



2022 - 2023
37TH SEASON

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
JOAN BLACKMAN

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CONCERT TWO

BACH AND MENDELSSOHN

Joan Blackman, Jae-Won Bang,
Molly MacKinnon, Yiyi Hsu *violins*
Katrina Chitty, Rebecca Ruthven *violas*
Amy Laing, Min Jee Yoon *cellos*
Meaghan Williams *bass*
Christina Hutten *harpsichord*

FRIDAY DEC. 2ND at 2PM

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SATURDAY DEC. 3^{TRD} at 7:30PM - A FOOD BANK FUNDRAISER

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SUNDAY DEC. 4TH at 2PM

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MONDAY DEC. 5TH at 7:30PM

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Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)
String Sinfonia No. 1,
“Sinfoniesatz” in C major

I. Allegro
II. Andante
III. Allegro

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)
Harpsichord Concerto in D minor, BWV 1052

I. Allegro
II. Andante
III. Allegro

INTERMISSION

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)
Orchestral Suite No. 3 in D major, BWV 1068

I. Overture
II. Air
III. Gavotte I & II
IV. Bourrée
V. Gigue

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)
Octet in E-flat major, Op. 20

I. Allegro moderato ma con fuoco
II. Andante
III. Scherzo: Allegro leggierissimo
IV. Presto

We have much to thank Bella Salomon for. She was Felix Mendelssohn's grandmother and her family had close connections to J.S. Bach's sons and students. Bella and her sister, Sara Itzig Levy, hosted Sunday salons in Berlin and naturally Felix and Fanny, Bella's enormously talented grandchildren, were often featured. Eventually, Fanny took over hosting the salons which had become important cultural events in the city. Bella had the score of Bach's St. Matthew Passion copied and gave it to Felix. The performance of the St. Matthew Passion which he produced and conducted in 1829 (after it not being performed for 102 years) has been credited with placing J.S. Bach firmly in the musical canon. The popular story of Felix suddenly discovering Bach is misleading. Perhaps more accurately, Felix was born into a family and community where Bach had been very much kept alive and he was well placed to be the one to ignite the fuse of worldwide recognition.

This season, Vetta's programming takes the concepts of hope, rebirth and inspiration on an overarching journey. This concert is also about mentorship and the hope for the future in talented young musicians. Mendelssohn learned directly from Bach's scores and we will hear his developing voice while also experiencing Bach the master. We'll also witness the direct mentorship that has been happening in rehearsal and now onstage with Vetta regular musicians working with promising and emerging artists.

Felix Mendelssohn String Sinfonia No. 1,
“Sinfoniesatz” in C major

Mendelssohn wrote 13 string symphonies between 1821 – 1823 which were played at the family's Sunday salons. The first six sinfonias, written when Felix was only 12 years old, were exercises exploring 18th Century composition techniques and styles. These tributes to classical composers Haydn, J.C. Bach, CPE Bach and Mozart were given as assignments by his teacher Carl Friedrich Zelter. Each one has three movements and follow the common Baroque and early Classical fast-slow-fast structure.

Sinfonia No. 1 contains all the youthful enthusiasm and bounce you would expect from one so young, and a skilled writing technique and robustness that you wouldn't. The opening movement is written in $\frac{3}{4}$ time and in two repeated sections. Rising staccato passages are all in the violins until a thicker texture through all voices happens in the B section. The middle movement, also in three, begins in a minor key with slow melancholic descending lines until the key changes to A major. Everything becomes brighter again as singing triplets float through all the voices with plucked strings (pizzicato) accompanying. The final Allegro is active and joyful sprinting forward with only a moment or two here and there to catch a breath.

Johann Sebastian Bach *Harpsichord Concerto in D minor* BWV 1052

Mendelssohn wrote 13 string symphonies between 1821 This is the first of Bach's seven concertos written for harpsichord with strings and continuo. One definition of concerto is the opposition of forces between soloist and orchestra, and we hear this contrast throughout the piece. In the first movement the orchestra begins with a unison ritornello which returns periodically after each keyboard solo section. At one point the harpsichord repeats a pedal (bass note that does not change) over an extended period, changing the harmony overtop ever so gradually which builds tension until relieved by an arpeggiated section following the chordal changes of the strings which then builds tension again until the next ritornello. The slow middle movement features a ground bass played by everyone in unison at the outset. Then the keyboard soars over this ground in excruciatingly beautiful melodies before returning to play the ground bass with the strings to end the movement. The pace of the final movement breaks the reverie with a rhythmic vitality much like that of Brandenburg 3. In the end, all voices contribute to the counterpoint, the harpsichord decorating the main ideas of the strings, introducing new ideas and occasionally erupting into brilliant cadenzas.

Johann Sebastian Bach *Orchestral Suite No. 3 in D major*, BWV 1068

Recently, scholars have suggested that the word “orchestral” meant something very different in Bach’s day compared to now. Until recently, we have heard this suite performed with three trumpets, timpani, two oboes as well as strings and continuo but it is now widely thought that Bach originally wrote the suite for strings and continuo and only added the other instruments around 1730. The string version you will hear today is leaner and more transparent but every bit as interesting as the later version.

The overture in the French style begins majestically with double dotted rhythms, and morphs into a romping middle section with concertante solo sections before returning to the stately theme. Next comes

the movement commonly called “Air on the G string”, which evokes nostalgia for otherworldly beauty with its subtlety and elegance. The rest of the movements are based on French dances, most of which were derived from folk dances and transformed into elegant dances for the French court of Bach’s time.

Felix Mendelssohn *Octet in E-flat major*, Op. 20

The Octet was written in 1825 when Mendelssohn was 16 years old and already a prolific composer of many works including the string sinfonias such as the one which opened this concert. The teenage Felix was bursting with ideas, yet he took the time and used his mental discipline and solid training in classical structure to create a masterpiece. This was also the first piece of chamber music written for string octet, and as such, represents an important innovation in Western art music. For this performance, we have chosen to add a bass instrument, a ninth voice arranged by double bassist and arranger Božo Paradžik, which provides enriched depth and dynamics often supporting a cello part by doubling or playing an octave below.

You can hear and feel Mendelssohn’s youthful adrenaline throughout the work. The first movement approaches a violin concerto in the first exhilarating theme, balanced by a subdued second theme. A soothing reprieve is provided in the second movement which delves into deeper emotions through the tension between duple and triple rhythms. The imaginative and energetic third movement hints at the fantasy world he will evoke a year later in his A Midsummer Night’s Dream. The final movement begins at a furious pace with a fugue sweeping throughout, adding each instrument one by one. Hang on and enjoy this glorious work!

Program notes by Joan Blackman and Laurie Townsend

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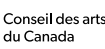
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