

wonderful sense of flow from beginning to end, however, keeping what in some hands can become a disjointed work, solidly together, capturing its many fluctuations in mood. Yes, there are a few flubbed passages, but especially since this was taped live in concert, what does that really matter when one is making real music? What is more peculiar to this recital is the chosen companion work, Bizet's brilliant, but little-played *Variations chromatiques*. My first exposure to this work came in Glenn Gould's somewhat eccentric rendition of the composition recorded back in the early 1970s. Though known today for little more than his opera *Carmen* and his incidental music to *L'arlésienne*, in his lifetime Bizet was regarded as one of the leading pianistic virtuosos of the age. It is said that he had an uncanny ability to hear a piece of music and play it back perfectly on the spot. On one such occasion it was Liszt who claimed that, after he played an extraordinarily difficult piece for a small audience, that in all of Europe only Hans von Bülow and he could master the piece, whereupon Bizet reproduced the most difficult passage in the composition both fluently and easily. Liszt's comment: "Now there are three of us, and I must add, to be just, that the youngest of us is perhaps the cleverest and the most brilliant." Even if the story weren't true, Marmontel, the famed Parisian teacher, claimed that his student Bizet "played the piano like Hummel, Heller, and Chopin with that exquisite perfection and particular taste of the great virtuosos." Bizet was clearly a master of the instrument. And a master technician it would take to manage some of the gnarly passages in his variations. From McGrory's performance it is obvious that he has not only mastered those technical hurdles, but has a real affinity with the music itself, so spirited and colorful are his readings.

In both cases I would not want to be without my favorite performances of these works—Evgeni Koroliov in the Beethoven and Setrak in the Bizet—but throughout this recital McGrory proves to be a very fine advocate of both compositions. The recorded sound is less than ideal, that of a large and resonant hall, but never so much as to distract from the music making itself. With interesting programming and very fine musicianship, I look forward to his future projects: this is an artist to watch. **Scott Noriega**

Mainly Mendelssohn: A Conversation with Nancy Green and R. Larry Todd

BY JERRY DUBINS

Ever since boarding the Good Ship *Fanfare* in 2003, I've consistently held up Nancy Green's JRI recording of Brahms's two cello sonatas as my favorite version and a benchmark against which others are to be compared. For those performances she was joined by pianist Frederick Moyer.

For a new recording on the same label, Nancy is now joined by pianist R. Larry Todd in a collection of Mendelssohn's complete works for cello and piano. But Todd is not only Green's partner on this disc, he is Professor of Music at Duke University and one of the world's most renowned and highly distinguished Mendelssohn scholars, having published over a dozen books and many articles on the composer's music. In addition, he has authored reviews and liner notes for CDs of Mendelssohn's music, and for major publishing houses he has worked on new critical editions of a number of the composer's important scores, for example, *Elijah* and *St. Paul* for Carus Verlag. It should be mentioned as well that Todd has not limited himself to the works of Felix Mendelssohn; he has also written extensively on the life, times, and music of the composer's sister, Fanny. Nor have the Mendelssohns been Todd's sole preoccupation; he also has written on Schumann, Brahms, and Richard Strauss.

The opportunity to interview both Nancy and Larry together was absolutely tantalizing.

Jerry: Mendelssohn has always struck me as such a fascinating figure. Like Mozart, he was a natural-born genius; I don't think anyone would argue with that. Yet unlike Mozart, whose youthful inspiration matured and deepened with age, Mendelssohn's Muse, according to some, at least seems to have abandoned him towards the end. There's a famous comment about Mendelssohn being a composer who went from genius to talent. I wonder, though, if that's really true, or if some of the

perception isn't based on the really messed up numbering of the composer's catalog of works. If one goes by the opus numbers assigned to his works, the impression may well emerge of greater works coming earlier and lesser works coming later. But the opus numbers are at odds with the chronology. Based on its opus number, the famous Violin Concerto in E Minor, op. 64, for example, looks to be like a middle-period work, but actually, it's quite late, dating from 1844, just three years before Mendelssohn's death, and it's one of his very greatest works. Then too, there's the matter of the romantic trapped in the classicist's body vs. the classicist trapped in the romantic's body, a romantic composer with Victorian sensibilities. Who and what was he, really?

Larry: Well, he was all these things and much more. When one looks at the great musical prodigies, Mendelssohn ranks very high, quite arguably at the highest level. I say that not only because of his musical precocity but because of the extraordinary breadth of his intellect. Musically speaking, he stood during his time at the forefront of German and English music. He was one of the great, legendary piano virtuosos of his time, even if his refined piano technique looked back at the virtuosity of Carl Maria von Weber and Hummel rather than matching the innovations of Chopin or muscular demands of Liszt. His musical ear and abilities at improvisation were extraordinary; I mention several documented accounts in my biography, *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music*. They include improvising a quodlibet on several themes chosen by Queen Victoria in Buckingham Palace, and playing back to Wagner sight unseen and from memory bits of *Tannhäuser* that Wagner was trying out at a Leipzig gathering of the publisher Brockhaus. Mendelssohn was arguably the great organist of the century, who brought back the organ music of J. S. Bach. His significance as a conductor was enormous, as he was one of the first to conduct with a baton and to develop modern orchestral rehearsal techniques. He was a violinist and violist who mixed freely with the great musicians of the time—Paganini and Spohr among them, and took under his wing the young Joseph Joachim. Mendelssohn was such a fine string player that he occasionally picked up a part and joined in performances of his Octet. And of course, he was a versatile composer who produced many standard works still in the repertoire. He was multi-dimensional musically, like Mozart, with whom he was often compared. Now when we consider the non-musical sides of Mendelssohn's intellect, he really emerges as a polymath. It is still not well known that he was an accomplished draughtsman and painter, whose watercolors were admired by his nemesis, Richard Wagner. He was a polyglot fluent in German, French, and English who wrote about 8,000 finely turned letters, and a serious classicist steeped in Greek and Latin. He was a poet and well enough versed in theology to play a heavy role in selecting sacred texts for his oratorios. And, something that I still find hard to believe—at age 16, he translated into German Terence's comedy, the *Andrea*, preserving the meters of the original Latin in German (i.e., preserving all those fussy iambs and dactyls), at exactly the time when he was composing the Octet, one of the most brilliant, complex works in the chamber music repertoire. It's hard to make the case that he declined from being a genius to a mere talent.

Jerry: Let's talk specifically about Mendelssohn's cello works. If you leave out the newly completed *Albumblatt* and the reconstructed original version of the *Variations concertantes*, both of which we'll get to in due course, you wouldn't have enough music to fill one CD. In fact, even with those two items added, you'd still come up short, which, I'm guessing, is why you also included on your new disc the *Fantasia in G Minor* by Fanny Mendelssohn. After Beethoven's five cello sonatas and three sets of variations, it seems like the cello was relatively neglected in duo sonatas by so many of the major 19th-century composers until Brahms? I mean, I could name half-a-dozen or so cello sonatas that date from sometime between Beethoven and Brahms, but, for the most part, they're not from the pens of really big-name, mainstream composers. Why do suppose that is?

Larry: It's curious that relatively few composers entered the breach created by Beethoven's five sonatas to focus on cello repertoire. Mendelssohn is in that sense the connecting link (with Robert Schumann) between Beethoven and Brahms. It's not that there weren't concertizing cellists. There surely were, and Mendelssohn knew them quite well—Joseph Merk in Vienna; the Italian Alfredo Piatti, who claimed that Mendelssohn was writing a concerto for him (sadly, no traces survive); Lisa Cristiani, one of the few 19th-century women cellists to have a professional solo career; and, we must not forget, Jacques Offenbach, who was a cello virtuoso before he turned to opera. I suspect that for

composers, Beethoven's cello sonatas cast a long shadow—in particular, how was a composer to respond to the two late cello sonatas, with their free approach to form, rarified counterpoint, and all the rest? Already in Mendelssohn's early *Variations concertantes*, one senses him beginning to struggle with the dramatic Beethoven, as in Mendelssohn's tumultuous D-Minor variation, or in the finale that veers away from the theme to indulge in Beethovenian excursions. But for Mendelssohn, confronting Beethoven was one of many stages in his stylistic development. And so Mendelssohn's later cello works reveal other facets of his personality—an almost Mozartean balance and grace in the B♭ Sonata, an unbounded exuberance in the outer movements of the D-Major Sonata, for example.

Jerry: Often, composers are inspired by or commissioned to write works for a particular instrument by a famous virtuoso player. Was this the case with Mendelssohn's cello sonatas? Was he acquainted with a well-known performer? And if so, would Mendelssohn have sought technical advice in writing for the cello, as he did from Ferdinand David in working on the violin part for the Violin Concerto?

Nancy: Mendelssohn was himself not a cellist, but his circle included many of the most accomplished players of his time. Several of the cello works, including the early *Variations concertantes*, were written for his younger brother Paul, who must have been quite an accomplished player, given the difficulty of that piece. The *Albumblatt* in B Minor was written for the conductor/cellist Julius Rietz. And the late *Lied ohne Worte*, op. 109 was a gift for the French cellist Lisa Cristiani. She played the so-called Cristiani Strad for Mendelssohn when she visited Leipzig in 1845 (it's reproduced in the CD book), but sadly died of cholera at the young age of 26 after concertizing in Siberia. We do not know of Mendelssohn consulting extensively with cellists as he did with David on the finer details of the Violin Concerto, but knowing what we do about his meticulous approach, it's hard to imagine that he didn't brood over cellistic issues with experts—take, for example, the remarkable pizzicato/grace notes in the second movement of the D-Major Sonata. One wonders how he hit upon that idea, and with whose help?

Jerry: How does Mendelssohn's writing for the cello compare to Beethoven's? Is it more or less technically challenging, or challenging in just different ways?

Nancy: It's definitely challenging in different ways. While Mendelssohn lies extremely well for the cello and takes advantage of its strengths (Felix more than Fanny, who in her two pieces for cello and piano put several passages in an extremely high and awkward register), Beethoven seems more abstract, and not linked as much to the physicality of playing the instrument. There are many passages in Beethoven, particularly in the two late op. 102 sonatas, that require a stark impersonal sound, as if the music is not quite earthbound, whereas most of Mendelssohn's use of the cello is very warm and singing, making use of what one normally thinks of as most readily suiting the nature of the instrument. In Mendelssohn one finds many relatively long passages of riffing (i.e., in the first movement of the B♭ Sonata and the fourth movement of the D-Major Sonata), which require a very specific type of left-hand fitness and endurance. This kind of writing doesn't happen in any of the Beethoven cello/piano works except for very momentarily, although there are a few passages with arpeggiated bowing riffs in the sonatas. Mendelssohn also uses a similar but more elaborate bowing pattern in his *Variations concertantes* near the end of the piece toward the final climax, and one wonders if perhaps he got the idea from Beethoven's cello writing. When my cello is moody and not resonating freely, I find Beethoven more challenging to play because it is in general more transparent than Mendelssohn, and there is quite a bit of writing that's highly punctuated, using shorter notes that need to be articulated and artfully sculpted. If the cello doesn't speak immediately, it feels very frustrating, whereas in much of Mendelssohn's cello writing one can avoid the issue to a large extent since the writing style is more predominantly legato and the piano writing, with its abundance of arpeggiations, tends to cover up the potential problem of short notes not speaking perfectly. (These persnickety Italian instruments!)

Jerry: I suppose I might pose a similar question to Larry about the piano parts. As a general rule, most 19th-century chamber works that include piano—be they duo sonatas, trios, quartets, or quintets—present a problem of balance between the keyboard and other instruments. Partly, I'd venture, it's because the composers who wrote such works were themselves accomplished pianists, and

thus, naturally tended to favor the instrument with prominent and often dominant, virtuosic parts. Mendelssohn was no exception in that department.

Larry: Mendelssohn complained bitterly about the virtuosos of his time—the nonstop 32nd notes in Thalberg, for instance, and what he viewed as the lack of truly original ideas in Liszt (“he has many fingers, but little upstairs,” Mendelssohn observed privately, after hearing the young Liszt in Paris). Mendelssohn was definitely conflicted about his own piano writing, and he surely realized that within a short generation piano technique was radically changing. Almost in protest, it seems, Mendelssohn countered the trendy virtuoso variations of his time by writing the *Variations sérieuses*, certainly a virtuoso work, but one in which the theme is of primary significance, so that the virtuoso displays never challenge its integrity. When he composed his D-Minor Piano Trio, his friend Ferdinand Hiller thought that the figurations of the piano writing were outmoded, and so convinced Mendelssohn to rewrite the part, to make it more *au courant*. Mendelssohn’s piano parts are typically busy and require stamina, not just from the technical point of view, but also purely musical—all those cascading arpeggiations and lithesome runs are packed with intricate lines unfolding subtle voice leadings, and pose challenges of interpretation as well.

Jerry: If I’m not mistaken, it was Aaron Copland, who, in a lecture on the relationship between tempo and harmonic rhythm, stated that all of Bruckner’s fast music was slow music played fast, while all of Mendelssohn’s slow music was fast music played slow. In listening to Mendelssohn’s slow movements, it does seem as if he didn’t write the kind of expansive, slowly unfolding Adagios like we get from Beethoven and Schubert. Can you explain the musical components that contribute to Mendelssohn’s unique style, a style that’s often described by words like “fleet,” “gossamer,” and “elfin?” Clearly, his approach to scherzo movements was something entirely new. Was the fairy and magic music of Weber’s *Oberon* an influence on Mendelssohn?

Larry: I would certainly not second-guess Aaron Copland, whose perceptive observations were routinely on target. But the idea of Mendelssohn and fast tempos is a little problematic. It was Wagner who criticized the conductor Mendelssohn for taking “fast” tempos, and Wagner’s critique caught on, even though he was hardly objective in his views about Mendelssohn. For an expansive, unfolding slow movement, I would try the *Adagio* of the B♭-Major String Quintet, and there is certainly nothing rushed about “It is enough” from *Elijah*. And for static, seemingly timeless music, there is *Calm Sea* from the *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage* Overture. Regarding your other point about Mendelssohn’s style—his is a synthetic musical style that draws upon and blends several different elements. Certainly the “elfin” is one—someone once said, *pace* Weber’s *Oberon*, that Mendelssohn let the elves in the orchestra, and once they arrived, they never left. Other elements include a fascination, at times preoccupation, with Bachian chromaticism and counterpoint; a balanced melodic construction indebted to Mozart; at times a penchant toward the dramatic, revealing his immersion in Beethoven’s music; and at still other times an exploration of nuance and color, as in the “Italian” Symphony and *Hebrides* Overture, which the Debussy scholar Edward Lockspeiser termed the first example of musical Impressionism. We also need to mention the lyrical element projected in the *Lieder ohne Worte* (and *Lied ohne Worte*-like movements, as in the slow movements of the piano trios and Violin Concerto), in which the romantic Mendelssohn gauged what he viewed as the precision of music as a language (as opposed to the ambiguities of words). History has generally focused on one or two of these stylistic elements—the imitation of Bach (for Berlioz, Mendelssohn was preoccupied with music of the dead), the interest in elves (for some, evidence of Mendelssohn as a lightweight)—but has often missed the remarkable versatility and full range of the style. And then there is the still little explored question of whose “Mendelssohnian” style we’re discussing. To be fair here, a neglected participant in its formation was Mendelssohn’s elder sister, Fanny Hensel, herself a child prodigy and composer of well over 400 compositions, whose story I have tried to tell in my biography *Fanny Hensel: The Other Mendelssohn*.

Jerry: Tell me about your completion of the *Albumblatt* and your reconstruction of the original version of the op. 17 *Variations*.

Larry: Sure. The *Albumblatt* in B Minor was hastily written down in the album of the cellist Julius Rietz in Düsseldorf the eve of Mendelssohn’s departing the city in 1835 to take up his new

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position as *Kapellmeister* of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra. He left the piece open-ended by concluding with a hanging half-cadence on the dominant, but never finished it, or thought further about it. That half-cadence gesture always seemed to need an answer, and so I added several measures to bring the music back to the tonic B Minor and to tie up a few loose ends. The result is a *Lied ohne Worte*-like miniature for cello and piano that complements the later *Lied ohne Worte*, op. 109. In the case of the *Variations concertantes*, Mendelssohn's unpublished autograph (reproduced in the CD book) shows that he originally conceived the fourth variation as a march, but then abandoned it after a few measures. Original intentions are of course impossible to figure out in composers, but here we have an important clue, and so I added a few measures to "complete" the draft that we've recorded and added as a supplemental track. I should note that the idea of completion and incompleteness in Mendelssohn's music is not only vexing but a constant issue in his music. Ever the perfectionist, he revised all of his major works, and he once confessed to Robert Schumann that he finished only about one-fifth of his compositions.

Jerry: Okay, Nancy, it's your turn again. In addition to the Mendelssohn CD, you have three other discs out that have come to me for review. One of them, dating back to 2004 and also on JRI, is a recording of Haydn's two standard cello concertos with the Bucharest Chamber Soloists, conducted by Eric Shumsky. Can you tell me something about this collaboration?

Nancy: For the Haydn cello concerto recording I had the great pleasure of working with my dear, long-time friend, Eric Shumsky. Eric, who grew up steeped in the rich tradition of great string players of the past, is a fabulous violist (although he had the role of conductor for this disc). His father, the great violinist Oscar Shumsky, was a legend among violinists in the know, never having had the fame of some of his contemporaries, but being the equal of any of them. Eric and I shared our passion for these so-called "historic string players," and while we were both students at Juilliard, we would spend many an enjoyable visit being geeks and seeking out every great recording we could find by players such as Casals, Feuermann, Kreisler, Primrose, Szigeti, and Heifetz, not to mention

Shumsky; and the more scratch and crackle on the recording the better. We would revel in every turn of phrase, elegant articulation, or uniquely nuanced glissando, like college students getting high, but on music instead of drugs or alcohol! When Eric Shumsky called me one day to say he would be in Bucharest conducting at a music festival, and would I like to join him to make a recording with a chamber orchestra, I was excited to seize the rare opportunity to collaborate with him. The musicians were wonderful, and although time was extremely tight and organization a little chaotic—there were last-minute scheduling problems, necessitating recording from 10pm to 1am—it was an unforgettable experience. We recorded in the Georges Enesco Museum in Bucharest, in a beautifully resonant space with an ornate domed ceiling with paintings of cherubs, which made me feel like I was in heaven!

Jerry: Haydn's concertos are both more numerous and more diverse in terms of the instruments he wrote them for than are Beethoven's concertos, and in numbers, Haydn's piano sonatas also exceed Beethoven's by 20. Yet, it seems to me that Haydn's special fortes were in the realms of symphony and string quartet; his concertos and sonatas never quite caught on the way Beethoven's did. What are your thoughts on this?

Larry: As a Haydn enthusiast who adores his piano sonatas, I'll try to tread lightly here. Clearly Haydn produced some great piano music. The late E \flat -Major Sonata, for instance, has it all—drama, wit, irony, lyricism—and clearly it made an impression on the young Beethoven's *Grande Sonata* op. 7, in the same key. The late C-Major Sonata has those extraordinary open-pedal passages in the first movement that, once again, made a mark on Beethoven. The main difference between the two is probably that Haydn was not a virtuoso musician, though, like Igor Stravinsky, he habitually composed at the piano. And, of course, Haydn grew up with the harpsichord and early fortepiano; his ties to the late Austrian baroque were meaningful for his early stylistic development. Beethoven's early period was of course indebted largely to Mozart, whom Beethoven revered as the leading virtuoso of the modern fortepiano.

Jerry: Your other two CDs, Nancy, have been put out by Cello Classics. One is an album of Spanish and Latin cello works that includes, among pieces by de Falla, Sarasate, Granados, Piazzolla, and Gaspar Cassadó, plus Pablo Casals's Song of the Birds. The other album, titled Jaguar Songs, contains works by contemporary Latin American composer Paul Desenne, a name, I have to admit that was completely unfamiliar to me. What can you tell me about him and his music?

Nancy: I first encountered the work of Venezuelan composer Paul Desenne when I was working with a doctoral student (also from Venezuela) who had chosen Paul's cello works as his dissertation topic. My student, Tulio Rondón, would bring into his lesson week after week the staggeringly difficult but incredibly innovative and colorful *Jaguar Songs* for solo cello in preparation for his lecture/recital. This was my introduction to Desenne's writing for cello, and what attracted me was the strong influence of various forms of popular and ethnic Latin American music, the imitation of various indigenous instruments, the shamanic references, and the clear influences of medieval chant and 17th- and 18th-century viol music. Desenne writes the following about this piece: "*Jaguar Songs*, the sonata for solo cello, was composed in 2002, almost entirely during the social upheaval that shook Venezuela in the first months of that year. Even though it is not directly related to the struggle for freedom under the growing threat of a totalitarian military state, it bears the stamp of rebellion, sometimes of despair." Certainly, the last movement at least, entitled "Birimbao-Jaguar," reflects this sense of struggle, intensity, and anguish. However, his music has infinite variety. For example, the fantastic and sublime *Glass Bamboo Frog Consort* is ambient, freely flowing, and magical, and makes extensive use of both natural and artificial harmonics, eerie glissandos, and little punctuations playing off of each other as they go from cello to cello. According to Tulio Rondón, who is familiar with the sound of these rainforest frogs in Venezuela (and who heard them when he visited Desenne's home outside of Caracas), Paul's writing is actually strikingly true to how they really sound! Paul Desenne is a very interesting guy. He was born in Caracas to a French father and American mother. He studied extensively in Paris, the cello, composition, and medieval music, and won prizes in both composition and cello. He was a founding member of the Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra and taught cello performance and chamber music studies at El Sistema Conservatory, where he was head of its strings department. He has performed classical works and contemporary

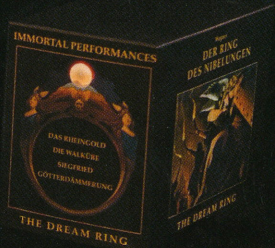
Latin American music, including his own compositions throughout the Americas and in Europe, with appearances at major concert venues. He is also a talented writer and has a monthly column about music in Venezuela's most prominent newspaper.

Jerry: I notice on the Desenne CD that several of the works are for three and four cellos, but that you're the only performer. So I'm guessing there was considerable over-dubbing involved on these tracks. Care to share how difficult that was?

Nancy: I'd be glad to. After I finished that project I was speaking to a violist friend who heard a couple of the tracks and remarked that he would love to do a project involving multi-tracking because it sounded really fun. Although I didn't respond, I felt secretly aghast to think of how quickly he'd find out it was no picnic! It was incredibly challenging even though the end result sounds fluent and spontaneous. Paul's writing is very complex and in, for instance, the *Pajaro-Guaracha*, with its catchy Latin rhythms, there was, at practically any given moment in the score, one of the four cellos playing on a different part of each beat. Of course, a click track was used for most sections of the multi-cello pieces, and this was new to me, so I had to get used to having headphones on (or ear buds) while playing, with one of the ears off so I could hear myself as well as the beat at all times. (For those who are unfamiliar with the term "click track," it's basically a metronome beat that one hears through headphones while recording so that when other instruments are added later, they can be well synchronized. It's used constantly in pop music, but most classical artists never encounter it, except sometimes in recording unusual contemporary works.) One would think that playing along with a click track would be quite easy and straightforward, but it's a real eye-opener to find out how difficult it really is to be accurate. The human body doesn't seem naturally tuned to being that inflexible! As grueling as it was, there were definitely fun moments too. One that comes to mind is when one evening, as we were taking a break for dinner from our long hours of multi-tracking, I came upon the idea of buying some super-glue to smear on the fingertip I was to use on a pizzicato passage we were just about to record, in order to get a very special kind of percussive attack. Another challenge, in addition to that of click tracks and headphones, was that I didn't know how the pieces were supposed to sound before starting to record. So, I would begin by choosing one of the cello parts, recording it, and then layering on the other voices. We worked in chunks, and as we added each part I could hear the piece emerging and would get to understand it as I went along. If I found in retrospect that I didn't have the right feeling for a passage, we'd go back and rerecord. Paul was really helpful every step of the way (from afar, near Caracas, Venezuela, but only a phone call away!), giving tips as to what he was after. For instance, at the beginning of the sublime *Glass Bamboo Frog Consort*, he suggested going for a very sparse, non-vibrated sound, like chanting voices in a cathedral. Or, in part of the third movement of *Jaguar Songs* for solo cello, he was after the sound of an electric guitar and its characteristic distortion and bending of tones. The technical aspect and engineering were not the only challenges with this project. There was also a huge learning curve for me because I rarely play contemporary works, but with these pieces I had to learn to play the cello in a totally different way, including tapping the strings with the wood of the bow (imitating an indigenous instrument called the "birimbao"), riffing in bizarre patterns while thumping the left hand fingers on the fingerboard and plucking off as well (marked in the score "quasi African instrument"), playing consecutive unisons connected by glissandos (in imitation of chant), which then start to morph into a very striking effect that I can't even begin to describe in an interview! Well, I'll try. The left hand contracts and expands as if it's an inchworm moving along the fingerboard, creating a very eerie effect. Paul has written for the cello in a completely unique way, and when one hears his music, it's not surprising to learn that he's a fabulous cellist. Only someone who intimately understands what the cello is capable of could write as he has.

Jerry: That last question is a perfect segue into this one. The subject of instruments is always of interest. Do you switch cellos depending on the music you're performing, or do you have one instrument that you prefer regardless of the repertoire? And as long as we're touching on that, how do you feel about period instruments, either the real McCoy or modern copies thereof? I ask this because some folks—I'm not one of them—who would insist that Haydn's concer-

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tos be played on a period cello and in a manner consistent with historical practices, might be a bit taken aback at your very modern, not to say, bold, approach to these scores. What would you say to them? And keep it civil, please.

Nancy: To answer the first part of the question, yes, I use the same instrument for all the repertoire I play. It's a Paolo Antonio Testore cello made in Milan in 1732, which actually makes it a "period instrument" as far as Haydn or even Bach goes! The cello was made the exact year Haydn was born and it was 18 years old when Bach died. Regarding the use of period instruments or modern copies, very interesting philosophical questions come up, and there are many different perspectives. I can certainly share my musings, for whatever they may be worth. To me, personally, the only question that seems worth asking is whether or not a particular instrument, independent from which era it was built, supports the full expression of the spirit of a given work. I've heard Chinese erhu players who capture more fully the essence of some romantic works from the European tradition than many violinists. So I would think that an openness and non-rigidity would be important in choosing which type of instrument should be used for which music, keeping the ultimate goal always in mind, which is to express the essence of the music as one understands and senses it from the deepest part of oneself. Otherwise it's like the spiritual seeker who mistakes drinking the wine and chewing the wafer for authentic inner transformation. If it were only that easy! And regarding so-called "historically informed" performance practice, it seems to me that every style of playing can be done well or poorly. To me, poorly would mean accents that don't make musical sense for the context of the piece on all levels (rhythmically, harmonically, melodically, etc.) and cookie-cutter sequences that sound mechanical in articulation and have no direction or audible hierarchy of tones, as if every pitch has identical meaning within the key one is in. If a particular performance sounds like a person reading in a language which they don't actually understand, and the deeper sense of context within the work is missing, each note spoken with the exact same monotonous inflection, I would call that a poor performance, whether it's "historically informed" or "modern," and it happens in both. Poor musician-

ship is possible in every style of playing. As far as my Haydn goes, it will surely meet with those who love it, those who hate it, and everything in between, and this is as it should be, nothing personal. I'm playing out of a genuine expression of deep love for these pieces, which have a special and sacred place in my heart. For instance, in the last movement of the D-Major Concerto—where the cello bursts into an ecstatic and joyful outpouring of cascading 16th notes, finally to be engulfed in the orchestra at the end, the individual voice absorbed into an ocean of pure spirit—I have to play it as I feel and experience it. It would feel wrong, like hurting a loved one, to block that energy because of something I learned in a book, as if the meager rational mind could encompass something so sublime. If there are a few souls out there whose hearts sing when they hear it, I'm very happy and honored, and for those who don't resonate with it, that's the beauty of the "stop" or "eject" button!

Jerry: Wrapping things up, let me ask both of you what future plans, if any, you might have to record together more Romantic-period cello and piano repertoire. There are some real beauties out there that are rarely, if ever, performed or recorded—sonatas by Alkan, Felix Draeseke (a composer who was part of the extended Brahms circle), Louise Farrenc, Eduard and Richard Franck, Robert Fuchs, Friedrich Gernsheim, Goldmark ... and I'm only up to the Gs.

Nancy: Interesting that you mention Robert Fuchs! His complete works was my first CD (originally on the Biddulph label out of the U.K., and soon to be reissued on JRI). And on the subject of future recording plans with Larry, I think readers might be very interested to hear the story of how things unfolded for us in a very unexpected way as we completed our Mendelssohn project. Our original plan was to release a two-CD set that would include both Fanny Mendelssohn pieces, (our present CD has only the Fantasia, but not the Capriccio), plus a little-known set of variations I'll leave for Larry to describe below. We planned to divide all these works over two CDs. But on December 2nd, Larry suffered a hemorrhagic stroke while playing tennis, just three hours before he was to perform the Beethoven op. 30 sonatas with a violinist. While I was visiting the intensive care unit that evening, Larry's wife told me that one of the first things he expressed was the fear that he now wouldn't be able to finish the CD. At that point, we had recorded all the works that are usually on Mendelssohn cello/piano CDs, plus both Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel pieces, and the unpublished draft of variation four from the op. 17 *Variations concertantes*. A few days later, in visiting Larry who was still in intensive care, we had an important decision to make regarding how to proceed. Would we wait and see how Larry's recovery went, or issue one CD with what we already had, minus one of the Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel pieces (since it would have been too long for one disc)? Larry opted to go ahead with what we had and to get the CD out as soon as possible. The really incredible part of this story regards Larry's recovery, which was nothing short of spectacular, and there is so much more to tell about it than there is time for in this interview, but within (exactly to the day) three and a half months, Larry was able to play a house concert (a Haydn piano sonata and two Beethoven violin/piano sonatas) at his home for friends who had supported him and his wife during the rough time he had been through. It was so moving and inspiring to see his hands (especially his right hand, since his whole right side had been paralyzed), flying over the keyboard. Larry swears that he wouldn't have made his astounding recovery if he hadn't had his music. In fact, just the week after his stroke, a new Bösendorfer piano was delivered to his home. He used that piano as inspiration to get his chops back, and it was the best medicine he could have had, because now his playing is back to pre-stroke level. It will be extra meaningful to us when we complete the other part of our Mendelssohn project, given the background story I've just shared.

Larry: I'll just add one or two thoughts—first of all, to thank my family and Nancy, and many other friends for being so supportive the last several months; and second, to say that music is more than therapy; it's an indispensable part of the human condition. And if anyone ever doubts its power, if anyone ever regards it as just so many elusive sonic memories, then consider its mysterious ability to reconnect neural pathways—i.e., to heal. Having been cast in a situation where my right arm and hand could barely move, I have experienced the regenerative power of music in so many compelling ways—for example, slowly but steadily relearning scale fingerings, controlling wide stretches and leaps, voicing chords (especially difficult in the early days), and retraining the hand to react contrapuntally (probably the most difficult). When all is said and done, whether we are trained musicians or not, we are all

musical; music goes deep into the brain, and to be able to tap into one's musicality, even under adverse conditions, is something special and phenomenal, and a blessing. There are always future projects to consider. For example, we have in the works a recording of Fanny Hensel's other little-known cello piece, the *Capriccio in Ab Major*, a pendant to the *Fantasia in G Minor*. In my capacity as scholar and researcher, I'm always on the lookout for traces of the cello concerto Mendelssohn was reported to have drafted for Alfredo Piatti. Finally, the other pending project promises to combine performance, composition, and musicological sleuthing. It turns out that in 1831 Mendelssohn composed a set of variations for cello and piano with the Viennese cellist Joseph Merk, the same musician for whom Chopin wrote his early *Polonaise*. Mendelssohn refers to his collaboration with Merk in his letters and diaries. The Mendelssohn/Merk variations are now officially listed in Ralf Wehner's new Mendelssohn thematic catalog, even though all that survives musically is a manuscript copy of the piano part, that is, Mendelssohn's contribution. There are plenty of clues in this part—we can tell that the cello was to present the theme at the beginning, and in the variations themselves, it's clear which instrument led when and where, and so forth. So the question is—can Merk's cello part be found in an archive, or, if not, can a workable cello part be fashioned in a Merk/Mendelssohnian style convincing enough to reclaim from oblivion something of this piece for the cello repertoire? It's a daunting task, to try to solve a musical puzzle by time traveling back to the 1830s (though Nancy's 1732 Testore offers some help there). If the Italian playwright Luigi Pirandello wrote *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, the Merk/Mendelssohn project might be titled *An Accompaniment in Search of a Theme, or One Part in Search of Another*. We'll see where it all leads.

Jerry: Well, thanks, guys; this has been a special privilege and a real pleasure.

MENDELSSOHN Sonatas for Cello and Piano Nos. 1 and 2. *Variations concertantes*, op. 17 + original version of Variation 4. *Albumblatt* in b. *Lied ohne Worte*, op. 109. MENDELSSOHN-HENSEL *Fantasia* in g • Nancy Green (vc); R. Larry Todd (pn) • JRI 138 (75:46)

All of Mendelssohn's music for cello and piano fits conveniently on one CD and close to 20 recordings of this not quite mainstream repertoire have appeared in recent decades. JRI's festive looking cover advertises "Bonus material: rarely produced artwork by Mendelssohn plus first recording of newly completed material" making it the most complete Mendelssohn cello disc yet. The musical "extras" include the reworking of a discarded sketch for the fourth of the op. 17 variations, and more significantly, a completion by R. Larry Todd of an *Albumblatt* in B Minor that Mendelssohn composed in one day in 1835, a ruminative "song without words" sort of piece. In addition, the program includes the attractive *Fantasy in G Minor*, one of two works for cello composed by Fanny Mendelssohn.

The cover also touts the "extensive liner notes by R. Larry Todd, 'Mendelssohn's most authoritative biographer' (The New Yorker)"—which R. Larry Todd indisputably is—but any question as to whether he's a proficient enough pianist to play this busy, virtuosic music is answered immediately at the start of the *Variations concertantes*. Not only does his playing have elegance and technical finesse, his phrasing is informed by a breathing, logical sense of the music's classical origins. (Todd's booklet notes are indeed informative, and the booklet itself is beautifully illustrated with 19th-century artwork, including two watercolors by Mendelssohn depicting two of his residences. As you might expect, he was a precise, detailed draughtsman).

The 1826 *Variations concertantes*, written for the composer's cellist brother Paul, subject characteristic Mendelssohnian melody and texture to a Beethovenian conciseness of design that makes it a perfect work, as is the 1845 *Lied ohne Worte*, which has one of Mendelssohn's inimitable, great melodies. The opening of Fanny Mendelssohn's *Fantasia* is indebted to the great melody that opens the slow movement of Beethoven's String Quartet op. 59/1, before moving on to faster, more energetic material.

Mendelssohn's enjoyable First Sonata is somewhat lacking in contrasts between its themes and moods, and each movement tends toward note-spinning repetitiveness. In some of the scoring, particularly in the second movement, the piano dominates to such an extent that the cello, often playing pizzicato, seems perfunctory. Nonetheless, the music—in the finale's main subject, for instance or the theme that bounds in once the first movement's exposition is underway—has the energy, del-

icacy and sense of well-being that are hallmarks of Mendelssohn's style,

Todd calls the Second Sonata Mendelssohn's masterpiece for cello and piano, and indeed, it surpasses the other works in its range and impact, with more resourceful scoring for the two instruments than in the First. Todd and Green's performance is suitably energetic, though never rushed in the fast outer movements, and well characterized in the second movement, which combines scherzo and lyrical elements. In the unusual slow movement, I wish that Todd had let the top notes of the arpeggios that state its opening hymn resonate longer, perhaps by taking a slower tempo. The music is often described as an homage to Bach, which the piano part surely is, but I have always thought that the cello's searching, chromatic lines sound far more Jewish than Lutheran, suggesting that the two instruments are illustrating Mendelssohn's religious conversion.

This is my first encounter with the playing of Nancy Green, but I'm aware of the very high praise that her many recordings have received from a number of *Fanfare* critics, and now I join the chorus. I love her characterful, burnished sound. There's an eloquent, speech-like quality to her playing, and her refusal to overplay shows an understanding of this music's refinement. She invests each passage with an indefinable sense of personality that I associate with an older, wiser style of cello playing, something like that of one of her teachers, Leonard Rose.

Green's ensemble with Todd is flexible and nuanced; both players well communicate the music's charm. There were many times when I smiled at their judicious sense of pacing and timing. The two instruments, which are not identified, are well balanced. They sound closely miked and the sound isn't over-reverberant, which suits the music well. All in all, this is a very esthetically appealing package, visually and aurally; an impressive accomplishment. **Paul Orgel**
