

# At the Piano

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The series “At the Piano” is intended for all those who have some experience playing the piano and would now like to play easier original works by famous composers. Students, teachers and those returning to the piano will encounter a wealth of well-known works.

## Contents

Each volume in the series is devoted exclusively to one composer. This is because each composer has his own style and thus places his own very personal demands on his piano works – not only from the point of view of technique but also as regards musical interpretation.

## Technique

All of the pieces have been arranged in progressive level of difficulty. They enable you to practise very different pianistic skills, including runs, breaking chords, arpeggios, parallel thirds, trills, playing chords and polyphonic playing. Thus most of the pieces also prepare you for more demanding pieces by the composer in question. We have endeavoured to keep variety in mind when compiling the pieces: slower ones follow faster ones, dances come after studies, variations after sonata movements, etc.

## Urtext

All of the pieces have been edited according to the strictest Urtext principles, as have all Urtext editions by G. Henle Publishers. In short, this means that the musical text is unaltered and presents the composer’s intentions. Additions that are essential – even great composers occasionally make mistakes – have been given in parentheses. And as we do not wish to dispense with the

aid of fingerings, we clearly differentiate between the ones we have added (in normal writing) and those that are original (in italics). Composers in the Baroque, Classical and even Early Romantic periods were extremely sparing with indications regarding articulation, phrasing, dynamics and tempo. This was because in those days they could assume that experienced players already knew how something was to be played. This might not always be immediately clear to musicians today. Nevertheless, in our Urtext editions we deliberately do without “well-intentioned” additions and questionable alterations, as are often to be found in other editions. Those who use our editions are free of such patronisation; they can be sure of the authenticity of the musical text and make the most of the ensuing flexibility for their own stylistically confident interpretation.

## Guide

This cannot, of course, be done without any help at all. The series “At the Piano” provides an introduction to dealing with Urtext editions as well as a first pedagogical guide on how to get to grips with original works of an easy and medium level of difficulty from a technical and musical point of view. To this end, each piece is preceded by some information on practising it, on its history and on understanding the musical text. In so doing we would like to provide players with a foundation upon which they can develop their own approach to the work, their own personal interpretation and above all, enjoy making music. Pianists who are enthusiastic and prepared to put in a little effort – no matter whether young or old, starting to play or returning to the instrument – will then be able to play their Bach, Beethoven, Chopin, Brahms or even Liszt with conviction.

# Playing Mendelssohn

Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1809–47) was a child prodigy. Although he only started professional piano and violin lessons at a relatively late date – when he was seven years old – he progressed so fast that he made his first public appearance as a pianist when he was nine, creating quite a sensation in the musical world. His teacher Carl Friedrich Zelter introduced the twelve-year-old Mendelssohn to Goethe, who was very enthusiastic about the young prodigy. Mendelssohn undertook his first attempts at composition in 1820 when he was just eleven years old: a little *Singspiel*, a violin sonata, a piano trio and in particular piano pieces. They show that the young musician already had a remarkable technique at his disposal.



Compositions for or with piano comprise the largest group in Mendelssohn's oeuvre by far. Alongside 199 pieces for piano solo, they also include six works for piano four hands or for two pianos, 34 chamber music works with piano, as well as eleven piano concertos. These works do not possess the extreme virtuosity of Chopin's or even Liszt's works, but rather are aimed at the experienced amateur. Nevertheless, a certain brilliance was typical of Mendelssohn's piano music for this group at the time. Even the *Lieder ohne Worte* (Songs without Words), the ones budding pianists are usually introduced to first, are not always easy from a technical point of view. The individual pieces in the eight volumes of the *Lieder ohne Worte* were by no means composed at the same time; rather Mendelssohn settled on six pieces for each volume, taken from a larger selection. Thus the opus numbers he gave them often do not reflect the chronological order of the works. Numerous other pieces remained unpublished – partly because he did not think they were worthy of publication, partly because his early death meant that he had no oppor-

tunity to do so. For this reason around one hundred piano pieces were published posthumously, including the *Sechs Kinderstücke* op. 72, which Mendelssohn had, however, prepared for publication in 1847, shortly before his death. He had composed them five years earlier and as far as their character is concerned they are also essentially *Lieder ohne Worte*, although Mendelssohn apparently considered them to be somewhat easier.



Aside from the term “Lied ohne Worte” Mendelssohn also enjoyed giving his pieces titles such as “Fantaisie”, “Caprice”, “Variations”, and on occasion he also turned to Baroque models such as “Prelude” and “Fugue”. His intense preoccupation with Bach, something he had throughout his life, can be clearly seen in many works, in particular those of opus 35. In these Mendelssohn reworked Bach's model, creating character pieces – piano miniatures that were very popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and that expressed a particular mood. Mendelssohn only devoted himself to the large-scale format of the piano sonata in his early youth, writing eight piano sonatas between 1820 and 1827. It might have been insightful restraint that caused the mature composer to no longer turn to this genre in his piano works. He seems to have felt more at home with smaller-scale forms. He often wrote fast, scherzo-like pieces, often with tempo markings such as *Allegro* and *Presto*. Only seldom are slower tempi such as *Andante* to be found.

Piano compositions and all of Mendelssohn's compositions in general are distinguished by a feeling for an even, elegant form, a fine balance of sound and song-like melody. The player is required to bring this to life and to master the technical demands to a certain extent as a matter of course.