

FELIX MENDELSSOHN
1809-1847

Sonata No. 1 in F minor, Op. 65, No. 1

In many ways, we can thank Mendelssohn for re-introducing the world to the genius of Bach. It was Mendelssohn who was the first to program the music of the great master on organ recitals, and it was he who resurrected many of Bach's choral works. In that era of orchestral and piano predominance, Mendelssohn also brought the organ out of relative obscurity for composers and audiences. He wrote preludes and fugues, chorale settings, and six sonatas (originally conceived as British-commissioned "voluntaries") for organ, and he carried fugues and chorale settings into his non-organ works, as well. Mendelssohn is the much-needed bridge between the vague, "organless" period following Bach's death and the re-establishment of the great German school of organ composition. The first movement of the F minor Sonata is full of Romantic-era drama, while it also incorporates soothing statements of the Lutheran chorale "Was mein Gott will, das geschehe allzeit" ("As God wills, so it will be forever"). The second movement is a welcome melodic excursion, much like a short movement for chamber ensemble. The third movement is an extended, halting recitative, pitting the quietest stops of the organ against the loudest, and proceeding without pause into the finale. The closing movement is an exciting flourish representing Mendelssohn and the organ at their symphonic, exuberant, even pianistic best.

Sonata No. 5 in D minor, Op. 65, No. 5

Bach's music was largely forgotten after his death. Mendelssohn gave us Bach back in two ways. He saw (correctly) in Bach's music the potential to instruct the world in the highest art of composition, and he himself composed in Bach's style, writing many fugues, chorale-based works, and contrapuntally driven music in all genres. The fifth Sonata for organ is a short suite with an original chorale, a pastorale, and an exuberant finale.