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CLASSICS

MENDELSSOHN

Violin Concerto in D minor
Concerto for Violin, Piano & Strings

**TAMSIN
WALEY-COHEN** *violin*

HUW WATKINS *piano*

Orchestra of the Swan
David Curtis *conductor*



FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847)

VIOLIN CONCERTO IN D MINOR CONCERTO FOR VIOLIN, PIANO AND STRING ORCHESTRA IN D MINOR

Violin Concerto in D minor

- | | | |
|---|---------------|--------|
| 1 | Allegro molto | [9.12] |
| 2 | Andante | [7.41] |
| 3 | Allegro | [5.16] |

Concerto for Violin, Piano and String Orchestra in D minor

- | | | |
|---|---------------|---------|
| 4 | Allegro | [18.55] |
| 5 | Adagio | [9.00] |
| 6 | Allegro molto | [9.41] |

Total timings: [59.42]

TAMSIN WALEY-COHEN VIOLIN
HUW WATKINS PIANO
ORCHESTRA OF THE SWAN
DAVID CURTIS CONDUCTOR

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ARTIST NOTE

As I was first becoming acquainted with these two early Mendelssohn concerti, I was captivated by the youthful spirit which seems to bound off the page.

The D minor Concerto for Violin is the earlier of the two, and evidently so – the almost childlike innocence of the emotional content is constantly charming. As I was playing it, I was struck by the contrast between the heavily Baroque influenced orchestral exposition and the violin's much more improvisatory line. Time and again, the operatic quality of the writing grabbed my attention; here like a coloratura, there a recitativo, and always with the natural and breathing lines we associate with Mendelssohn. The playful passages in the outer movements tell of the brilliant virtuosity which will flow from his pen in so many of his later works, including the Double Concerto on this disc. The similarities between the slow movement of the D minor Concerto played here and the famous E minor concerto are remarkable. Indeed, both are really Songs Without Words; simple Gondolier's songs, gently lilting, without pretension. The Klezmer-like dancing last movement seemed to come to life during our rehearsals, telling of Mendelssohn's

Jewish roots. In addition to the great artists and thinkers of the time that would frequent his family home, the Mendelssohn family's Jewish heritage clearly remained with them.

Written only the following year, the Concerto for Violin, Piano and String Orchestra in D minor brings us a much more mature musician. His grasp of form is impressive, showcased in each movement, but in particular the colossal first movement. Here, his teenage exuberance is in full swing. Brilliantly virtuosic, tender, playful, and restless, he could hardly have packed more in. Everything is on a grand scale yet what fun it is to play! After the engaging orchestral exposition, it is a wonderful release when the piano and violin finally begin in a whirl of notes. Again, some of the recitativo passages are remarkable in their bold romanticism and freedom of expression. The noble, simple and beautiful second movement is masterful, and the last is dazzling in its cascades of sound – chasing, arguing, teasing, flirting, and dancing, always fleet of foot.

Both are a joy to play, for their beauty and brilliance, and bringing us back to the teenage world of endless exploration and possibility.

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Mendelssohn: Two Early Concertos

'Mendelssohn ... is the Mozart of the 19th century; the most brilliant among musicians, the one who has most clearly recognized the contradictions of the time, and the first to reconcile them'. This was the verdict of Robert Schumann, greeting the publication of Felix Mendelssohn's D minor Piano Trio in 1840. The comparison with Mozart was already almost a commonplace, partly because of Mendelssohn's sure instinct for classically-balanced form, and partly for the seeming youthfulness of his inspiration. Both composers, of course, had been child prodigies, and in fact it is the brilliant music of Mendelssohn's extreme youth that has continued to uphold his reputation.

It's often said that if Mozart and Mendelssohn had both died at the age of 20, Mendelssohn would have been accounted by far the greater composer – for though both of them wrote copious music from an early age, Mendelssohn's early works surpass Mozart's in both substance and originality. It was only later that Mozart's genius came to full fruition, while in the view of many critics Mendelssohn never surpassed his teenaged achievements in works like the String Octet or the incidental music to *A Midsummer*

Night's Dream. From his earliest years he seemed to have a natural affinity for string instruments, as is well illustrated by the twelve-and-a-bit *Sinfonias* for string orchestra he wrote between the ages of 12 and 14 (student works half-way between Baroque symphonies and string quartets writ large) and the aforementioned String Octet, written at age 16, essentially conceived as a symphony-like double string quartet.

More than 160 years after his death, Mendelssohn's position as a crucial link between the Classical style of Mozart and Beethoven and the high Romantic style of Schumann and Brahms is quite secure. Yet he is still an imperfectly-known composer, whose reputation continues to rest on a very partial selection of his works: the last two symphonies, say, the Violin Concerto in E minor, the *Hebrides* overture, the *Midsummer Night's Dream* music, the Octet and some of the other major chamber compositions and the *Songs without Words* for piano. Even the music of his brilliant early years is by no means familiar in its entirety: for instance, it includes the two concertos heard on this disc, written between the ages of 13 and 14.

It is important to understand the milieu in which Mendelssohn's early symphonic works appeared.

As grandson of the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn and son of the banker Abraham Mendelssohn, whose wife also belonged to a prominent Jewish family, Mendelssohn and his siblings were raised in an extraordinarily cultured background and were given the best possible education. When the family relocated from Hamburg to Berlin in 1811, for fear of Napoleon, their house became an intellectual and artistic salon frequented by leading artists, scientists and musicians. It has been said that 'Europe came to their living room'. In addition to such luminaries as Hegel, Heine, von Humboldt and the mathematician Dirichlet, Mendelssohn studied with Zelter, one of the first 19th-century enthusiasts for the music of JS Bach, and regularly met leading musicians from the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. His adolescent works – even his orchestral works – were performed at his parents' house by a private orchestra drawn from these players. In such an environment his musical genius flowered and he wrote a remarkable series of works: no doubt intended at first for domestic consumption, but also with his ambitions fixed on a wider world. For example in 1822-23, in addition to the two concertos featured here, he composed a second Piano Quartet (the first was already published!), a Piano Concerto, a Concerto for 2 pianos, eight

of his String Symphonies and an opera, *The Two Nephews*.

The **Concerto in D minor for violin and string orchestra** dates from 1822: that is, 22 years before Mendelssohn's 'other' and much more famous Violin Concerto in E minor. The piece has a curious history. After Mendelssohn's death in 1847, his widow gave the manuscript to the renowned violinist-composer Ferdinand David, a close friend of Mendelssohn who had premiered the E minor concerto; but David apparently did nothing with it, and the score returned to the Mendelssohn family and was handed down within the family for several generations. At some point after World War II it was acquired by the London-based rare book dealer (and amateur violinist) Albi Rosenthal, who in the spring of 1951 showed this 'lost' Mendelssohn concerto to the world-famous violin virtuoso Yehudi Menuhin, who as a teenager had premiered the 'lost' violin concerto of Schumann. Menuhin was immediately attracted to the work and bought the rights to it from the surviving members of the Mendelssohn family, then living in Switzerland. He gave the work its first public performance at Carnegie Hall, New York on 4 February 1952, conducting a string orchestra with his violin bow, and it was published the

same year. Subsequently Menuhin played the concerto many times and made three recordings of it, but it has never entered the mainstream repertoire, remaining rather on the fringes of it.

Among his other talents, Mendelssohn was an excellent violinist even in his childhood, and gave his first recital at the age of 9, though he later took the piano for his chief instrument. He wrote the D minor Concerto not for himself but for his friend and violin teacher Eduard Rietz. Rietz was only three years Mendelssohn's senior – he would later help to found the Berlin Philharmonic Society and was the concertmaster when the 19-year-old Mendelssohn revived Bach's *St Matthew Passion* in 1829, a legendary performance which did much to restore public awareness of Bach's music.

This concerto for violin and strings is, in a sense, a cousin of Mendelssohn's contemporary series of symphonies for string orchestra. Like them it derives not so much from Mozart or Beethoven as from CPE Bach and the North German symphonic school; equally important is the influence of the French violin school represented by Viotti and his Parisian followers, who included Rodolphe Kreutzer, Pierre Rode (Eduard Rietz's teacher) and Pierre Baillot, with whom the young

Mendelssohn had studied in Paris in 1816. The concerto's three movements represent a kind of historical progression. The first, with its angular, broken melodic lines, recalls the mannered *empfindsam* (ultra-sensitive) style associated with CPE Bach. Unlike the later E minor concerto it begins with an orchestral exposition, and is continuously restless in mood. By contrast the opening of the D major *Andante* is based on a theme at once serenely classical, even Mozartian in its poise; while the finale, a lively, humorous rondo in a popular (almost gypsy) style, bristles with solo figurations reflecting the virtuoso styles of Mendelssohn's own time. (There are written-out cadenzas in both the second and the third movements.) As Yehudi Menuhin declared, it shows a remarkable freedom and elasticity of form.

It was not long afterwards, in 1823, that Mendelssohn composed the **Concerto for Violin, Piano and String Orchestra in D minor**. Following the composition of the D minor Violin Concerto and the A minor Piano Concerto composed earlier in 1822 this may have seemed to him like a logical next step (he probably envisaged Rietz and himself as soloists), though there were few earlier examples to which he could have looked as models. He may have had in

mind Beethoven's Triple Concerto for violin, cello, piano and orchestra; he would certainly have known that Mozart began such a work only to abandon it (leaving a tantalizing fragment, K135f anh. 56). Laid out on an altogether larger scale than the D minor Violin Concerto, this Double Concerto is one of Mendelssohn's most brilliant adolescent works. Superficially the two solo instruments would seem to be almost incompatible, though of course the pianoforte of Mendelssohn's day was a gentler, lighter beast than today's concert grand: but he uses them with such resource and knowledge of their respective qualities that there is never a sense of incongruity. They dialogue with one another, they mimic each other, the piano accompanies the violin (and vice versa) and they are also given solo spots of their own.

The piece clocks in at nearly 40 minutes, and every one of them is entrancing. The grand first movement *Allegro*, a spacious concertante sonata form with double exposition for soli and orchestra and cadenzas for both soloists, takes up more than half the piece and displays precisely that perfect command of form which Mendelssohn seems to have been born with. The *Adagio* opens with an orchestral introduction setting out the main theme, which is then taken

up by the piano, the violin only entering later, after which the orchestra has little to contribute while the two soloists engage in an extended, almost operatic dialogue. The effervescent *Allegro molto* finale, in sonata form with a pell-mell first and a sweetly lyrical second subject, is an utter delight of post-Mozartian charm and tremendous energy, culminating in a breathtakingly brilliant conclusion.

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TAM SIN WALEY-COHE N

Tamsin Waley-Cohen is associate artist with Orchestra of the Swan and performs as a soloist with many others including the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestra of St John's, London Concert Orchestra and London Chamber Orchestra, and the Brighton Philharmonic, under conductors including Tamas Vasary, Andrew Litton, Jose Serebrier, Shlomo Mintz and Nicolae Moldoveanu. She has played at the Cadogan, Queen Elizabeth and Barbican halls in London, Symphony Hall Birmingham, Bridgewater Hall Manchester, the Liszt Academy Hall, Budapest and in venues across the UK and the Continent. She has performed at the Wigmore Hall and Cadogan Hall in London, as well as in concerto and chamber music concerts in Italy, France and Sweden. Tamsin's debut recording 'Americans in Paris' was released on the Champs Hill label in 2013. She is now a Signum Artist with several new recordings planned, including Vaughan Williams' "The Lark Ascending" and a chamber recording of music from the year 1917 by Debussy, Elgar Respighi and Sibelius.



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In demand as a recitalist, Tamsin's partners include Huw Watkins, Tom Poster and Time Horton. She has worked with artists such as Andreas Haefliger, Heinz Holliger and Anssi Kartonnen and premiered works by composers including Torsten Rasch and Richard Causton; at a recent Presteigne festival she gave the premiere of a new "Concertino" written for her by Huw Watkins. Tamsin values her experience as a chamber musician and has formed the Honeymead Ensemble, resident at the Tricycle Theatre in London as well as the Honeymead Festival on Exmoor. In its first four years it has included Adrian Brendel, Guy Ben-Ziony, Leon McCauley, Thomas Carroll, and Sarah-Jane Bradley. Tamsin has performed in many festivals - Cheltenham, Academia San Felice, Florence Chamber Music, The Red Violin, The Two Moors, Stiff and Presteigne, and in 2010 made her American debut with the Mendelssohn Concerto in the Bowdoin Festival.

Tamsin Waley-Cohen was born in London in 1986. She became a Foundation Scholar, studying with Itzhak Rashkovsky, at the Royal College of Music where she won all available awards, including – twice – the concerto competition, and was their String Player of the Year in 2005. Numerous competition successes include

winning the 2005 Royal Overseas League String Prize and the 2007 J&A Beare Bach competition.

Tamsin has been a regular participant at the International Musicians' Seminar at Prussia Cove since she was 16. She has also participated in master classes given by Ida Haendel, Igor Ozim, and Ruggiero Ricci, the latter describing her as "the most exceptionally gifted young violinist I have ever encountered."

She is the current Artistic Director of London's Tricycle Theatre's Chamber Music Series in Kilburn. Since 2007 Tamsin has played the 1721 ex-Fenyves Stradivarius violin.

HUW WATKINS

Huw Watkins was born in Wales in 1976. He studied piano with Peter Lawson at Chetham's School of Music and composition with Robin Holloway, Alexander Goehr and Julian Anderson at Cambridge and the Royal College of Music. In 2001 he was awarded the Constant and Kit Lambert Junior Fellowship at the Royal College of Music, where he now teaches composition.

As a pianist, Huw Watkins is in great demand with orchestras and festivals including the London Sinfonietta, Britten Sinfonia, the BBC orchestras and Aldeburgh and Cheltenham Festivals. Huw has also developed a strong relationship with the Orchestra of the Swan where he is 'Composer in the House' and with whom he has performed regularly over the years. Strongly committed to the performance of new music, Huw has given premieres of works by Alexander Goehr, Peter Maxwell Davies, Michael Zev Gordon and Mark-Anthony Turnage. He recently presented a programme of Hans Werner Henze's piano works at the BBC's Total Immersion day at the Barbican.



A favourite partner for chamber collaborations, Huw Watkins performs regularly with his brother Paul Watkins, as well as Alina Ibragimova, Tamsin Waley-Cohen, James Gilchrist, Daniel Hope, Nicholas Daniel, Sebastian Manz, Mark Padmore, Carolyn Sampson, and Alexandra Wood. Recently Huw has featured as both Composer in Residence and pianist at festivals including Presteigne and Lars Vogt's 'Spannungen' Festival in Heimbach, Germany.

Huw Watkins is one of Britain's foremost composers. His music has been performed throughout Europe and North America.

Huw is regularly featured on BBC Radio 3, both as a performer and as a composer. He has recorded for Chandos, Nimbus, Wergo, EMI Classics, Champs Hill and Signum. Most recently, NMC Records have released a disc dedicated to Huw Watkins' work.

ORCHESTRA OF THE SWAN

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David Le Page
Amelia Jones
Kokila Gillett
Shelley Van Loen
Simon Howes

2nd Violin

Cathy Hamer
Amy Littlewood
Caroline Mitchell
Naomi Rump

Viola

Adrian Turner
Vanessa Murby
March Chivers

Cello

Nick Stringfellow
Robyn Austin
Anna Joubert

Double Bass

Lucy Heath
Sam Riches

“... a brilliant performance.”

Daily Telegraph

“Orchestra of the Swan does a fine job of revealing the qualities of this master”

New York Times

Orchestra of the Swan is resident in Shakespeare's Stratford-upon-Avon and Associate Orchestra at Town Hall, Birmingham, performing at major venues and festivals throughout the UK including Cadogan Hall London, Symphony Hall Birmingham, Warwick Arts Centre St David's Hall Cardiff, Bridgewater Hall, The Sage, Liverpool Philharmonic Hall, Glasgow Royal Concert Hall and the Royal Albert Hall.

OOTS is a major champion of new music and has commissioned work from Joe Cutler, Tansy Davies, Joe Duddell, Alexander Goehr, John Joubert, Joanna Lee, Roxanna Panufnik, Paul Patterson, Joseph Phibbs, Julian Philips, Dobrinka Tabakova, Param Vir, Errollyn Wallen, Shu Wang, John Woolrich and many others.

OOTS' Spring Sounds Spring Sounds Festival 2011 celebrated new work with 7 world premieres, visiting composers, soloists and conductors from the USA, a joint commission

with the American Composers Orchestra and two world premiere recordings.

TV appearances include the South Bank Show with Tasmin Little, and CDs have been Gramophone Choice, CD of the Week on Classic Fm and Washington Public Radio, and in the top 20 Classical Albums for 2011 on Chicago Public Radio. OOTS broadcasts live on BBC Radio3 and performances have been networked to 260 USA Public Radio Stations and Chinese Television featuring the cellists Julian Lloyd Webber and Jiaxin Cheng.

Orchestra of the Swan records for Avie, Naxos, MSR Classics and Somm. Repertoire includes work by Barber, Bax, Berlioz*, Brahms, Copland, Debussy, Finzi, Hans Gal, Gershwin, Daren Hagen*, Ireland, Mahler, Mozart, James Schaffer*, Schumann, Johan Strauss and Vivaldi.

*world premiere recordings.



DAVID CURTIS

Artistic Director

“Curtis's conducting, if close to Boult's, is more intimate, and slightly more perceptive”

American Record Guide (Ireland Piano concerto)

“... his imaginative programmes have a knack of making connections which are genuinely stimulating.”

The Guardian

His thought-provoking programming, infectious enthusiasm and refreshing interpretations have established him on the international stage, working in Europe, the USA and Far East, conducting the Academy of St Martin's-in-the-Field, Prague Chamber Orchestra, Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra. He appears as soloist and conductor in Finland with the Mikkeli City Orchestra, the Roveniemi Chamber and Yvaskyla Symphony Orchestras in the concert hall and on Finnish Radio.

David champions new work, premiering at least 50 works by leading composers from the UK, Europe, China and the USA including four world premieres in the Nordic Music Days for Icelandic Radio.

Recorded live in Cheltenham Town Hall, Gloucestershire on 15th February 2013.

Producer - Alexander Van Ingen

Recording Engineer - Mike Hatch

Recording Assistant - Craig Jenkins

Editor - Dave Rowell

Cover Image - © tbc

Design and Artwork - Woven Design

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FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847)

VIOLIN CONCERTO IN D MINOR

CONCERTO FOR VIOLIN, PIANO AND STRING ORCHESTRA IN D MINOR

Violin Concerto in D minor

1	Allegro molto	[9.12]
2	Andante	[7.41]
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Total timings:		[59.42]

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