death in 1848, Wagner (courageously…) went on the attack against a dead man. He published a disgusting book titled "***Judaism (or Jewishness) in Music,***" after its first appearance as a much-shorter pamphlet.

As I've written in the past, Wagner's rise created a schism in international "classical" music of its day. You must choose to either become a Wagnerian rebel and acolyte, composing in his free, propaganda-laden style, or you were a sick, sorry old-fashioned wastrel of a Brahmsian: that is to say – someone creating new music in the classical mold. Someone following the path of Beethoven, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Schumann, which – though he admired SOME of those of the past, Wagner despised those of the present who followed their lead in the classical tradition. He now proclaimed Mendelssohn's glorious music and all of his ethnicity as detrimental and argued that they should never be accepted as German artists. He viciously attacked Mendelssohn in particular but trashed music by ***all*** Jewish composers as effeminate (hard to come to that conclusion if you know Mendelssohn's music) and "vague" – whatever THAT meant. That Mendelssohn and the music of Jews was an insult to German "culture." He turned the mere word "Jew" into a horrible pejorative. Surprisingly, Wagner's hatred went so far as to attack **Brahms**, that ultimate German, that goy, that man without a drop of Jewish blood in his body as "*that Jew*" after Brahms was awarded a prize by the University of Breslau. Seriously! He referred to Brahms as "*that Jew*"! Why? Because Brahms, like Mendelssohn before him: was a classicist and not a Wagnerian rebel. But Wagner was into labels, blackwashing anyone who he felt stood in his way and who did NOT accept Wagner as the visionary artist he insisted he was: the one TRUE messiah of music to whom ALL should bow, and follow as his disciples.

Unfortunately, he was widely read and praised for his ultra-Germanic views – another reason why his music became the darling of the Nazis only 50 years after his 1883 death. Just a half-century later, the German people were stirred by the words of another who foamed at the mouth with prejudice directed against Jews – a man who insisted that all must feel pride in German culture as the superior, master race of artistry above all other. Just a mere 50 years after Wagner's mantle was taken up by another German madman.

And before he could truly create his music revolution (just after the German Revolution of 1848-49 itself) he had to mow down, he had to destroy, he had to delegitimize anyone NOT following WAGNER. And that began with Mendelssohn, one year dead and the subject of much of ***Judaism in Music***. I'll quote directly from that vile book.

Wagner wrote, beginning with damning praise: that Mendelssohn *"has shown us that a Jew can possess the richest measure of specific talents, the most refined and varied culture… without even once through all these advantages being able to bring forth in us that profound, heart-and-soul searching effect we expect from music."* Mendelssohn, whom I've written was baptized at seven and brought up as a Lutheran. A Protestant. A Christian. His music expressly and profoundly extolled Christianity, and utilizing the New Testament as his source of inspiration AND texts for not only the oratorio I've mentioned: ***Paulus*** – which is all about the most famous of all Jewish-to-Christian conversions in the Bible, but also his ***5th "Reformation" Symphony*** based on Martin Luther's most famous hymn tune and which the MYSO performed on a past Festive Holiday Concert, and also innumerable ***Psalms*** and other sacred works extolling: Christianity. But Wagner didn't care. To him, Mendelssohn was born with tainted Jewish blood and no conversion would change that.

Plus, he made for a great target – to be marginalized and turned into a pariah, as all his fellow Jews *had* to be turned in order that this new culture of ultra-, exclusive-German Culture – could be established and overcome all else.

Wagner's ***Judaism in Music*** also proclaimed that new German composers MUST write music that would be strong and ambitious. Which he claimed was the opposite of "Jewish music" produced by weaklings. He also attacked Mendelssohn not only for his compositions, but also as the brilliant conductor who built the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra into a world-class ensemble that survives as such to this very day. Wagner insisted that the great Mendelssohn's interpretations as a conductor were "flabby and colorless;" and he damned Mendelssohn and all other Jews, as corrupt and "outside the pale of German art-life." And as if to somehow show the example, Wagner's 1850 opera ***Lohengrin*** was premiered on August 28 of that year – a tale of the search for the Holy Grail (read: New Testament CHRISTIAN material) in what was becoming Wagner's music-drama style, the antithesis of Mendelssohn's technique. The entire production was directed by Franz Liszt, another raging anti-Semite, and Wagner's future father-in-law when Wagner seduced Liszt's daughter Cosima (yes, an anti-Semite like her father) away from Wagner's acolyte and frequent conductor of Wagner's works - Hans von Bulow. And to make things even more offensive? Liszt decided to honor Goethe by holding that premiere on the date which would have been the 101st birthday of that great friend and admirer of Mendelssohn.

Why? Why was Wagner doing this? Because Mendelssohn's reputation grew after his death, and his lifetime of work as a Christian German had elevated him to a position of true authority within German music and the arts, and a model others now followed. And Wagner would have NONE of that. ***HE*** was to be the great answer, ***HE*** was to be the one to follow, ***HE*** was to be the most important German composer – and not this converted *Jew*. Wagner was hardly a Christian; his beliefs were more in line with Paganism, only turning to Christianity late in life – it seems: to perhaps hope to atone for a life riddled with sexual escapades, sociopathy and other irreligious behavior, much to the abhorrence of one of his greatest admirers: the philosopher, critical thinker and cultural critic Friedrich Nietzsche, who was himself one of the most influential minds of the latter part of the 19th Century and beyond, as well as being an atheist. So: the attack on Mendelssohn – a man who lived by and upheld Christian values - was on. Led by a terrible little man who hid behind white Christianity, but never lived up to its tenets – just as people with inferiority issues try to tear down others in order to make themselves more important.

And that meant turning Mendelssohn into a weakling, a traitor to his country, an insignificant being who – rather than having been elevated to the great position of respect as the leading German artist Mendelssohn had become after his death, he should instead be condemned. Thrown away, forgotten. Spurned and destroyed.

"… Judaism is the evil conscience of our modern civilization."

So wrote Wagner, and as his vision of Germans being recognized as a superior race took hold, ***Judaism in Music*** itself turned into a bestseller. The guidebook for both the past and the future. And just like that, this man Mendelssohn who had been celebrated as the greatest German musician and composer of his time: was dumped. His music went – nearly overnight – from being the most-played music in all Central Europe to the least performed. If it was performed at all. And it didn't end there. The hatred directed against Mendelssohn continued vividly all the way to Wagner's 1883 death. And that stuck and HELD. 35 years of Wagner – now a hugely celebrated man himself – referring to Mendelssohn and all Jews as subhuman and worse - took its toll. ***Judaism in Music*** marked the end of Mendelssohn as the great German artist he was. And – his music was now out. Finished. Verboten.

That pronouncement from Wagner lasted – all the way up to the 1920s, at which time an attempt was made to rehabilitate Mendelssohn.

(At left: Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, in an 1896 illustration by Aubrey Beardsley (1872 – 1898,) in Beardsley's distinctively strange Art Nouveau style, perhaps playing into the image Wagner had created of the composer's music being effeminate?)

But, and as successful as it was, it merely brought Mendelssohn to the attention of the Nazis, who would place his name on the list of FORBIDDEN artists. From merely trashed by Wagner to being banned outright, completely. In his own country – the land in which he lived, loved – and composed. So now, again, he was banned, ignored and forgotten until the outcome of WWII forced the Germans to realize they weren't superior to ANYONE. Then, in the early 1950s Yehudi Menuhin edited and then published Mendelssohn's masterpiece Violin Concerto in e-minor. Ignored or forgotten for a century, his time was coming back.

Despite all, it wasn't until about 30 years ago – the 1990s - that the REAL rehabilitation of Mendelssohn began to take off, but he's still suffering the injustice done to him by the all-powerful Wagner. Once totally trashed by Wagner, that castigation still bears its effects on Mendelssohn and his image to this day. Which I hope to help alleviate by programming the music of this genius, and by making this story public.

One final irony of Mendelssohn and Wagner? The music which has become the standard for the entrance procession of brides at their weddings? The music to which the lyric "Here Comes the Bride, All Dressed in White," has been added? That music is Elsa's "Bridal Chorus" from the beginning of Act III Wagner's ***Lohengrin***. (True to operatic form, Elsa dies at the end of that 'music-drama.') And likewise, the music which has become the standard to be played following the words "…you may now kiss the bride" and the presentation of the new couple to the wedding's attendees? That's the ***Wedding March*** by Mendelssohn from his incidental music to ***A Midsummer Night's Dream***. Together, through infamy – even in weddings.

The final note: Mendelssohn literally worked himself to death. He was compelled to ALWAYS do more: compose MORE, conduct MORE, teach MORE, travel and perform: MORE. He did have a weak constitution from birth, which he tried to overcome through sports and other activities, but it's believed there's the possibility that the family had inherited through grandpa Moses brain defects – Moses (September 6, 1729 – January 4, 1786) died at age 56 of a stroke. Ditto with both Mendelssohn's parents: Abraham (December 10, 1776 – November 19, 1835) died at 58 of a stroke. Lea (March 15, 1777 – December 13, 1842) died at 64 of a stroke. Sister Fanny Hensel (November 14, 1805 – May 15, 1847) died at age 41 of a stroke. And besides Fanny, his other sisters also betrayed similar symptoms and deaths by stroke. The deaths of his parents were devastating to Felix, but that death of his beloved sister Fanny – nearly killed Felix, too. But then in less than six months, Felix would join them all, dying – yes, of a stroke. The symptoms preceding death were demonstrated by all, apparently, and Felix's condition was noted specifically: he suffered from years of terrible headaches and earaches, and strange mood swings. The symptoms intensified during his final year, step-by-step, as his walking pace became irregular, he began to lose the sense of touch in his extremities, his body began to experience partial paralyses and the loss of consciousness. In that final six months after Fanny's death, he was also given to deep depression – as well as simply a near-loss of creative juices and physical weakness. Though composing was now on the back burner for him, he did produce a masterpiece which really portrays what must have been the state of his mind while suffering from the depressing loss of Fanny: the ***f-minor String Quartet***, which is filled with anguish, churning passion, sadness – and an a finale which is one of the most pained expressions of grief in music ever written. Long the darling of Queen Victoria and

Prince Albert of England, he had offered a performance of Beethoven's ***Fourth Piano Concerto*** which had brought the house down and was described as "legendary" during his final (tenth) tour of England in April 1847 less than a month before the death of Fanny.

He began to complain about those severe headaches becoming worse, and perhaps had epileptic seizures. Finally, on November 3 – just hours before his death, Mendelssohn had such a debilitating pain in his head that he actually screamed and fainted. Over the next several hours, he passed in and out of consciousness before falling into a coma and then: died.

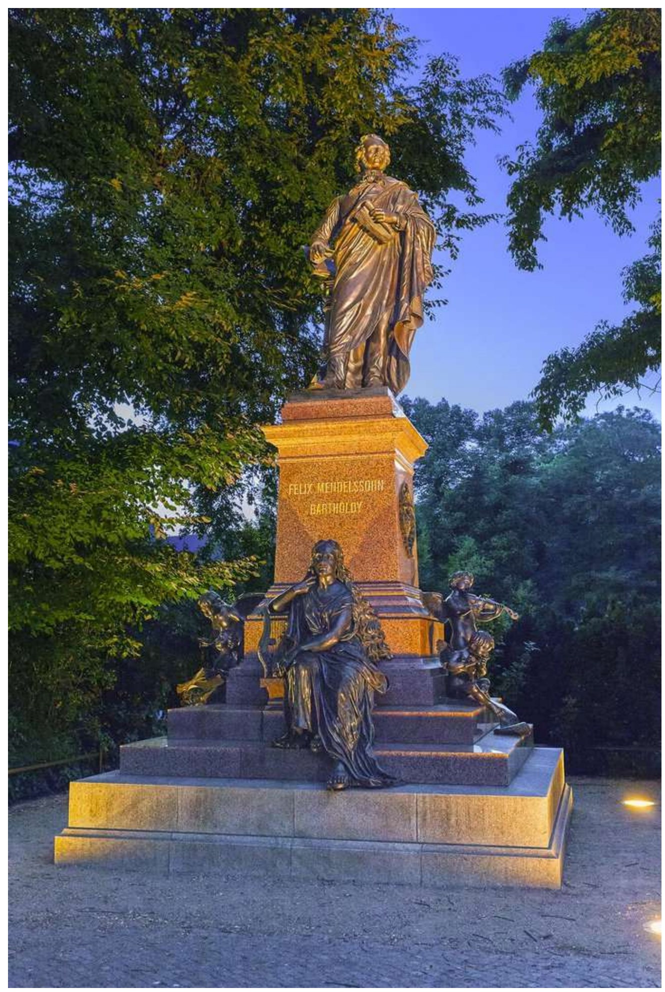
There are actually three modern medically-identified possibilities for his death, given the symptoms which were recorded: ruptured cerebral aneurysm combined with subarachnoid hemorrhage, familial cerebral cavernous malformation, and cerebral autosomal dominant arteriopathy with subcortical infarcts and leukoencephalopathy (CADASIL.) And ain't those a mouthful!?

On hearing the news of Mendelssohn's death, Queen Victoria could barely take it in: "We were horrified, astounded and distressed to read in the papers of the death of Mendelssohn, the greatest musical genius since Mozart and the most amiable man."

His widow Cécile took her husband's death VERY badly, becoming terribly depressed – theirs had been a wonderfully happy marriage. She would survive him by only six years, dying in 1853 at the age of a mere 36.

Alas, just like the very Mozart Mendelssohn had been constantly compared to in his youth, Felix died far too early, too young at only 38. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart had passed at 35 in 1791. Perhaps with the gifts of genius and musical brilliance also came with the curse of lives cut short.

(At right: The Mendelssohn Monument in Leipzig.)



Ken Mackie (1954-): ***Deck the Halls à la Bach*** (2024)

(Notes by the composer/performer)

Ken Mackie started playing the Horn in 7th Grade when his band director asked if he wanted to switch from playing his dad's beat-up trumpet to French Horn. His first experience playing in a horn choir came in high school, where his band director, also a horn player, started a horn choir with eight horn players from his high school band. He played horn through high school, junior college and college, graduating with a B.A. Degree in Music in 1977.

Five years later, Ken returned to school, earned a teaching credential and became a music teacher. He taught music at the Alta Vista K-8 Elementary School in Porterville, Atwater High School in Atwater, Le Grand High School in Le Grand, Washington Elementary and Cloverdale High School in Cloverdale, and Planada Elementary School and Cesar Chavez Middle School in Planada. While at Planada, Ken started a Mariachi Band, adding violin and guitar classes to the band program.

In 2002, Ken embarked on a new venture, commuting to the McGeorge School of Law in the evenings. Four years later, he graduated in the top fifteen percent of his class and earning a Juris Doctor, With Distinction. He remained under contract with Planada and opened a home office to do legal work part time. A year out of law school, Ken helped save Merced's oldest church sanctuary from demolition.

Hired by the Canelo law firm, Ken retired from teaching in 2009. His practice included a broad range of civil litigation and appellate work. Over time, he accepted more and more workers' compensation clients. In 2019, with the senior partners retired or retiring, Ken reopened his home office. Six months later, the world closed due to the COVID pandemic. Now, Ken is the only Certified Specialist in workers' compensation law in Merced County.

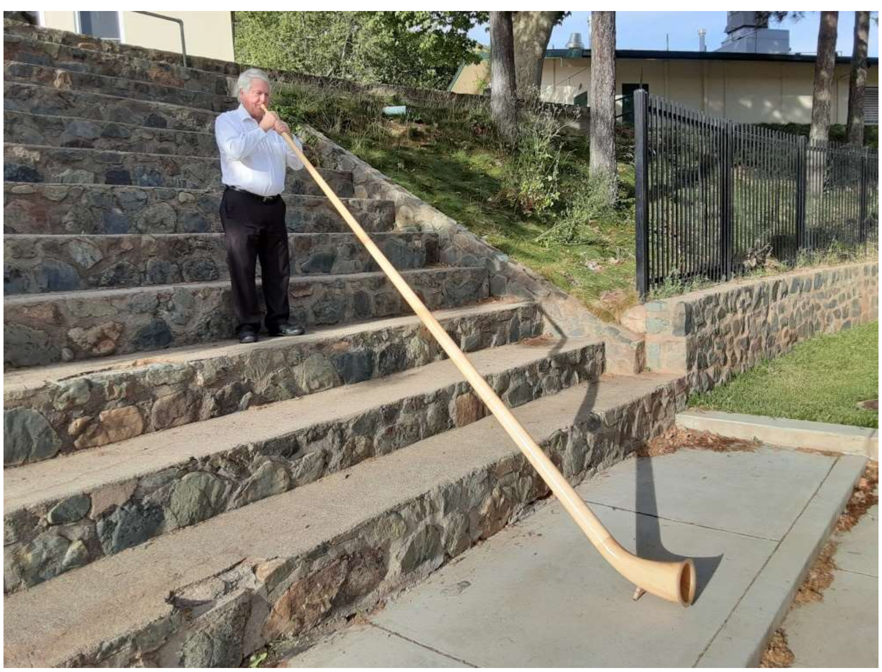
Although Ken left teaching music in the public schools, he didn't leave teaching music. In 2013 Ken joined forces with John Gottschalk and formed Merced's first community French Horn Choir. He named the group Cuivre!, which is French for brassy. Cuivre!, has performed in numerous venues in Merced and Stanislaus counties and appeared as a guest performing group with the Merced Community College Band in the Spring of 2014.

About twenty years ago, Ken took up the bagpipes. He regularly pipes at the closing ceremony at the Field of Honor at Merced College each November. Most recently, Ken piped as a guest artist with the Merced Community College Band's concert in May of this year.

Ken also rang handbells in the Opus Handbell Choir in Modesto, and various church handbell choirs. He and his wife now practice duets on a set of handbells they acquired during the pandemic.

But Ken's love of the horn could not be constrained to just the French Horn. In 2014, Ken added the Alphorn to his collection (*the 14-foot-long all-wood beauty seen below left – which was heard in our June 29th concert at the Wawona Hotel in Yosemite in the world premiere of Ken's* ***Pastorale—All Is Well - for Alphorn and Orchestra****.*) This was followed in 2015 with the purchase of a Wagner Tuba, which he bought to play "Oom-pah" music at an annual Octoberfest hosted by the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Turlock. During the pandemic, with the horn choir in hiatus, Ken practiced duets with his wife, Kathie, and added a pair of natural horns, that is, horns without any valves, to play with.

Ken played horn in the Modesto Junior College Wind Symphony; the Stanislaus State Wind Ensemble, Orchestra and Jazz Band; the Merced Symphony; the Tulare County Symphony; the Mendocino County Symphony; the Mendocino Brass Ensemble, and the Merced Community College Band.



In the fall of 2018, Ken joined the Mariposa Yosemite Symphony Orchestra for the October concert in the

Ahwahnee Hotel in Yosemite National Park. He proved his talents and was promoted to principal horn in January, 2020. After a three-year pandemic-pause, he finally filled the position in April of 2023.

Ken attributes much of his composition skills to his mentor and spouse of fifty years, Kathleen Mackie. Kathleen, a talented musician in her own right, holds a Masters in Composition from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. Over the years, Ken arranged and composed music for his school performing groups, handbell choirs, and the horn choir. Ken and Kathleen collaborated on musicals and an opera based on Dickens' A Christmas Carol. Their first work, a musical melodrama titled Blazing Guns at Bear Creek, or What Will We do with the Ferry when the Railroad Comes Through?, was produced more than twenty years ago at the Merced Open Air Theater. Ken arranged Scarborough Fair for band and Merced Community College Band under the direction of Ken Taylor performed the piece in the spring of 2016.

Eleven years ago, composer Ken Mackie's first forage into fugue writing in the style of Johann Sebastian Bach resulted in ***"Deck the Halls à la Bach"*** a short, minute and a half piece for a horn quartet. The concept began with the song, ***"Deck the Halls with Boughs of Holly"*** having a party-like atmosphere, with each entering voice going off into its own conversation as the subject went around the quartet. In true fugue style, after a brief development, the subject came back in the minor mode, followed by another development. Then the subject came out in a *stretto* treatment, where one voice overlapped another till at last the subject, ***"Deck the Halls,"*** shone forth with all its contrapuntal accompaniment and finished with a grand *Fa-la-la-la-la* ending.

In this orchestral treatment, Bach shows up and takes the subject into the minor mode in a manner reminiscent of his fugue from ***Toccata and Fugue in D minor***. Now the subject in the minor mode is given the full fugue exposition.

The trumpets take the conversation away by introducing a new subject, ***"Masters in this Hall"***. Bach goes right along, turning the fugue into a double fugue. This new subject comes to an abrupt end with a collective breath of silence before the Chimes sound a haunting ***"God Rest ye Merry"*** subject and a triple fugue is born.

After every section of the orchestra takes their turn with this new subject the development begins. The Horns quickly move ***"God Rest ye Merry"*** from the minor mode to a much happier sounding major mode. Seamlessly, the orchestra follows along, rejoicing in the new key. The party mood recaptured, ***"Deck the Halls"*** reappears, gets tossed about with a *stretto* treatment before recapitulating all the earlier conversations and wrapping everything up in a fa-la-la-la-la finale.

Leroy Anderson (1908 - 1975): ***<u>Sleigh Ride</u>*** (1946)

Oh, what a wonderful, immediately-recognizable evocation of a horse-drawn sleigh! This is probably the most famous sleigh ride of all, and was written by a highly successful American arranger/ composer: Leroy Anderson. And it's even more fun to hear the piece when you realize that Anderson actually composed it not in winter, but in the midst of a very hot summer - and not in the Currier and Ives late 19th century era but smack dab in the middle of the 20th century!

Anderson was born in Cambridge, MA, graduated from Harvard and got his start as a conductor leading the Harvard Band. When he guest-conducted the Boston Pops at age 28 in his own music, dynamic conductor Arthur Fiedler immediately asked Anderson to compose/arrange for the Pops, beginning a lengthy and highly successful collaboration. Many of Anderson's arrangements for the Boston Pops became instant classics in the American light classical (or "pops") genre and in fact, became international hits, too. A 1950 Decca Records contract resulted in recordings in which Anderson conducted pick-up studio orchestras in New York in his own works – and those recordings provide us with the composer's own specific interpretive preferences. While Anderson was best-known for his "Pops" arrangements and pieces, he spread his wings and composed a short piano concerto and also a short-lived Broadway musical based on Goldilocks.   His legacy of well-known light popular symphonic scores includes: ***<u>The Typewriter</u>***, ***<u>Sandpaper Ballet</u>***, ***<u>Bugler's Holiday</u>***, ***<u>Belle of the Ball</u>***, ***<u>Trumpeter's Lullaby</u>***, ***<u>The Syncopated Clock</u>***, ***<u>Blue Tango</u>***, ***<u>The Waltzing Cat</u>***, ***<u>A Christmas Festival</u>*** (and three lesser-known but wonderful ***<u>Suite(s) of Carols each for Woodwind, Brass and Strings</u>***.)

Anderson conceived ***<u>Sleigh Ride</u>*** during a July 1946 heat wave; it was first recorded by Fiedler and the Boston Pops in 1949. While Anderson composed it as a purely-orchestral piece (which is how it's most commonly heard,) lyrics by Mitchell Parish were approved by Anderson in 1950. Anderson's own recording of the piece with a NYC pick-up orchestra under his Decca contract made the best-seller chart in its 1952 release. For many decades Anderson's ***<u>Blue Tango</u>*** was considered his greatest hit, but ***<u>Sleigh Ride</u>*** eventually became his most memorable and most often-performed work. Interestingly enough, Anderson never considered the piece a Christmas – or even a holiday work: just a piece of wintry music. Special effects to listen for: besides sleigh bells, Anderson uses woodblocks to capture the sound of the clip-clopping horses' hooves, a slapstick to reproduce the cracking whip and of course, that now famous horse whinny near the very end of the piece by a half-valved trumpet glissando.

Fifty years after his death, Anderson is still considered the king of American symphonic pop music – a title he richly deserved.

Sir Arthur Sullivan (1842 – 1900) ***<u>Overture to the Operetta "The Mikado</u>"*** (1885) (arranged by Les Marsden)

Let's get this out of the way immediately:

> **Silly** is GOOD. There is nothing wrong with **SILLY.** The world would be better off, especially at a time like this, with much more: **SILLINESS**.

Gilbert and Sullivan were, in some ways, the Monty Python of their day, but with integral symphonically-appropriate and vocally-delicious music which influenced later song-writers – especially G&S's patter songs, clearly identifiable in Monty Python ditties, among many others. And they were adept at pulling off, at the height of stuffy Victorianism:

> ***very silly, indeed.***

*Above, L – R: Sir William Gilbert and Sir Arthur Sullivan, looking **VERY** silly.*

They were also at each other's throat constantly until, after a quarter-century, 14-operetta creative partnership, they pulled the plug and went their own individual ways, never to receive the same success on their own as they had as that single-named unit: **<u>gilbertandsullivan</u>**.

But as I'm writing about the ***<u>Overture to "The Mikado</u>***" – which is purely orchestral, of course – I'll focus only on the man who was the composer, and not the witty book writer/lyricist.

Sullivan was born on May 13th, 1842 in London (Lambeth) in relatively humble origins as the son of a military musician; his father Thomas had been born in Ireland and that Irish familial line would be felt in the son's music later in life. Sullivan's mother was English (by birth) to the core: Mary Clementina Coghlan Sullivan possessed Irish and Italian ancestry. As a young child, Arthur (who had only one sibling: an older brother named Frederic Thomas Sullivan 1837 - 1877) wasn't the sturdiest of children: he would be in fragile health for most of his life. But he was in sheer bliss when music arose: and especially as he was surrounded by his father's musical life – Pop's work both as a military band leader and as a private music instructor, which helped ends meet. Arthur showed great musical talent at a very early age, much to the exasperation of his parents. They would have preferred him to engage in a less risky and more financially-rewarding profession later in life. But Arthur persisted, and wrote of not only his great love for music, but his intense intellectual curiosity as well, learning while still a child: to play nearly all wind instruments to a high degree of proficiency. Not merely to be able to just get by, but to be truly an expert at each, which he later claimed stood him in great stead when he would orchestrate his works as an adult. And how old was he by this time? Eight. Eight years old. He ALSO wrote his first piece at age eight: an anthem titled ***By the Waters of Babylon***.

At the age of 12 *(at left, in his unform/costume,)* he begged his parents to allow him to apply for consideration as a chorister at the Chapel Royal, and not only was he accepted at once, but at the age of 14 he became "head Boy" or lead soloist, despite the fact his child's range would soon be gone as his voice aged.

Tying in with another work on our program: at that same age (14) in 1856, Sullivan was awarded the first-ever **Mendelssohn Scholarship** and left the Chapel Royal behind as he studied first at the Royal Academy of Music and then, in Leipzig at the very Conservatorium der Musik which had been *created* by Mendelssohn just 13 years earlier, in 1843. This was a huge validation of the boy's great talent, and he made the most of it. His graduation piece was a set of incidental music for Shakespeare's final play: ***The Tempest***. *(At right: in Leipzig, age 18.)* In keeping with the namesake scholarship, Arthur was also well-trained in conducting, in addition to composition and all the other technicalities of music from instrumental performance, harmony and theory. When – after his return home to England, that seven-movement incidental music suite from Shakespeare's ***The Tempest*** received its first performance back on British soil at the Crystal Palace in London, it brought the house down. It was (and IS) a masterful demonstration of compositional talent and keen orchestration, but aside from being a rave sensation, it led the young composer virtually nowhere – only making his name known. He thus embarked upon making a career in music armed only with his talent and training – with sure, perhaps: a little bit of name recognition.

Knowing that there was relatively quick money to be made in writing successfully-memorable popular (Victorian) songs and hymns, he began churning them out, with (perhaps) the most successful parlor song being ***The Lost Chord*** (1877,) written when he was 35 although the hymn ***Onward Christian Soldiers*** (1871) written at age 29 - would be a very close second. During this time (roughly the 1860s) he also accepted commissions to compose incidental music for plays, and by the end of his life, had done so for a number of other Shakespearean productions – ***The Merchant of Venice*** (1871,) ***The Merry Wives of Windsor*** (1874,) ***Macbeth*** (1888,) and the Shakespeare-John Fletcher collaborative play ***Henry VIII*** (1877.) He also wrote scores for Alfred, Lord Tennyson's play ***The Foresters – or Robin Hood and Maid Marian*** (1892) and J. Comyns Carr's ***King Arthur*** – a production starring the great Victorian actor Sir Henry Irving.

Surprised already? Yup – most people think he only composed the scores to the famed operettas/operas he wrote in collaboration with Sir William S. Gilbert between 1871 and 1896 - during which period they broke up in 1889, but got back together to write their final two operas in 1892 – breaking with one another for good four years later. But well before their partnership, he was already established as a "serious" composer. And he continued composing concert music all throughout that collaboration and well after.

But wait! There's more! His orchestral output included (ALL pre-Gilbert):

Two now-lost ***Concert Overtures***,
The ***Procession March*** (1863)
The ***Princess of Wales' March*** (1863)
His one-and-only symphony - the ***'Irish' Symphony in E*** (1866)
His ***Overture in C-Major, 'In Memoriam'*** (*also* 1866)
The ***Cello Concerto in D-Major*** (*also ALSO* in 1866 – he was on a roll in that year, and those three pieces are perhaps his most famous concert pieces,)
The ***Overture 'Marmion'*** (1867) and
The ***Overture di Ballo*** (1870)

Aside from a couple of late pieces, that really was about all he wrote for orchestra, but all were well-favored at the time, and those three 1866 works as well as the ***Overture di Ballo*** have lived on and weathered time fairly well.

And yes – had HAD already composed operas prior to working with Gilbert:

1863's ***The Sapphire Necklace***,
1866's ***Cox and Box*** (**AGAIN** - that same magical year!) and
1867's ***The Contrabandista – or the Law of the Ladrones***

Now – in the latter part of the 19th Century, British Choral Societies became a big thing – with some boasting of huge choruses and orchestras, others smaller vocal groups with only organ, but the bigger the better. Some municipal/regional choral societies became hugely successful, drawing international audiences for annual festivals, and as well: the cream of contemporary composers, eager to premiere their new choral works, oratorios and other large-scale vocal/instrumental pieces with the more prestigious festivals. But the true crème de la crème of the days' most successful and noteworthy (pun unintended) composers actually received commissions from the festivals themselves – for the honor of having a vocal work written specifically for their organization and the privilege of offering the world premiere of such works.

Sullivan wrote many throughout his career, including:

The Masque at Kenilworth (1864) *(the photo at left shows him in 1864, at the Birmingham Festival where this Masque – his first such work for voices and orchestra was premiered – and started him on the road of composing more);*
The Prodigal Son (1869)
On Shore and Sea (1871)

– and during the team of G & S:

Festival Te Deum (1872)
The Light of the World (1873)
The Martyr of Antioch (1880)

Ode for the Opening of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition (1886)
The Golden Legend (1886)
Ode for the Laying of the Foundation Stone of The Imperial Institute (1887)

Incidentally, ***The Golden Legend***, based upon Longfellow's poem, was composed for the Leeds Festival and it was magnificently, beautifully received – becoming his most popular non-opera/operetta composition. It was presented constantly all over the world, and finally reached the point that Sullivan placed a ban on further productions as he didn't want it to become so ubiquitous that it lost its sense of special occasion and became a bore.

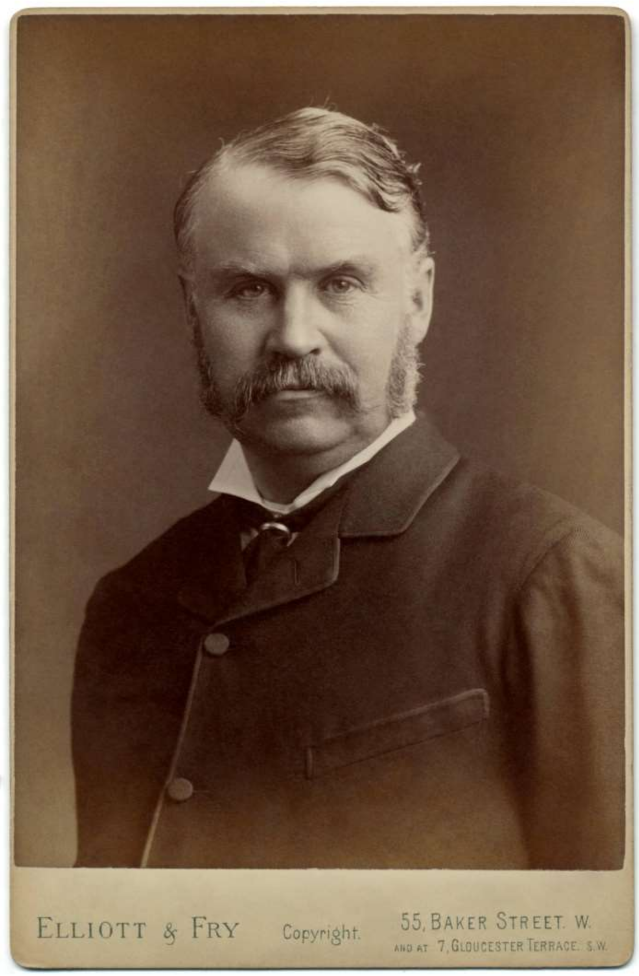
As for his final major work following the end of the teaming of G & S:

(The Boer War) Te Deum Laudamus (1900) - first performed posthumously in 1902.

Yup – THIS was the true Sir Arthur Sullivan, **SERIOUS composer**. But unfortunately that successful side of the solo Sullivan was far eclipsed both in the public mind AND in history by the über-beloved and successful operas (or operettas) by that unmatchable team of Gilbert and Sullivan.

As for that teaming, it began strictly as a one-off collaboration in late 1871 when John Hollingshead - the managing director of the Gaiety Theatre in London commissioned them as a team to come up with a light entertainment for a Christmas Panto (or Pantomime – a longstanding British tradition combining elements of the British Music Hall with Musical Comedy, and it's alive and kicking to this very day.) They worked up a comic operetta called ***Thespis*** – which successfully ran through Easter of the next year. They then politely parted company, probably never intending to collaborate again. But again they did – when over the period of a few months in late 1874 and early 1875 they informally came together again to write words and music for three simple parlor ballads. And that was that, again. As a matter of fact, earlier in that year of 1874, Sullivan had composed his **Merry Wives of Windsor** incidental score for a production of that play at – the Gaiety Theatre, site of their first collaboration. And his oratorios and other concert works were in demand – with performances commissioned *by*, or with performances *at* the Birmingham Festival and the Crystal Palace, among other prestigious venues. He was, in a word: hot.

And while this isn't supposed to be about Gilbert, he was also a greatly-well-recognized writer by this point. He was born in 1836 – six years before Sullivan, and he would survive Sullivan by 11 years. Born into a well-to-do family, his parents constantly fought and were distant, stern parents to "Bab" as Willliam was called – and his three sisters. Parents separated in 1876 and after that, their relationships with William became nearly non-existent. His early career was spent briefly as a government clerk, and then as a lawyer, before his hobby of writing light verse and poetry began to garner profitable sales; by the 1860s he was writing comic plays and burlesques, or revues and had also begun directing for the stage, becoming a well-organized, no-nonsense and even strict director with success. His first professionally-produced play was staged in 1863, and he wrote constantly, collaborating with Charles Millward on a large number of Christmas pantos – so he was well-experienced in that genre before collaborating on ***Thespis*** with Sullivan in 1871. His approach to writing comedy was – as he framed it: a technique called *Topsy-Turvy*, which was an absurdist, ridiculous style in which a frequently-bizarre exposition featuring ridiculous elements would all logically come together sensibly by the end. That became the framework for his libretti for the Gilbert and Sullivan collaboration, too – and the name of Gilbert's *(at right: an 1880 photograph from the Elliott and Fry Studio)* writing strategy: became the double-entendre title for one of the best films about theatre, and certainly the best autobiographical film about Gilbert and Sullivan yet: Mike Leigh's 1999 ***Topsy-Turvy***, which I recommend strongly. They're played beautifully by Jim Broadbent and Allan Corduner – though the film does get ONE thing wrong: in reality, Gilbert and his 11-years-younger wife had a long and very happy marriage. So THERE, Leigh…



Gilbert's wife was Lucy Agnes Turner (1847–1936), and their 1867 marriage was an extremely happy one. Gilbert's pet name for his wife was Kitty (and just by way of contrast, Sullivan had multiple affairs but never married – and at times, was even carrying on brief affairs behind the back of his longest-lived affair: with the wealthy American Fanny Ronalds, who was three years older than Sullivan. Their affair lasted for three years, beginning in 1871 and though it eventually became more of a platonic friendship, she stuck around until his 1900 death.

As for Gilbert? He DID have a thorny, prickly reputation and a wit which was not only quick, but could be devastating as well. However, he was also adored by countless people for the generosity and support he gave others even in his early years when he was not yet the major earner he would eventually be. He took numerous younger people with talent under his wing, fiscally supporting; his last student and excellent singer was an American-born young actress named Nancy McIntosh, whom both the Gilberts loved dearly and unofficially adopted. After Gilbert's 1911 death, Nancy stayed on, caring for Lucy and serving as her companion. After Lucy died in 1936, their estate was left to Nancy.

Later in 1875, the manager of the Royalty Theatre, and a man who would prove to be nearly the third leg of the Gilbert and Sullivan Stool: Richard D'Oyly Carte – had a dilemma. He had scheduled Jacques Offenbach's one-act ***La Périchole***, but now needed another one-act opera/operetta. Carte had been the conductor of a production of the (pre-Gilbert) Sullivan's ***Cox and Box***; he also recalled a libretto Gilbert had shared with him (Carte.) And so he contacted both, bringing them back together for what would become their second stage collaboration: ***Trial By Jury***. Incidentally, the one-act ***Trial By Jury*** starred Arthur Sullivan's older brother Fred as the Learned Judge. That production was a huge success – with ***Trial By Jury*** outdrawing ***La Périchole*** when it came to audience reaction.

A few months later, Carte *(photo above right)* produced another Sullivan-sans-Gilbert operetta: ***The Zoo***, with libretto by R. H. Stephenson. However, it was only a minor event.

Carte, knowing a good thing when he saw it, then brought Gilbert and Sullivan back together, a collaboration which would then last – off-and-on – for another couple decades.

And so it took off in earnest, with various squabbles (mostly regarding the subjects for their collaborations) along the way. Next up after ***Trial by Jury*** was:

1877's ***The Sorcerer*** (it would later be revised 1884)
1878: ***H.M.S. Pinafore***
1879: ***The Pirates of Penzance*** (1879)
1881: ***Patience*** (1881)
1882: ***Iolanthe*** (1882)
1884: ***Princess Ida*** (1884)
1885: ***The Mikado*** (1885)
1887: ***Ruddigore*** (1887)
1888: ***The Yeomen of the Guard*** (1888)
1889: ***The Gondoliers*** (1889)
After their first split up, they returned to working together for:

1893's ***Utopia, Limited*** (1893)
1896: ***The Grand Duke***

And that's all she literally AND figuratively wrote. And those last two? Not so good, nor well received. Matter of fact, ***The Grand Duke*** became the first (and last) G & S opera to lose money.

Even the most distant fan of Gilbert and Sullivan will recognize the names of the most famous of those operettas: ***Pinafore***. ***Penzance*** (which has even had fairly recent stagings on Broadway.) ***Yeomen of the Guard***. Perhaps ***Ruddigore***. But probably most, and BEST of all: ***The Mikado***. I can think of no better marriage of book and music from the team despite Sullivan's dislike of Gilbert's "Topsy-Turvy" plotting. Unfortunately, Sullivan was just plain wrong, but like the craftsman he was, delivered a remarkably entertaining score to fit Gilbert's hilariously funny, sharply-witted book. And on that point this is a very importance clarification to make.

Britain at that time was in the midst of a Japanese craze. From the early 1880s, everything Japanese was adored. From early 1885 through June of 1887, the Japanese Village and Exhibition which had been created in Knightsbridge was a huge attraction, drawing at least one million visitors. And so, why not set his latest British-mocking plot in Japan? Gilbert was not in any way ridiculing the Japanese, but rather: the government of Great Britain, as he always wanted to do, being quite politically-involved. But he couldn't out-and-out ridicule Queen Victoria and her Parliamentary government, and so: he turned the entire story to Japan. Just as Verdi had moved his opera "A Masked Ball" first to Sweden, and then ultimately to Boston. Which still gives pause: why are these Bostonian Americans singing and speaking in Italian? Why, because they're REALLY Italians, just as The Mikado's Japanese are speaking English, and are – objects of English ridicule, as is made especially clear in Ko-Ko's aria "I've got a little list…"

Here's the plot of ***The Mikado*** – as terse as I can make it, and it's about as silly as can be:

Act ONE:

The scene is the courtyard of Ko-Ko's Palace in Titipu, and the male chorus of Japanese nobles is found sitting about and standing in various poses which might have been lifted from traditional Japanese paintings and drawings. They sing "if you want to know who we are" – which ends basically with the answer "we are Japanese gentlemen!"

Nanki-poo enters; he's the disguised son of The Mikado, who disappeared about a year earlier from the village. He sings "A Wand'ring Minstrel, I" to no great point, and inquires if anyone knows where he can find Yum-Yum, daughter of Ko-Ko, the village tailor. I trust you can already sense the general silliness from the characters' names alone…

Pish-Tush enters (he's a Lord) to ask just WHY Nanki-poo is interested in Yum-Yum and Nanki-poo tells the tale: he used to live in Titipu and developed a mad crush on Yum-Yum. But then he heard that Yum-Yum was formally betrothed to the cheap town tailor: Ko-Ko. Yum-Yum and her two sisters Peep-Bo and Pitti-Sing, incidentally: were the wards of Ko-Ko. In grief, Nanki-poo left town and – well, became a wandering minstrel, until he heard to his delight that Ko-Ko had been condemned to death for flirting and dashed back just now to Titipu, to see if he now had a chance with Yum-Yum. But – he's told Ko-Ko's execution was halted at the last minute and he was issued a pardon. And to make things even better, he was then rewarded by being elevated to his current position: Lord High Executioner, and given this palace.

The chorus launches into the introduction of "Defer to the Lord High Executioner" as Ko-ko enters and launches into "Taken from the county jail by a curious set of chances, Liberated then on bail, on my own recognizances…" which then shortly introduces his next – and magnificent aria: the patter-song "I've got a little list" in which he mentions all those he'd like to put on his list for execution – as they'd "not be missed." And the examples are too many to be listed here; suffice it to say that there's a tradition of re-writing the lyrics of this aria so that CURRENT personages are then included on "the list."

As there's really NO way to briefly walk you through the hilarious libretto, I'll just cut to the chase: Ko-Ko's wards are introduced as a precursor to the Andrews sisters in their aria: "Three Little Girls From School are We." Ko-Ko exits and finally Nanki-poo and Yum-Yum can be together. Still betrothed as the ward of Ko-Ko, she has no desire to marry him but – unfortunately in Japan, women don't come of age until they're 50, and that's too long to wait. And Nanki-poo was betrothed to a lady of his father's court: Katisha, who's usually portrayed as a very large, overbearing and older woman, madly in love with Nanki-poo. So: he must continue to hide from her – and that "betrothal" was another reason he went into

hiding. *(Below: the cover illustration from the original 1885 premiere program.)*

Pooh-ba, Lord High Everything Else and Pish-tush – a nobleman, then sing a trio with Ko-Ko amounting to little of anything. And finally, the First Act ends with a general chorus of contentment because – aside from all the problems everyone is facing, all is well. Until: the monstrous Katisha descends upon the stage to the general dismay of everyone (she's not very popular at all.) She knows her beloved Nanki-poo is back – and she eventually spots him in the crowd despite his attempt to hide with Yum-Yum. She demands that he step forward to be embraced; she's then furious to learn of his love for Yum-Yum and tries to reveal to everyone that he's NOT a minstrel at all, but the "son of your---" however, she's cut off by the chorus each time, so she can't reveal the truth. Livid, she then sweeps the stage of ALL the townspeople and ends by returning far upstage as the curtain falls.

ACT II:

All is well; now Yum-Yum is to marry Nanki-poo and is at her bridal bureau gazing into her mirror, as Pitti-sing and a girls' chorus sing a brief chorus about her bridal preparations. They exit, then Yum-Yum muses aloud, into the mirror, "Yes, I am indeed beautiful! Sometimes I sit and wonder, in my artless, Japanese way, why is it that I am so much more attractive than anybody else in the whole world?…." as she sings one of the most absolutely beautiful tunes Sullivan wrote, with Gilbert's lyrics allowing her to describe how incredibly beautiful she is, and comparing herself to the beauty of the sun and the moon. Just magically funny!

Her sisters Pitti-sing and Peep-Bo enter, with the gentle reminder of the reason why she's now able to marry Nanki-poo: because Ko-Ko stepped out of the way so Nanki-poo and Yum-Yum could be wed and enjoy a month of happiness, at which point Nanki-poo is to be executed by Ko-Ko, who will then be able to marry the widowed Nanki-poo himself!

Ko-Ko enters in a gloom and tells Yum-Yum that he won't be able to marry her in a month after all – because, according to Japanese law, the wife of a condemned man must be buried with her executed husband. And so there'll be no Yum-Yum for Ko-Ko to marry!

Nanki-poo has a scene with Ko-Ko: he has decided that the way to spare Yum-Yum's life is for him to perform, right now: the "Happy Despatch" – which is presumably: hari-kari or seppuku – ritual self-disemboweling. Ko-Ko protests because there's a contract between the two and he refuses to allow Nanki-poo to break it. And to make things worse, The Mikado is arriving to make sure the sentence of death on this miserable minstrel has been carried out – not realizing Nanki-poo is his own son. But Ko-Ko is adamant that the execution must be carried out in one month, according to their agreement – in part, because Ko-Ko has never killed before and must study how it's done, and then to experiment so he'll be prepared in a month – but then he admits he cannot kill ANYONE, breaking down. Ko-Ko then has an idea: he tells Nanki-poo and Yum-Yum to immediately go get married; Yum-Yum is concerned about being buried alive, but Ko-Ko reassures her that that'll be worked out. He also asks for and receives the promises of all the collected nobles that they will swear on an affidavit that they witnessed Ko-Ko execute Nanki-poo, even though committing perjury is itself punishable by death.

The Mikado and Katisha enter together as they sing a duet about "letting the punishment fit the crime" – because "I'm the emperor of Japan" – "and I'm his daughter-in-law-elect!"

As they arrive, he's presented with the certificate of execution by the "coroner" – Pooh-Bah. The Mikado is sorry he missed the execution of this minstrel, and begs Ko-Ko to describe it, which he does in agonizing detail in another hilarious aria.

But then: the Mikado reads the death certificate, and says that Nanki-poo was his son and heir-apparent, but is now dead - freshly executed! In perfectly calm terms he then discusses the fact that for that oversight, there'll have to be some sort of punishment for he who killed, and those who signed the affidavit certifying his death – something, "…lingering, with boiling oil in it, I fancy. Something of that sort. I think boiling oil occurs in it, but I'm not sure. I know it's something humorous, but lingering, with either boiling oil or molten lead. Come-come! Don't fret – I'm not a bit angry."

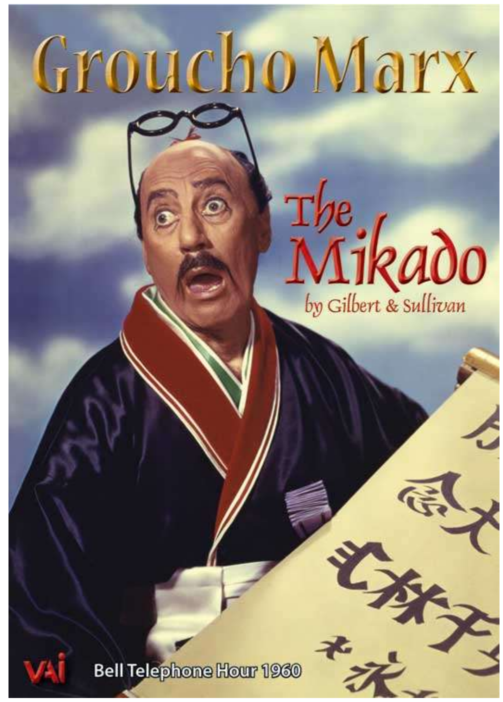
But of course, they'll have to be killed for killing his son. His party departs and then Nanki-poo and Yum-Yum arrive, on their way out of town after having just been married. The situation is explained, and as Nanki-poo is no longer available to marry Katisha, the only solution which will keep everyone alive is for Nanki-poo to let his father know he's alive and for Ko-Ko to romance and marry Katisha.

Ko-Ko then finds the still furious Katisha, who is out for HIS blood for killing her betrothed. Ko-Ko then tells the repulsive Katisha how he's always had a white-hot passion for her – and woos her, though she still hates his hands which still carry the blood of her beloved. Ko-Ko tells her that if she won't be his, he'll die on the spot of a broken heart. She says that no one ever died of a broken heart, to which he responds with another extremely famous aria: "Tit-willow" – in which a heartsick tit-willow does just that: dies of a broken heart.

Katisha melts, and they sing a duet of love, exiting. The Mikado and his party enter, demanding to see Ko-Ko and his accomplices – as he's just had a delicious lunch and wants to know if the arrangements for their torture/death have been made. Immediately, Ko-Ko and Katisha re-appear, begging for The Mikado's mercy as they're now engaged to be married; then – Nanki-poo and Yum-Yum enter, with Nanki-poo falling to his knees and telling his father that he's alive! There are some general minor complications – primarily Katisha's anger directed at Ko-Ko for knowing that Nanki-poo was still alive when he wooed her, but – Ko-Ko explains with logic that "When your Majesty says 'let a thing be done,' it's as good as done – practically, it *IS* done – because Your Majesty's will is law. Your Majesty says 'kill a gentleman' and a gentleman is told off to be killed. Consequently, that gentleman is as good as dead – practically, he IS dead – and if he *is* dead, why not say so?" The simple mind of The Mikado is impressed, saying "I see. Nothing could possibly be more satisfactory!"

And after a song of general rejoicing, all is well – though Ko-Ko must still marry Katisha, who – as she has earlier in the opera said of herself, "You hold that I am not beautiful because my face is plain. But you know nothing; you are still unenlightened. Learn, then: that it is not in the face alone that beauty is to be sought. My face is unattractive. But I have a left shoulder-blade that is a miracle of loveliness. People come from miles to see it. My right elbow has a fascination that few can resist. It is on view on Tuesdays and Fridays, on presentation of a visiting card. As for my circulation, it is the largest in the world."

And all – truly is turned from Topsy-Turvy to: very, very well – and very ***very*** silly!



Now – many of the most discerning minds throughout the past near-150 years have been great fans of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas, and perhaps there was none more in love with them than Groucho Marx himself, whom many of you know <I> knew.   He constantly sang them around the house, accompanying himself on the guitar, and in perhaps one of the most serendipitous bits of casting ever, he actually portrayed Ko-Ko in a Bell Telephone televised version of the operetta on April 29, 1960, with the great American dramatic soprano Helen Traubel as Katisha. The broadcast was kinescoped (I've got it on DVD) but though it was broadcast in color, kinescoping only preserved broadcasts in B&W. Not only was it a lifelong dream for Groucho, but the role was a perfect fit for his character persona. The cast also features the incomparable Stanley Holloway as Pooh-Bah and Groucho's own young daughter Melinda as Peep-Bo.

My description of the opera leaves out all the truly hilarious lines ranging from unexpected sarcasm to out-and-out buffoonery which ABSOLUTELY holds up to this day.

There are actually at least two overtures to The Mikado, but many years ago I took the best one - which is wonderful in that it takes many (but not all) of the greatest tunes in the opera and reveals them in a beautifully-constructed pot-pourri. Sullivan rarely (if ever) created his own overtures, instead usually leaving them to his assistant Hamilton Clarke, working under Sullivan's close supervision.

From the opening complete with forcefully regal Bass-Drum, we are then launched into the "miya-sama, miya-sama" chorus from Act II, which accompanies the entrance of The Mikado and Katisha – the pentatonic tune of which Sullivan took from an actual Japanese melody.   The action cools down, and we enter into a beautifully-rendered orchestral version of that glorious aria "The Sun, Whose Rays are all Ablaze" which Yum-Yum sings in Act II as she serenades her own beauty, now given to the oboe. Next the tempo increases (*Allegro con brio* – or *fast, with fire*) as we're given an orchestral version of the Act II breakneck patter song by Katisha and Ko-Ko "There is Beauty in the Bellow of the Blast" which then gradually slows with a *poco rallentando* as we hear the first aria from Act II – "Braid the Raven Hair" as Yum-Yum is being prepared for her wedding – and then finally, "With Aspect Stern and Gloomy Stride" as the music surges up to an exciting ending complete with swirls from the strings and woodwind.

One last note on Sir Arthur Sullivan, or perhaps two. First, Queen Victoria knighted Sullivan in 1883 for his services to music, and encouraged him to write a grand opera and presumably, to stop writing the sort of frivolity he had been composing with Gilbert. It's fascinating to imagine Gilbert boiling away over the fact HE wasn't granted a knighthood, too – although he FINALLY was, nearly a quarter century after Sullivan received HIS, and seven years after Sullivan's death. He received his knighthood from Victoria's son George; Victoria had died in 1901. And I do have to share this: Sir Arthur Sullivan's older brother Frederic had performed in three of the team's operas before he died of tuberculosis in 1877, just three weeks after his 39th birthday. His younger brother Arthur sat by his

bedside, and was inspired to write the hugely successful parlor song, "The Lost Chord" as his brother lay dying. Frederic left his pregnant wife with seven children and that last one to come to raise alone, and Arthur became their guardian and supported his brother's family until he himself died, leaving most of his estate to the children. And regarding those children? Arthur still supported the family even after they moved to California, against Arthur's advice. But while there, one of those children – Frederic(k), who bore a striking resemblance to his Uncle Arthur, became an actor and director, and (here's one of those great coincidences, or IS it?) appeared in extra roles in two Marx Brothers films! He appears briefly in 1931's **Monkey Business** onboard the luxury liner upon which the four brothers are stowaways *(see photo above – Frederick with Harpo – whose real name was ALSO Arthur, as was the name of Groucho's son, with whom I collaborated – whose life and career were integral to my own, and Groucho –*

whom I would come to know 45 years after this film and picture were shot) and in a slightly more substantial role in which he sings two lines: 1933's **Duck Soup** during the trial scene in which Chico is being tried as a spy, but which suddenly breaks out into a major musical number which is even more absurd than anything found in a Gilbert and Sullivan opera. In that musical number (*Freedonia's Going to War!*) Sullivan– who at first is a member of the judges' panel, listed as "Judge #2" – then jumps up during the number to sing "Each native son, will grab a gun…" *(at left, just as he sings those two lines)* and his moment of glory is over! Frederick would die four years later, in 1937, of a heart ailment six days after his 65th birthday. Which just made me realize: I knew a man, who knew Sir Arthur Sullivan's nephew, who certainly knew his uncle…so I have three degrees of separation from Sir Arthur Sullivan: the man who wrote ***The Mikado!***

And one (and I promise it ***IS*** the) final note on Sullivan - Stay with me here, but his late brother Frederic had been married to Charlotte Louisa Lacy and as I wrote above, when Frederic died in 1877, Charlotte was pregnant and had seven children under the age of 14. One daughter - Edith, died just after her father. Four years later - in 1881, Charlotte married Captain Benjamin Hutchinson, 13 years her junior. Charlotte's brother William Lacy – who had established a thriving business in Los Angeles, convinced Charlotte, her new husband, and six of her seven surviving children to emigrate to L.A. Her eldest son (Bertie) was left with Sir Arthur, who also paid for the family's relocation to California. THEN, in January of 1885: Charlotte died, less than a year after the move to California. And so, dear Uncle (Sir) Arthur stepped up again a few months later, and just after he finished the score to ***The Mikado***, and before its opening, trekked all the way to L.A. for a visit with his surviving nieces and nephews and Captain Hutchinson from June through August. And he then took the family on a trip to see the sights of the Western US, including Yosemite!

While in Yosemite, the news of the July 23rd death of former President Ulysses S. Grant reached the park. Sir Arthur Sullivan's presence was something of a bid deal, so he was asked to play the Chapel's organ during a memorial service honoring Grant, and: he did.

Amazingly small world, isn't it? And now, 139 years after that visit by Sir Arthur Sullivan to Yosemite – little more than 45 minutes away, 139 years after the premiere of ***The Mikado*** in London, we will offer you the overture to his greatest hit – live, and right here in Mariposa!

Franz von Suppé (1819 – 1895) ***Overture to the Operetta "Leichte Kavallerie" ("Light Cavalry")*** (1866)

Suppé was born in Dalmatia as Francesco Ezechiele Ermenegildo Cavaliere Suppé-Demelli.

But intending to be known as a "serious" composer, the man who wisely shortened his name to Franz von Suppé wrote a considerable number of musical works ranging from a Requiem and three additional Masses to art songs, symphonies and concert overtures. Despite those efforts, he was best-known in his day for his three dozen operettas, nearly all of which share absolute, equal obscurity today. Born in the town of Spalato (or – as it's called today: Split, Croatia) to a civil-servant father of vaguely Belgian lineage and a Viennese mother, he received absolutely no support from his parents for his early love of music, but fortunately did receive encouragement from both the local town bandmaster and the choir director of the Spalato cathedral – which helps to understand his passion for music of the Church. He dutifully followed his father's wishes by studying for a legal career in Padua, Italy – while privately maintaining his music studies and compositions on the side. Frequent trips during those student years to Milan only fed and whetted his musical appetite as he came to hear and know the operas of Rossini, Donizetti and the young Verdi – all men he came to know personally.

When he was 16 years old, his father died and his widowed mother moved with her son back to her native Vienna, and there: the die was cast. Plunged into certainly one of the most musical of all European capitals, Suppé dabbled with classes at the Vienna Polytechnic University and the University School of Medicine, but finally dug in his heels for a career in music. He studied privately, gave Italian lessons to support himself – and landed an unpaid, volunteer position as conductor at the Josefstadt Theater, gradually working his way up into paid positions in other towns, ending up in Bratislava from 1842-44. Though he had been writing operettas and other musical works as early as his teens, he now began composing in earnest and finally had his first stage success in 1841 with a hybrid comedic theatre-piece with songs called “Jung lustig, im Alter traurig oder Die Folgen der Erziehung” – or “Happy in Youth, Sad in Old Age or The Consequences of Education.” To think people paid cash money to see something with a title like THAT!

His career slowly moved forward: by the mid-1840s he was regularly conducting the Italian operas that were then all the rage, speculatively composing his own works on the side while retaining the more-or-less steady job as a conductor – and even, on occasion: singing roles in operas. In 1845 he struck gold: becoming music director/conductor/composer at the famed Theatre an der Wien – essentially: the Vienna Theatre, where he would remain for the next 17 years. It became a great laboratory of sorts for Suppé: he composed and sometimes scheduled his own works – and the period gave rise to more and more successful theatre pieces, Singspiels (“spoken/sung” plays or music-dramas) and even operas. With a well-regarded Requiem in 1855.

Then in 1860, with Suppé entering his forties, the successes slowly began. In that year, the staging of his Das Pensionat initiated a new genre of Viennese operetta at Theatre an der Wien – and just when things were on a roll, the owner of the theatre went bankrupt in1862. But by then, Suppé had becoming a promising commodity and he was quickly snatched up by the Carltheatre – where his career as a composer of operettas would be made, and solidified – at least for the rest of his lifetime. He would eventually retire from the Carltheatre in1882 after a falling-out with management over his opinion that the failure of his Das Herzblattchen (The Sweetheart) was strictly due to it being badly-staged. Beginning with Das Corps der Rache (The Revenge Corps) in 1864 with his mature period to his final, incomplete operetta Das Modell – left unfinished at his death in 1895: there lay 31 years of not only operettas but nearly 20 operas as well, a total of 50 in his lifetime, including the remains of Das Modell, as finished by others. Although his full catalogue of works (mostly all theatre) is over 200. His prime contribution to music, and particularly to music of his day: was a hybrid combination of Italianate comedy with solid Viennese workmanship – even more so than the up-and-coming Johann Strauss (who would push things into a mostly-lighter direction,) Suppé was a solidly-trained craftsman whose tremendous background of decades in the theatre beginning in his teen years: really delivered the goods.

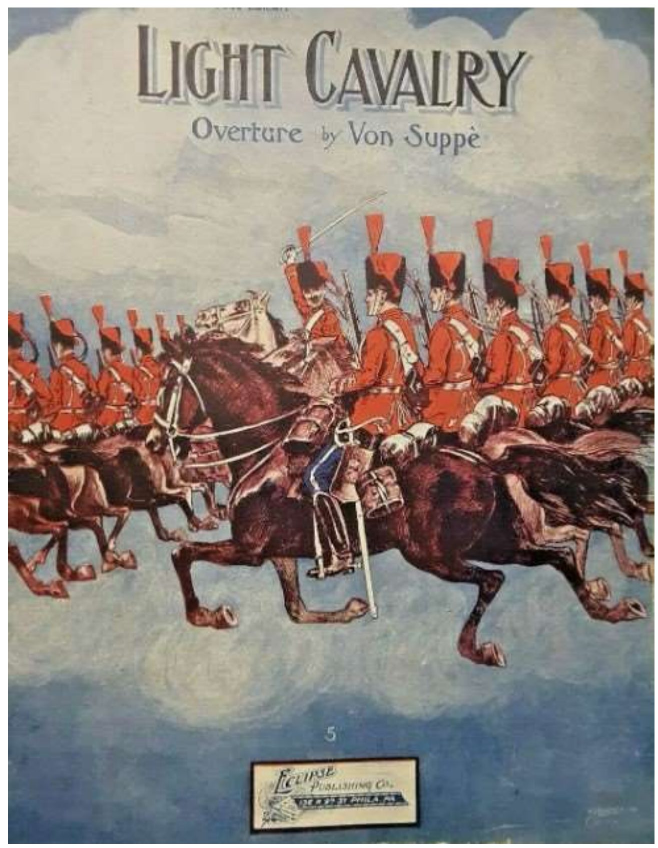
What of the story of this operetta? Well, pretty standard stuff. You have your pretty young thing (Vilma) who's an orphan to boot - as a child, she was the beloved "adoptee" of the entire village, which collectively looked after her well-being. But now that she's grown into a VERY attractive young woman, every male villager is madly in love with her. And naturally the women of the village (and especially the wives) begin to look at Vilma differently. The town government is torn; do they DO something about Vilma to appease their wives - even though every man of the council INCLUDING Mayor Bums: is gaga over her?

Vilma, (of course) only loves one man: Hermann. His guardian, (of course) is Mayor Bums, who adamantly refuses to allow the two to marry. And so (of course, again) therein we have the complications of the story. And leave it to a company of mounted Hussars from Hungary to ride into town to save the day! The disheartened Hermann, sad that he will never be able to marry the girl of his dreams, attempts to enlist with the Hussars. Janos (the commander of the Hussars) realizes that things in the Village are a little...unfair. And so he pledges to help Vilma and Hermann, essentially by exposing the hypocrisy of the town. In a NICE way, though - as a bit of a prank. Riding to the rescue, to save the day. In effect.

Janos gets down to brass tacks: he gains the confidence of Mayor Bums and his friend Pankraz - and tells them (to their delight) that he will arrange a private little...encounter - between them and the object of their affection: Wilma. However, he instead persuades Pankraz' wife Eulalia to meet him at the rendezvous place (she's wild about the dashing Janos) while also making sure Mayor Bums' wife Apollonia is within earshot of the scene of the soon-to-be-near-crime. And of course, just to make things merrier, two other young village men - Carol and Stefan - have planned to meet in the dark at this VERY same spot with Dorothea and Regina: the daughters of upstanding civic leaders. You see where this is all going?

A bit of backstory: Janos (in his impoverished youth) had a similar story: he was in love with Zinka, but was not allowed to marry her as he was well below her class standing. He left their village and never saw her again. Now, alone in the dark, he disconsolately sings a song he often shared with Zinka those many years before. Until he - to his shock, hears someone ELSE singing that song. It's none other than Vilma - who sings this song SHE had learned from her own mother in childhood. The mother who left her an orphan when she was very young. Janos searches in the dark for the singer, finds Vilma - and wouldn't you know it: when they compare stories, they learn that Vilma's mother WAS Zinka, and: Janos is none other than Vilma's FATHER! Of course, he's even more upset now by the village's treatment of his own daughter, in her young womanhood - and so his prank to embarrass the entire village by showing their cruelty up for what it is: comes off splendidly. They realize they've all behaved like fools and Janos then "persuades" Mayor Bums to allow his son Hermann to marry Janos' daughter: Vilma.

Rights have been wronged, miscreants have been put in their places, Vilma now knows who her parents were - though her father Janos now must ride off with his Hussars, presumably to save the day elsewhere. To great - though perhaps not ENTIRELY universal celebrations of joy.



Fun, huh? It's just a shame that we only know this operetta from its world-renowned, beloved overture. What of "Light Cavalry" and Suppé's operettas today? Well – you'd be hard-pressed to find a production of any of them now. And his more substantial operas – even less so. They're just not as respected and well-liked as they were in Suppé's day. Call it the fashion of the times, if nothing else. But oh, those operettas' overtures! Long after Suppé's death they would become a staple of cartoons, early silent-movie music, television and radio, and eventually: to permeate pop culture. "Morning, Noon and Night in Vienna," "Poet and Peasant," "The Beautiful Galatea," "Jolly Robbers" and others are very familiar, but "Leichte Kavallerie" or "Light Cavalry" is probably his best-known; from the opening (and recurrent) fanfare to the rollicking cavalry 'galloping' tune, you've heard his music before! I've programmed this one on at least two of our past Mariposa Yosemite Symphony Orchestra concerts and it never fails to please our audiences.

A final thought or two? Even though Suppé's operettas were popular at the time and usually financially successful too, it didn't stop his contemporaries from taking potshots. One Viennese music critic glibly noted that Franz' music was NOT the "heady wine of Johann Strauss, Jr. but a Dalmatian Suppe (soup.)" Amazing what passed for "witty" music criticism back then. You'd never read THAT sort of line today, would you?!

Johann Strauss (II) (1825 – 1899) *An der Schönen Blauen Donau (On the Beautiful Blue Danube) Waltzes, Op. 314* (1867)

And SPEAKING of Johann Strauss, Jr:

Though his music and that of many of his fellow Viennese composers best known for their waltzes, quadrilles, galops, polkas - and the operettas from which many of those pieces came - are associated with the New Year celebrations, I've regularly programmed quite a few on our December Festive Holiday Concerts. And why not?

The Strauss dynasty began with Johann Strauss II's great-grandfather Johann Michael Strauss, a Hungarian Jew who immigrated from his hometown of Ofen to Vienna in 1750, becoming the menial employee of Count Franz von Roggendorff. But it wasn't until the 1804 birth of Johann Michael's grandson Johann Strauss (Sr. - father of Johann II) that the MUSICAL dynasty would be hatched. That very Johann Strauss (the father) was an accomplished musician and composer who lifted his family line from mere mundane employment (his father Franz Strauss had been a waiter, and then ran the small tavern named *Zum Heiligen Florian* in Vienna) to artistry - and international renown.

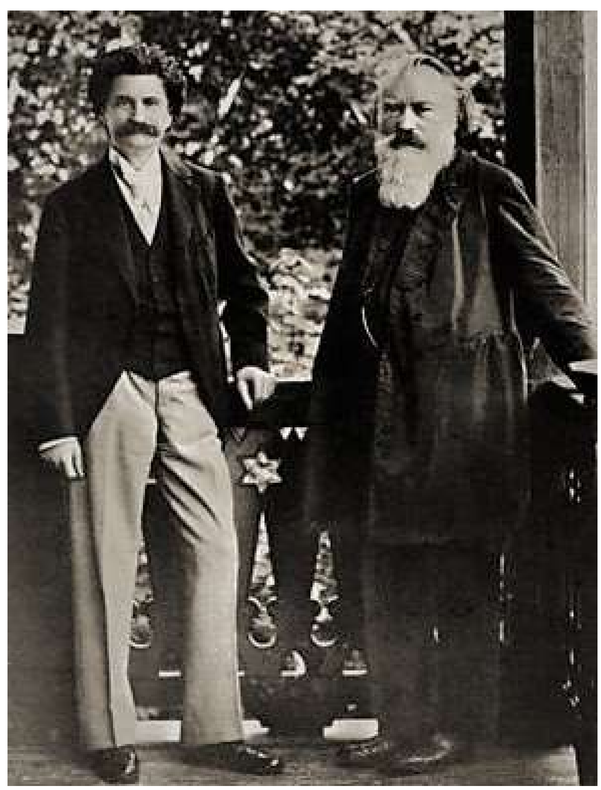
Johann (the dad) gained fame and fortune with his dance orchestra in Vienna – but was a strict disciplinarian who laid down the law: none of his six children were to have anything to do with music – and he decreed future non-musical careers for each of his sons, whether they were interested or not. Well, stern martinet: think twice before telling your children what to do.

You see where I'm going. Of course Johann Jr. was captivated by music, studying the violin in secret with the concertmaster of the father's own orchestra. But Pop caught the kid practicing the violin one day and punished him violently (now THERE'S a new one: a parent punishing a kid for actually practicing an instrument) with father claiming he would "beat the music out of" his son. He was probably only trying to spare his kids the uncertainly and inconstancy of the music profession, but it had the opposite effect. When that same Father

Johann abandoned his family for his mistress in 1844, Strauss (Jr) was free to pursue music and probably did so vindictively after the betrayal he must have felt by that rotten father of his. He was a better musician and businessman than his father and began to be hired as his father's equal – if not his better.

The son composed music like his father, but unlike Dad, Junior really made the Viennese Waltz (which his father had pioneered) into a far more musically sophisticated art form. After Dad's early death in 1849 – the surviving 24-year-old Johann Strauss consolidated his orchestra with musicians from his father's and soon became literally the toast of the international music world, to a far greater, more lasting degree than his father ever had. Talk about revenge.

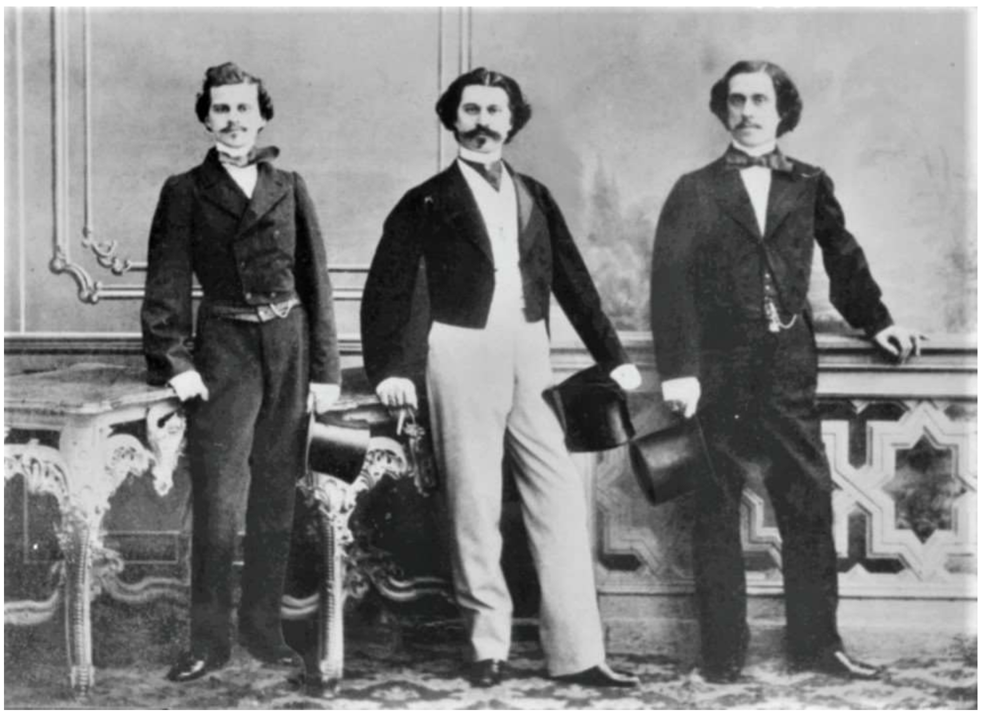
As Strauss' name and prestige grew, his circle began to include some of the cream of the world of music, nobility, monarchy – and many other influential realms. He became a great lifetime friend of Johannes Brahms - the man who was the epitome of "serious" classical music, and who was seen as the continuation of Beethoven. Brahms, though - who on more than one occasion noted that he would have given anything to have written ***An der Schönen Blauen Donau*** and once went so far as to consent to Strauss' wife Adele's request to him to sign her fan. And Brahms immediately complied by transcribing on it a couple bars from her husband's ***Blue Danube***, along with the words "alas, not by Johannes Brahms!" And he genuinely MEANT it.



(At right, great friends Strauss and Brahms at the villa the Strausses kept in the Austrian spa town of Bad Ischl, 1894 - and yes, Adele was present, too. Brahms visited the Strausses annually, usually each summer - and spent a good deal of time at the spa town where he also composed a great deal of his late chamber music.)

Between father Johann Sr, Johann II and his two brothers Josef and Eduard, and Johann Strauss III (son of Eduard,) the family's combined output numbered over 1,500 orchestral works. Johann Strauss II (or Junior) - the most famous and accomplished member, eventually composed some 500 waltzes, polkas, quadrilles, marches and galops, as well as at least 17 operettas on his own.   His most famous operetta by far – is ***Die Fledermaus*** - the German word for "flying/flitter mouse" – or more directly, "bat." Though sometimes the operetta is also known in the plural as ***Die Fledermause*** or even as ***The Bat's Revenge***.   Whatever the case, it's a frothy Viennese party, with a detailed yet inconsequential plot to serve as the structure to hold all the fun together.   I've programmed its wonderful overture with the orchestra in the past.

Johann Strauss II's two younger brothers Josef and Eduard were not as musically-inclined as the first-born.   Those two intended careers in totally different realms than the arts, but - big brother Johann II had created an empire, and a highly-successful one at that, and needed someone to help expand the franchise, so both were dragged - - errr: drafted into the now-family-business.



(*The three brothers are shown in their earlier days at right: L-R, Eduard, Johann and Josef.)*

It's important to place Vienna in the second half of the 19th century into perspective: it was the fulcrum of culture; as the capital of the Austro-Hungarian empire (following the creation of that powerhouse in 1867) which combined the best, most musically-relevant and developed portions of Europe including Austria, Germany, Bohemia, Slovakia, Hungary and even northern Italy.   THIS was the seat of musical relevance.   And the impact of the Strausses - and to a lesser extent, their compatriots/rivals including Joseph Lanner and certainly Franz von Suppé - created one of the most distinctive and long-lasting musical traditions in the dance music of Vienna. Johann II was lauded during his lifetime, and continues to be known as "The Waltz King" to this very day. And it was THAT musical dance form more than any other which is his legacy.   Some Strauss waltzes are known by the singular "waltz" and some by the plural "waltzes" - and that's largely due to the fact that the form Strauss refined was usually an introduction followed by five waltzes and then the coda-ending.   So, for example: to call that most famous one of all - the ***Blue Danube Waltzes*** is correct as it consists of five distinct, though related waltzes. His most famous waltzes include the ***Emperor***, ***Wine, Women and Song***, ***Vienna Blood***, ***Vienna Bon-Bons***, ***Roses from the South***, ***Thousand and One Nights***, and many more, including - the most famous one of them all, below. There IS one that's not often played, but contains one of my favorite tunes composed by Strauss: the ***Lagunen Waltzes***, but I have yet to find it with score and parts. Perhaps I'll just have to make my own edition for the MYSO…

His was one of the most wildly successful, financially-lucrative careers enjoyed by ANY musician up to his time, and really: far better than most musicians even up to and including our OWN time! Internationally-traveled, internationally feted from Russia to the U.S., Johann Strauss II died at the age of 73 after being diagnosed with pleural pneumonia and was buried (where else?) in Vienna. The city to which he gave an entire musical identity - a just-plain-fun, yet highly-sophisticated musical image any OTHER city would give its right arm to possess.

At left: the "Golden Strauss" monument in Vienna's Stadtpark: a gold-gilt life-sized bronze statue of the man who got the Viennese up on their feet and: dancing.

An der schönen blauen Donau ***(By the beautiful blue Danube)*** ***Waltz(es)*** was originally composed as a vocal piece for the Vienna Men's Choral Association. Though not an immediate smash hit, it soon became so incredibly popular that it was to be regarded as something of an alternative Austrian national anthem - a role it enjoys to this day. And I hope it comes as no shock that the music was composed first - with NO connotation to any river or anything else - strictly as that piece for chorus, THEN Strauss wrote a rushed piano accompaniment, and only THEN were the somewhat sarcastic, comedic original words added by writer Josef Weyl - with the NAME of that waltz and its association with the beautiful blue Danube - being added last! Amazing, isn't it: it just feels as though the music was conceived to represent the gently-flowing, azure-blue river, but: nope!

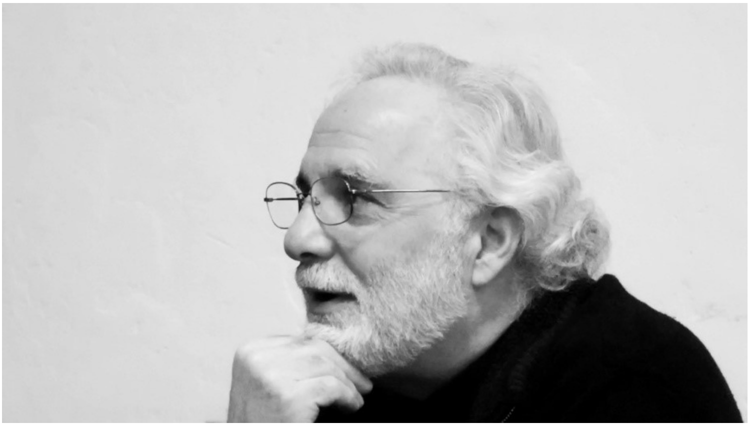
Strauss wasted no time creating a strictly-orchestral version, and it's in that form the piece has become one of the most recognizable musical works ever. And perhaps wisely, Strauss had poet Franz von Gernerth write NEW lyrics which were a little more...respectful and in keeping with the famous piece that ***Blue Danube*** had become. Though they're very rarely heard in performance today.

As for the beloved strictly-orchestral version? From the concert hall to the movie score it's a knockout piece of music. Who can forget the amazingly graceful space station gently floating to the sound of this great waltz in Stanley Kubrick's landmark 1968 film of Arthur C. Clarke's **2001: A Space Odyssey**? And likewise, despite the incongruity in one's mind of a Viennese waltz from the 1860s being used as background music for a space flick that takes place both three (the novel) to four (the film) million years in the past to a century after that waltz composer's death, a bone-shaped space station in the black vacuum of space, in the time of rocket travel unimaginable to Strauss; the sound of that graceful WALTZ and yet: it WORKS! Maybe it was just Kubrick - not to go all sidebar on you, but I mean - after all, he ALSO used the opening of Richard (no relation) Strauss' ***Also Sprach Zarathustra*** ***(The Spake Zarathustra***) - the symphonic poem based on the Nietzsche novel for ANOTHER iconic film moment: the monolith reveal - and who woulda thunk THAT might work?

But back to the *Johann* Strauss waltz. Not much more to say about it, other than the fact that Strauss himself was a little surprised by the success of that piece. Matter of fact, when he visited Boston only five years after ***Blue Danube*** was first born, he (get this!) had been contracted to conduct the piece - with words - for the 1872 Boston Jubilee. The forces he conducted in that Boston event? A chorus of 20,000(!) and an orchestra of 1,000 more musicians. And in order that everyone in the musical forces was watching when time came for Strauss to give the downbeat, a small CANNON was shot off to get everyone's attention! Strauss himself was more than flabbergasted, describing the sound of those 21,000 musicians singing and playing his ***By the Beautiful Blue Danube*** on THIS side of the Atlantic - in, again: the most incongruous of circumstances as: "a holy din."

It's hard to imagine that glorious set of waltzes being described in that manner, in ANY context. But then again…

Les Marsden (1957-): *Sierra Christmas Party* (2002; 2011 version)



This final piece on our concert program will ALSO celebrate its 22nd Anniversary, having closed our very first concert to the very day – in 2002. I'm sure no one wants to hear its genesis AGAIN, but for those who don't know, I encountered local legend Miriam Costello at the post office in town a couple weeks before that first concert, and she asked if I planned to have Christmas music on the program. I hadn't planned on it, as I was so focused on it being our very first concert – but realized she was right. I dashed home, wrote it out literally in a couple of days, got it to the musicians and rehearsed it just in time to perform on December 21, 2002. A couple years later I decided to add a carol or two each year until it got so out of hand I decided to cut it back down to what I considered to be its optimal length and froze it in its 2011 version. In this incarnation, and after an introduction which briefly hints at the "Hallelujah Chorus" from Handel's "Messiah," you'll hear the following Christmas carols, in order:

1) Deck the Halls (With Boughs of Holly)
2) We Wish You a Merry Christmas
3) Silent Night, Holy Night
4) God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen
5) Good King Wenceslas
6) O, Holy Night
7) Jingle Bells

There's really very little else to be said about this, my errant musical child – other than the fact that we do wish you the best sentiment, as is contained in the spoken line just before the piece's conclusion. And in any case, we do offer to you, ***sincerely*** – with this concert: a wonderfully Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukah, Winter Solstice, Happy Kwanzaa, Feliz Navidad, Joyeux Noel, Pancha Ganapati, Jolly Yule. As I wrote at the start of my original program notes 22 years ago, from this orchestra's very beginning, I wanted our annual Festive Holiday Concert to be an evening during which we might all come, friends, relatives, neighbors, strangers of all beliefs – to gather together under the finest of circumstances for a little good old-fashioned musical Holiday joy — best summed up by that (spoken) final line of Sierra Christmas Party. No matter what holiday you celebrate, the line works for 'em all and so please: if you do remember that line, feel free to jump right in and shout it out with us, all the musicians of the MYSO, (or ***MY*** Symphony Orchestra) which is truly: ***YOUR*** **very own symphony orchestra!**