

The Second Book of the
GREAT MUSICIANS

***Books by
Percy A. Scholes***

The Listener's Guide to Music

The First Book of the Great Musicians

The Second Book of the Great Musicians

The Third Book of the Great Musicians

The Complete Book of the Great Musicians

The Second Book of the
GREAT MUSICIANS

*A Further Course in Appreciation
for Young Readers*

by
Percy A. Scholes

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TO THE READER

HERE is a Second Book of the Great Musicians—for those who have already read the first one. As whilst they have been reading it they have been growing older and cleverer, I have not used such simple language this time as I did before, and I have made the chapters rather longer and fuller. I want to offer a word of thanks to Mr. Emery Walker, as well as to Mr. F. Page of the Oxford University Press, who have taken a great deal of trouble to help me to find suitable pictures to illustrate this book, and to Mr. W. R. Anderson, Editor of the monthly journal, *The Music Teacher*, who has read the proofs for me. A Third Book of the Great Musicians is in preparation and will complete the series.

The Author

CONTENTS

I. SCHUBERT.....	1
II. THE INVENTOR OF THE NOCTURNE: JOHN FIELD	15
III. MENDELSSOHN.....	27
IV. ABOUT THE OLD MIRACLE PLAYS AND MASQUES, AND WHAT SPRANG FROM THEM.....	39
V. ABOUT ORATORIOS.....	49
VI. THE EARLIEST OPERAS	57
VII. MORE ABOUT OPERA	65
VIII. WAGNER.....	76
IX. VERDI.....	89
X. THE GAME OF 'CAMOUFLAGED TUNES'	98
XI. ORGANS.....	101
XII. DEBUSSY	114

XIII. MILITARY MUSIC	126
XIV. ARMY BANDS OF TODAY.....	131
XV. SULLIVAN	141



SCHUBERT

CHAPTER I
SCHUBERT
1797-1828

A School Band Practice

THE school orchestra was practising. The oboe and flute and bassoon and horn and kettle-drum were vigorously playing their parts or counting their rests, and the string players were fiddling away. One of the big boys was the leading Violin. It was a musical school, and this boy had been there a long time and could play beautifully. What were they playing? Well, for a guess, one of Haydn's symphonies. This school was in Vienna, and Haydn and Beethoven both lived in Vienna at that very time, and their music was popular with the Viennese; so we will suppose that the band was playing a Haydn symphony, since a Beethoven symphony is, as a rule, too difficult for a school orchestra. By and by came a break in the playing, as one movement of the symphony ended and before the next began, and the big boy, the leader (Spaun was his name), turned round to see who it could be who was playing behind him, with such firm rhythm and in such good tune.

SECOND BOOK OF THE GREAT MUSICIANS

There he saw a little new boy, a round-faced, curly-headed fellow, with spectacles. His name was Franz Schubert, but already he had a nickname—‘The Miller’, because when he came to be examined for entrance to the school he wore a light coat. Spaun nodded at him with approval, and then the playing began again. But when the practice was over he learnt more about ‘The Miller’, and in a few days he had become one of his truest friends.

School Joys and Troubles

Franz needed friends. His father was poor, and the school life, though happy in many ways, was in others a hard one. At the time Franz was admitted to this school he had ten or eleven brothers and sisters, and as years went by more came into the world, so that in the end there were seventeen children in the family. Now the father, though a hard-working man, did not earn a great deal of money. So when, to his great joy, he managed to get his clever son Franz into the school I have been speaking of, which was the Emperor’s choir school, and trained the boys for the court chapel, he could not supply him with those little luxuries that boys at a boarding-school seem to expect, and it is quite certain, for instance, that Franz had no ‘tuck box’. ‘Tuck box’ indeed! Why, he had not even enough plain wholesome food, as you may find from a letter he wrote some time after this to his elder brother, Ferdinand, who was his favourite brother and always, through his whole life, very good to him. This is what he wrote:

SCHUBERT

MY DEAR BROTHER,

I have been thinking over my life here, and I find it's really not a bad one, on the whole, but there are some ways in which it could be improved. You know how much one enjoys a roll or an apple now and again, and all the more when one has to wait eight-and-a-half hours between dinner and supper! All the money Father gave me, which wasn't much, has gone long ago, so what am I to do? This is what I've been thinking—Can't you let me have a shilling or two a month?

You see, in those days, neither schoolmasters nor Emperors had any idea of making schoolboys comfortable. They had a notion that if you gave them plenty to eat and well-warmed rooms to work in (the rooms at this school had no fires in winter) the boys would be 'spoiled'. All the same, if you or I were an Emperor we would treat our choir-boys better, wouldn't we? and risk 'spoiling' them!

The Young Composer

Besides food and warmth there was something else of which young Franz felt the lack. He was already a composer, and composition was as necessary to his life as games are to yours. And he couldn't get music-paper. Here was a chance for the big boy, Spaun, to help him, and help him he did, so that Franz just poured out music—songs and piano pieces, and string quartets, and church anthems, all of which his school friends

SECOND BOOK OF THE GREAT MUSICIANS

were willing and eager to try over as fast as they were written. It was really a splendid school for Franz, in that way, at any rate; there was plenty of music going on. But one thing he missed badly, and really suffered from all his life—though they taught the boys to sing and play, and had a rehearsal of the orchestra every day, nobody ever taught them to compose. So Franz had just to pick up composition as best he could, which was a pity, for even a born composer needs teaching, just as a born cricketer is all the better for some good coaching.

Holidays

You see that Franz lived in music, when at school, and so he did, too, at home, for when there came a holiday time, and he hurried home, he got to work at once with his father and brothers, playing away at string quartets. Franz played the Viola on these occasions, his father the 'Cello, and two brothers the first and second Violins. This family string quartet became well-known in the neighbourhood, and by and by was enlarged to a little band, by taking in other players, so that Haydn's symphonies could be played (with a bit of special arrangement); then neighbours liked to drop in and hear the music, and the room at home became too small, and so another and larger one was taken, and after that a still larger, and then the little band of musicians was increased to a full orchestra. All this time Franz went on playing the Viola, and also composing. In his last year at school he composed a symphony for the school orchestra, and later he wrote some symphonies for the home orchestra too.

SCHUBERT

Earning a Living

When Franz left school there was the question of what to do with him. He was determined to be a composer, but to earn a living by composing was even more difficult in those days than in these. So he decided to be a schoolmaster. His father was the master of a parish school in Vienna, and Franz joined him and taught the lowest class. I think he hated the work, and what he really liked was to slam the school door at the end of the day and get home to his composing, or else to run off to see his old friends at the Choir School and join them in their music-making, or take them some new music he had just written. About this time he began to have a few lessons in composition. There was in Vienna a musician named Salieri, the Emperor's chief musician (or 'Capellmeister'). He had helped Beethoven, in his earlier days, by advice and lessons, and now he helped Schubert in the same way, for he saw that the youth was a genius and was well worth helping.

How Schubert Wrote and Performed a Mass

One great event about this time (he was now seventeen) was Schubert's composition of a Mass for one of the churches. He conducted it himself, his brother played the organ, a celebrated violinist, called Mayseder, came and led the violins, and the performance went off very well and made quite a stir. To commemorate the occasion his father, who was delighted to see his son

SECOND BOOK OF THE GREAT MUSICIANS

doing such great things, spent a good deal of his hard-earned money and gave him a piano. (Harpsichords, of which you have read in the previous volume, were now fast going out, and pianos were becoming quite common.)

Schubert's Friendships

There is one thing you cannot help noticing when you read Schubert's life—the number of friends he made and the splendid way these stuck to him. You have just read how Spaun helped him, when he was a schoolboy, and now you will hear how a young man called Schober did the same. This Schober had come across some of Schubert's songs—in manuscript, for nothing of Schubert's was yet printed. He was so much struck with these that he called to see the young composer, and when he found that he was wasting his days in an occupation for which he was not fitted, he said to him 'Come and live with me, and I'll look after you.' The father was willing, so off the youth went, and now he could compose to his heart's content, instead of correcting short division sums or giving spelling lessons. Other friends gathered round him too, and tried to help him. One thing they felt really should be done was to print some of the lovely songs he had written. But they could not persuade any publisher to look at the work of an unknown youth, so in the end Schubert had to go on composing year after year and living one hardly knows how (for he could not stay very long with his friend Schober, as Schober had to take in

SCHUBERT

a brother). And when he was twenty-five nothing was yet in print, so that his beautiful music, instead of being at the service of all the world, was known only to a few keen musicians in his own native city.

Now the father of one of Schubert's old friends of his school-days had a large house, and used to give fine concerts there of Schubert's music, so as to make it known, and the plan was hit upon of printing one of the best of the songs, having it sung at a concert, and then offering it for sale to the audience. The first song to be printed was the one which is now perhaps most famous—*The Erl King*. This was sung by one of Schubert's friends, who had a fine voice and a dramatic way of singing, and at once the people in the audience bought one hundred copies. This provided enough money to print another song, for the next concert, and so on! One reason why publishers would not undertake to bring out such a song as this was the difficulty of the piano part, which in *The Erl King* goes very fast and gives a wonderful feeling of a horseman galloping through a dark night and a ghostly enemy following swiftly after. You can get the song as a Gramophone record, and you will notice at once that it is quite as much a piano piece as a song. After hearing it you will be astonished to learn that Schubert wrote it in one afternoon.

Schubert's Songs

Schubert, from a boy upwards, took to song writing like a duck to water, and to instrumental writing (we

SECOND BOOK OF THE GREAT MUSICIANS

may say) like a man to water. That is to say, song writing seemed natural to him, but instrumental writing he had to learn, as swimming has to be learnt. He wrote a lot of most beautiful instrumental works, but sometimes you feel (especially in a long piece) that he was not quite so much the complete master of this sort of composing as of the other.

If he got hold of a book of poems and opened it, at once he would seize on some verses, read them once or twice through, and see in a flash what was the best way to set them so as to bring out all the meaning and the feeling of the poet's words. Then he would sit down and write the music straight away.

There is a most lovely setting by him of Shakespeare's song, *Hark, hark, the lark*. It came about in this way. Schubert was walking in the country and saw a friend sitting at a table in an inn garden. He joined him, and took up the book he had been reading. It opened at *Cymbeline*, at the poem which Cloten's musicians perform to Imogen, to wake her sweetly in the morning—*Hark, hark, the lark*. 'Oh!' said Schubert, 'I have thought of such a lovely tune for that! What a pity I haven't some music-paper here!' The friend took up the bill of fare and drew some music lines on it with his pencil, and Schubert at once wrote that beautiful song that has now gone all through the world and is loved in every civilized country. (This song also you can get as a Gramophone record.) So quickly did Schubert write his songs that once or twice he actually forgot them again. On one occasion one of his friends put before him on the piano a manuscript song in the friend's own

SCHUBERT

writing. Schubert played it through and said, ‘That’s not bad! Who composed it?’ ‘Why,’ said the friend, ‘you yourself did, and you gave it me a fortnight ago, but as it was too high for me I wrote it out afresh in another key.’

Altogether Schubert composed in his lifetime over 600 songs. As you have learnt, the publishers would at first not look at them. Later the tide turned, and the publishers became more willing. But they rarely gave him more than a few shillings for a song, and in spite of his genius he remained ever a poor man.

Instrumental Music

If you have not yet made acquaintance with Schubert’s Piano Music (such as his *Impromptus*, and his *Moments Musicaux*, for instance), let us hope you may soon do so. Then there is some beautiful Chamber Music, and there are some Symphonies, of which two are most heard—the great C major Symphony and the one in B minor, of which only two movements exist, and which is therefore always called *The Unfinished Symphony*.

Schubert’s Death

Like this symphony, Schubert’s life itself was ‘Unfinished’. If you will look back at the heading of this chapter, and see the dates there, you will realize that he only lived thirty-one years. It will strike you, too, that he died the year after Beethoven. For years Beethoven and Schubert had lived in the same city of Vienna, but

SECOND BOOK OF THE GREAT MUSICIANS

Beethoven was known to everyone, was admired, and had wealthy friends, whereas Schubert was known and loved only by a small circle of people, generally not so high in the social scale as those with whom Beethoven associated. So Beethoven knew nothing of Schubert and Schubert loved Beethoven at a distance. Then one day a friend took Schubert to visit Beethoven, but the younger man was so bashful that when the elder one asked him a question, instead of answering it on the writing-tablet held out to him (you remember, Beethoven was deaf), he caught up his hat and rushed to the door and bolted! Later he got more courage, and as for Beethoven, when he was shown some of the songs, he said, emphatically, 'Truly, Schubert has the divine gift in him!'

When Beethoven was dying Schubert visited him, and at the funeral he was one of the torch-bearers. On the way home he and the two friends who were with him stopped at an inn, and solemnly drank to the memory of the great man. Then they drank another solemn toast to the first of them who should follow him. This, as it turned out, was Schubert himself, who, weakly for many years, fell ill and died, lovingly cared for in the house of that elder brother, Ferdinand, who had been so kind to him from his boyhood. On his death-bed he was cheered by reading *The Last of the Mohicans* and other novels by the American novelist Fenimore Cooper, and a few days before he died he wrote to a friend asking him to lend him more books by the same author. He had begged to be buried near Beethoven, and his wish was fulfilled. In music he left over 1,000 compositions; in money—£2 10s. The stone placed over him has these words:

SCHUBERT

Music has here entombed a rich treasure—
But still fairer hopes.

QUESTIONS

*(To See Whether You Remember
the Chapter and Understand It)*

1. What was Schubert's nationality?
2. In what city did he spend his life?
3. What other great composers lived there in those days?
4. What was Schubert's father?
5. To what school was Schubert sent?
6. What instrument did he play in the family quartet?
7. How did he earn a living when he left school?
8. Was Schubert in your opinion a surly sort of fellow or a pleasant sort? Why do you think so?
9. Was he a slow, laborious composer, or a quick one? Can you remember any circumstances that will illustrate your answer?
10. Mention two or three of his songs and tell anything about how they were composed, or performed, or published.

SECOND BOOK OF THE GREAT MUSICIANS

11. Mention one or two Symphonies.

12. How old was Schubert when he died? Did he die poor or rich?

13. Tell anything you remember about Schubert's meetings with Beethoven.

14. Which of the two died first—Schubert or Beethoven?

THINGS TO DO

(For School and Home)

1. Get somebody to play you some of Schubert's music. Listen to it carefully and see if you really like it, and which pieces you like best, and why. Write down your opinion.

2. Next day get the same performer to play the pieces again, without your looking over them, and see if you can remember the name of each piece. Then look at what you wrote down yesterday and see if you still like the same pieces best.

3. If there are any parts you don't like, or seem not to understand, get the player to do them again, and look over the music so as to see how these parts are made up. Then listen again and see if you now understand better.

4. If you have a Pianola, Piano-player or Player-piano, get your parents to buy or borrow some Schubert rolls, and practise these yourself.

5. If you can play the Piano pretty well, ask your

SCHUBERT

teacher if there is any Schubert piece suitable for you.

6. If you know a Singer, get him or her to sing you some Schubert songs. Before each is sung, read the words through and understand them. Then listen to the song the first time just for its music, and the second time to see how the song-part and the piano-part express or set off the words. Then listen a third time just for the pleasure of it.

7. If you have a Gramophone, get hold of some Schubert song records, and of the records of *The Unfinished Symphony*. In listening to the Symphony, see if you can find places that illustrate what Schumann said about the Wind Instruments in Schubert's orchestration—'They chat with one another like human beings'.

8. If you have any of Schubert's music, write a preface to it, giving briefly the chief facts about the composer's life, and paste it on the back of the title-page.

9. Make up a little play about Schubert, write it out and act it with your companions.

10. Prepare a little lecture on Schubert, and give it, with musical illustrations by yourself and friends or by the Pianola or Gramophone.



JOHN FIELD

CHAPTER II

THE INVENTOR OF
THE NOCTURNE

JOHN FIELD

1782-1837

What is a Nocturne?

Before you begin to read this chapter play one of Chopin's Nocturnes, or get some one to play one to you. And as you play or hear it try to notice what it is like—what it is that makes a Nocturne a Nocturne, and not (say) a Minuet or a March.

The word 'Nocturne' means, of course, just a Night Piece—the sort of dreamy, tender music that might come into a composer's head as he stood looking over the fields or the sea on a starlight or moonlight night. But, besides suggesting this feeling, Chopin's Nocturnes, you will find, have also got other characteristics in common. Look, for instance, at the favourite one in E flat. You will notice that in the right hand we have a beautiful melody, that *floats*, as it were, on spreading

SECOND BOOK OF THE GREAT MUSICIANS

waves of harmony in the left hand, which are made to sound on by the use of the sustaining pedal. Almost all the Chopin Nocturnes are like that, though the left-hand part is not in some of the Nocturnes so wave-like as in this Nocturne, whilst in others it is more so. This way of treating the two hands is really one of the 'distinguishing marks' of a Nocturne. If you were to make up a bit of slow melody, put to it a left-hand accompaniment of the sort described, and then play it to any one who knew anything about piano music, they would say at once, 'Why, that must be the beginning of some Nocturne.'

Who First Composed Such Pieces?

Now most people think the Chopin Nocturne style was invented by Chopin, but this was not so. An Irishman invented Chopin's Nocturnes for him, which, being a sort of 'bull', is just what an Irishman would do. This Irishman was John Field, and he was writing Nocturnes before Chopin was put into trousers. At one time everybody played his music, but now hardly anybody does so, and thus what he did for music is in danger of being forgotten.

Where and When Field was Born

Field was born in Dublin in 1782—that is to say, whilst Haydn was in his prime (how old was he?) and Beethoven a boy (and how old was *he?*). And he died in

JOHN FIELD

1837, the year Queen Victoria came to the throne, when Schubert and Beethoven had been dead respectively nine and ten years, and Chopin and Schumann and Mendelssohn were all young men of twenty-seven or twenty-eight. That fixes him in his chronological place in your mind, I hope.

The Young Pianist

Field's father and grandfather lived together in Dublin and kept a sort of little school of music. The grandfather was an Organist and Pianist and the father played the fiddle in a theatre orchestra, and taught it to as many pupils as he could get. These two elder musicians gave the younger one (for Field had early taken to piano playing) many a good thrashing, thinking perhaps that they could whip music into him through the skin, instead of making him take it up gradually with the mind. Once the boy ran away from home to escape the whippings he got there, but he seems to have gone back again pretty soon.

At that time there was in Dublin a famous Italian pianist named Giordani (pronounce that 'Gee-or-daa-nee', saying the first two syllables quickly, which is as near as I can get to it in English spelling). To this man was young Field sent for lessons, and he got on so well that when he was nine his master made him appear at concerts, describing him on the bills as 'the much admired Master Field, a youth of eight years of age'. I am sorry to tell you that nearly all these youngsters who appear before the public are made out to be

SECOND BOOK OF THE GREAT MUSICIANS

younger than they really are. When I visited Beethoven's birthplace at Bonn, I saw there a printed bill of his father's announcing the appearance at a concert on March 26, 1778, of his little son of 'six years'. You, who have read the account of Beethoven in my first volume, and know in what year he was born, can see what a shocking lie *that* was!

Field in London

When Field was eleven, his father left Dublin for Bath, and later went to London, where he became a member of the orchestra at the Haymarket Theatre. And in London the boy became pupil to a celebrated pianist of the day, that Clementi whose sonatinas you may know, and who was then the finest player in London. In 1794 young Field (this time 'aged ten') appeared in public, and old Haydn, who was in London just then, was in the audience and predicted that the boy would become a great musician.

Now Clementi was not only a player of pianos but also a maker of them, and he made Field spend a great deal of time in his piano shop, playing brilliant passages to customers, and showing off the instruments. Then when Clementi went abroad for the purposes of giving recitals and of selling pianos he took Field with him. When they got to St. Petersburg (which we now call Petrograd) Clementi opened a show-room for the pianos, and poor Field (aged nineteen, yet, as the great musician Spohr tells us, 'in an Eton suit which he

JOHN FIELD

had much outgrown') was kept at work displaying the qualities of the instruments.

When Clementi left Petrograd, Field remained behind, and a certain general took him in as his guest and introduced him into society. Soon he became very well known as a concert player, and had crowds of aristocratic pupils. Indeed he became so popular that he was spoiled, becoming lazy and frivolous. One of his pupils was Glinka, who became the founder of modern Russian music.

Field's Compositions

So long did Field live in Russia, and so connected with that country in people's minds did he become, that often he is spoken of in books as 'Russian Field'. He did a great deal of composition, and in 1814 composed his first Nocturnes. He also wrote Piano Sonatas and Concertos. The Concertos were for years very much played, and Schumann, in his time, praised them highly, but we never hear them now. Later, Field left Petrograd and lived in Moscow, and sometimes he travelled on recital tours. He played in London, and in Paris, and Florence, and Venice, and elsewhere, and the best judges of music were astonished at his playing, which was very simple and unaffected in style, and very neat and finished.

Field's Death

In Naples Field fell ill, and spent nine months in a hospital. A Russian nobleman found him there, and took him away with him. Gradually he was able to travel back to Russia with the nobleman, but there he fell ill again and died. The city of Moscow, recognizing what a great man he was, gave him a public funeral. His life was not a short one (fifty-five years), but probably it would have been longer and happier if he had not been so sternly treated as a boy at home, and then overworked in youth by Clementi. The result of this harshness seems to have been that when he got away from restraints, and was made much of in Russia, he 'lost his head' and became careless of his health and intemperate.

The Two Nocturne Writers

If possible get your teacher or some friend to play you not only the Chopin Nocturne I have mentioned (the one in E flat, Op. 9, No. 2), but also a certain one by Field in the same key (No. 1).

JOHN FIELD

Field's begins:

Molto moderato.

messa voce.

Ped. *Ped.*

Ped.

Detailed description: This musical score is for the beginning of a piece by John Field. It is in 12/8 time and B-flat major. The tempo is 'Molto moderato'. The score consists of two systems. The first system has a vocal line in the treble clef and a piano accompaniment in the bass clef. The vocal line starts with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5, then a half note B4, and finally a half note A4. The piano accompaniment starts with a quarter rest, followed by eighth notes G3, A3, B3, and C4, then eighth notes D4, E4, F4, and G4, and continues with a similar pattern. Pedal markings are placed under the piano accompaniment. The second system continues the vocal line with a half note G4, a quarter rest, a half note A4, and a quarter rest. The piano accompaniment continues with eighth notes G3, A3, B3, and C4, then eighth notes D4, E4, F4, and G4, and continues with a similar pattern. Pedal markings are placed under the piano accompaniment.

And Chopin's begins:

Andante

espress dolce.

*Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. **

*Ped. * Ped. * Ped. **

Detailed description: This musical score is for the beginning of a piece by Chopin. It is in 12/8 time and B-flat major. The tempo is 'Andante'. The score consists of two systems. The first system has a vocal line in the treble clef and a piano accompaniment in the bass clef. The vocal line starts with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5, then a half note B4, and finally a half note A4. The piano accompaniment starts with a quarter rest, followed by eighth notes G3, A3, B3, and C4, then eighth notes D4, E4, F4, and G4, and continues with a similar pattern. Pedal markings are placed under the piano accompaniment. The second system continues the vocal line with a half note G4, a quarter rest, a half note A4, and a quarter rest. The piano accompaniment continues with eighth notes G3, A3, B3, and C4, then eighth notes D4, E4, F4, and G4, and continues with a similar pattern. Pedal markings are placed under the piano accompaniment.

SECOND BOOK OF THE GREAT MUSICIANS

If you listen to and look at those extracts carefully you will see how similar they are in style. But, of course, though we may *like* Field's piece, Chopin's is the one we *love*. Why? Because to Field's grace and beauty Chopin has added a deeper poetical feeling. It is as if I were to say to you (as the opening of a word-nocturne):

'The evening bell is ringing,
The cattle come home from the fields,'

and somebody were then to read to you Gray's 'Elegy', which begins with just this thought, but ever so much more beautifully expressed:

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea.

But you see what Chopin learnt from Field, and if you will now look at and listen closely to the two Nocturnes you will see many others of Field's ideas that were adopted by Chopin, such as, for instance, this sort of ornamental, running, chromatic-scaly figure:

Field:

The image shows a musical score for a piece by Field. It consists of two staves. The top staff is in the treble clef and features a complex, chromatic, and scalic figure. The bottom staff is in the bass clef and contains a simpler bass line. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The time signature is not explicitly shown but is likely common time. The score includes dynamic markings: *sf* (sforzando) and *pp* (pianissimo). The word *And.* (Andante) is written below the bass staff. A decorative asterisk symbol is located at the end of the bass staff.

JOHN FIELD

Chopin:

Musical score for Chopin's piece. The score is in 12/8 time and features a key signature of two flats. The treble staff contains a melodic line with a long slur over a series of notes, including a sharp sign and a note with an accent (>). The bass staff contains a rhythmic accompaniment with chords and single notes. Below the bass staff, there are dynamic markings: 'Ped.' followed by an asterisk (*), then another 'Ped.' followed by an asterisk (*).

Then notice where Chopin got another of his charming little 'mannerisms', a turn followed by a high leap:

Field:

Musical score for Field's piece. The score is in 12/8 time and features a key signature of two flats. The treble staff shows a melodic line with a turn (trill) and a high leap, marked with an accent (>). The bass staff contains a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth notes. Below the bass staff, there is a dynamic marking: 'Ped.'

Chopin:

Musical score for Chopin's piece. The score is in 12/8 time and features a key signature of two flats. The treble staff contains a melodic line with a turn and a high leap. The bass staff contains a rhythmic accompaniment with chords and single notes. Below the bass staff, there are dynamic markings: an asterisk (*), 'Ped.', an asterisk (*), 'Ped.', an asterisk (*), and 'Ped.'

SECOND BOOK OF THE GREAT MUSICIANS

And so we could go on, comparing these and various other Field and Chopin Nocturnes.

But, since Field is little played to-day, why have I troubled to write a chapter about him? *Firstly*, because his Nocturnes, though not so deeply poetical as Chopin's, are refined and beautiful and worth more playing than they get. *Secondly*, because people so often forget what British composers have done for music, especially piano music, and they should be reminded of it. Look back again at Chapter II of *The First Book of the Great Musicians* and remind yourself of what the British composers did in laying the very *foundations* of keyboard music. Bach's Suites, we may say, are a building reared on the foundation laid by Bull and Byrd, and other British musicians, a century and more earlier. And, similarly, Chopin's Nocturnes are a building reared on the foundations laid by his elder contemporary, John Field.

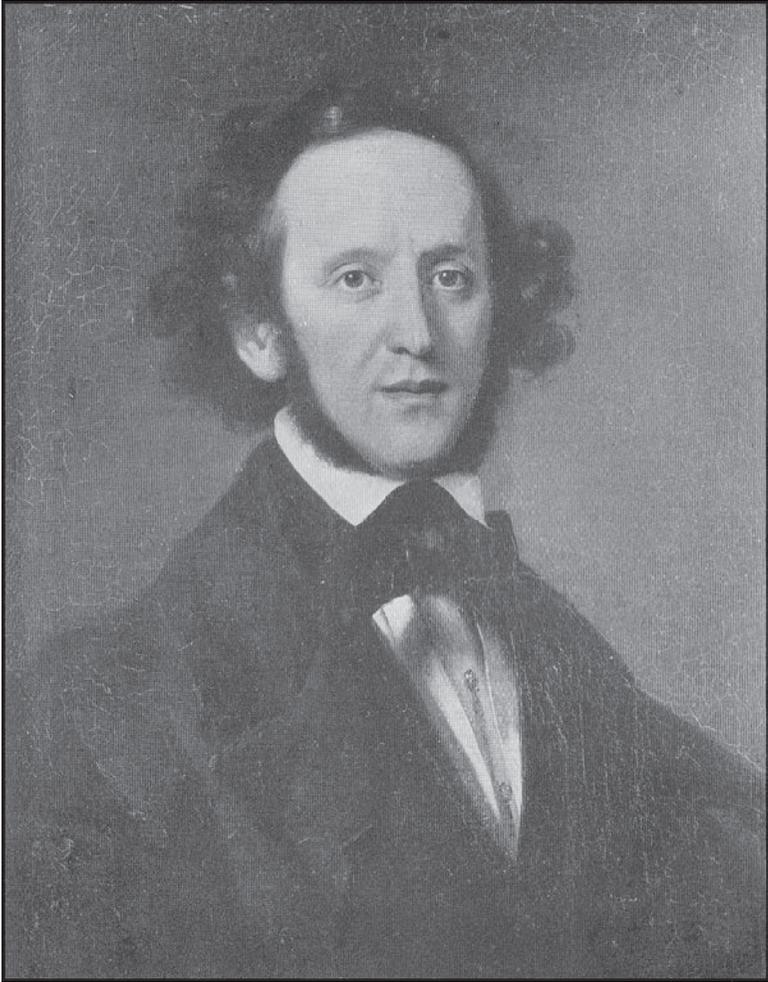
QUESTIONS

*(To See Whether You Remember
the Chapter and Understand It)*

1. What is a Nocturne? Describe it as clearly as you can.
2. Where and when was Field born?
3. Where and when did he die?
4. What do you remember of Field's boyhood?
5. Mention one or two of Field's teachers.
6. How did Field come to be in Russia?
7. Tell anything you remember of his life there.
8. What did Field write besides his Nocturnes?
9. Mention a few things that Chopin learned from Field.
10. Why should we remember Field?

THINGS TO DO

These have already been mentioned in the chapter itself.



FELIX MENDELSSOHN

CHAPTER III

MENDELSSOHN

1809-1847

The Youth Who Could Do Everything

We will begin with a picnic in Wales, up amongst the hills. The engineer who is in charge of the mines of the district has had a tent carried up, and brought his family to celebrate his birthday among the miners. And with his family he has brought a guest who is staying with them, a young man from Germany, who has the reputation of being a good musician and who has been appearing at concerts in London. But this young man, it seems, is not only a musician. He throws himself into the fun and it really seems as though he can do everything. He can play all the games, or if there is one he cannot play, it has only to be explained to him and he understands it at once. He can sketch, and that quite beautifully. He can dance. In the evenings when they get home he can play chess and billiards and beat them all, he can ride and swim and is a great gymnast, and when he leaves this Welsh family and goes home they find that he can write the most interesting letters, describing all that he sees and does more like a practised author than a mere friendly letter-writer.

SECOND BOOK OF THE GREAT MUSICIANS

But it is the music he makes that pleases them most. He sees a creeping plant in the garden, with little blossoms almost the shape of trumpets. 'Fairy trumpets,' he says, and sits down and plays a piece on the piano—music for the fairies to play. Then he writes it out for one of the children, and draws all up the margin of the paper a sprig of the blossoms.

One morning as he is dressing he hears a boy of the family playing on the drawing-room piano a little tune he has made up in the Welsh style, and in the evening when the visitor sits down to play, out comes this very tune, turned into a long piece of beautiful music.

When they are out in the grounds one evening the young man says, 'What a pity we haven't an instrument out here!' One of the boys rushes to the gardener's cottage and borrows a fiddle. It is a wretched old thing, and all the strings are snapped but one. The young man bursts into fits of laughter when he sees such an instrument, but he takes it, and somehow he draws beautiful music out of that one string, to which his companions listen eagerly until darkness comes and it is time to go in.

That is Mendelssohn 'all over'—the youth to whom everything came easily and who was nearly always in high spirits.

The Boyhood

Mendelssohn had had a wonderful musical boyhood. He learnt early to play the Piano, and from nine

MENDELSSOHN

onwards appeared in concerts; he learnt the Violin too, and did a great deal of composition; and he sang alto in the great choral society of Berlin, his native place, ‘standing amongst the grown-up people in his child’s dress, a tight-fitting jacket cut very low at the neck, over which the trousers were buttoned, into the slanting pockets of these the little fellow liked to thrust his hands, rocking his curly head from side to side, and shifting restlessly from one foot to the other.’

When he was twelve he began to compose more systematically, copying all his pieces into a big album, and, when that was finished, starting another, until, at the end of his life, there were forty-four of these volumes on his shelves—one for each year and a few over.

Sunday Music

Mendelssohn’s parents were rich and had a large and beautiful house, with a big dining-room, where every other Sunday they gave concerts for their friends. The children took a great part in the music. Felix, of whom I have been telling you these things, often composed some of the music, and conducted the Orchestra, standing on a stool; Fanny, his clever sister, played the Piano, Rebecka sang, and Paul played the ‘Cello. This is the very best way of making music, and more families could do it if they tried, though not all could do it on so big a scale, or do it so well as to be worth their friends’ frequent hearing. And of course not all families could provide their own domestic composer.

SECOND BOOK OF THE GREAT MUSICIANS

The Mendelssohn family's music-making was so famous that any notable musicians who passed through Berlin were glad to be present to hear it.

Some Holiday Music

The Mendelssohns lived in music, and when they went on holiday they did not leave it behind. When Felix was fourteen he and his two brothers were taken on a tour in Silesia by their father. At one town a Charity Concert was being prepared, and the committee asked if they might announce that Felix would play a Mozart Concerto with their Orchestra. But at the rehearsal the Orchestra played so much out of tune and out of time that Felix made the schoolmaster go on to the platform and say that, instead of playing the Concerto, Master Mendelssohn would extemporize, and this was done, Felix playing a brilliant improvisation on some tunes out of works by Mozart and Weber.

When they went to the seaside next year they found that there was a wind band there, so Felix wrote for it an Overture, which the band played and which he afterwards published.

The 'Midsummer Night's Dream' Overture

When he was seventeen-and-a-half Mendelssohn wrote a most beautiful overture, intended to precede Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. To this day, this is the music we generally hear in a London

MENDELSSOHN

theatre when they perform the play, and to the end of his life the composer never composed anything finer. Its opening is very light and fairy-like, so that somebody has said that Mendelssohn was ‘the first composer to bring the fairies into the orchestra.’ But there are others besides fairies in Shakespeare’s play and so there are in Mendelssohn’s overture to it; at one place you can distinctly hear Bottom’s ‘Hee-haw’.

Mendelssohn later wrote other music for *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*—for instance, the famous Wedding March, which is nowadays as much used at church weddings as at stage weddings. And there is also a very beautiful soft Night Piece, or ‘Notturmo’.

Other Orchestral Pieces

Mendelssohn is famous for his Overtures, some of which were not intended for plays, but just as orchestral pieces to begin a concert. Indeed he may be said to have invented the Concert Overture, writing it much on the lines of the first movement of a Beethoven symphony. One of the best of these concert overtures is the *Hebrides Overture*, sometimes called *Fingal’s Cave*. When Mendelssohn was travelling in Scotland, of which country he was very fond, he visited that cave, and there came to his mind a beautiful bit of music, which he wrote down and afterwards used as the opening of this Overture. Some other orchestral works of Mendelssohn are in the form of full symphonies. He gave these names: there are a *Scotch Symphony* and an *Italian Symphony*

SECOND BOOK OF THE GREAT MUSICIANS

(in which some of his feelings during his tours in Scotland and Italy are reproduced), and a *Reformation Symphony* with the finale made out of the fine old tune which you will find in all Hymn Tune books to Luther's hymn, 'A Safe Stronghold our God is still'.

Pieces for orchestra and a solo instrument are the very popular Violin Concerto and the two Piano Concertos.

There is also a good deal of Chamber Music.

Mendelssohn's Oratorios

Besides the pieces just mentioned, Mendelssohn wrote a good deal of choral music, and especially sacred music, such as settings of the Psalms, and some Oratorios—*St. Paul*, *Elijah*, and the *Hymn of Praise*.

The first performance of *Elijah* was at Birmingham, so English people heard it before Mendelssohn's own countrymen. Mendelssohn himself conducted and was delighted with the solo singers and the chorus and the orchestra, and with the audience, too. He wrote home to his brother saying, 'No work of mine ever went so admirably at the first performance, or was received with such enthusiasm as this. I never in my life heard a better performance, no, nor so good, and almost doubt if I shall ever hear one like it again.'

MENDELSSOHN

The Piano Music

Mendelssohn was himself a fine pianist, so naturally he wrote a good deal of piano music. Amongst this there is a *Rondo Capriccioso* that you may have heard (you know what a Rondo is, and a Capriccioso piece is naturally one that cuts jolly 'capers'). And you must know some of the *Songs without Words*. The idea of these, of course, is a beautiful tune, of a song kind, with an accompaniment to it going on all the time. And there are other pieces, but these are perhaps the best known. At first nobody in England would buy the *Songs without Words*, and when Mendelssohn, being in London, went to Novello's shop to see how much money they had for him from the proceeds of the first book of six of the pieces he found that they had only sold about a hundred copies in four years and had only a pound or two for him. Afterwards people became even too fond of these pieces, so that every home in England where there was a piano had the full set of them, and other good music was in some cases neglected.

Mendelssohn as Pianist

There must be many young pianists amongst the readers of this book, and they may care to have a description of Mendelssohn's playing, which was very famous.

SECOND BOOK OF THE GREAT MUSICIANS

He was a good sight reader and could play at once anything you put before him. And he was a good memory player, and hardly ever used printed music except when he was sight reading. Train yourself in sight reading and memory playing by all means! And, once his boyhood was past, he *never practised*. But in this you and I cannot, I fear, afford to follow his example—can we? Madame Schumann said that Mendelssohn's playing was one of the most delightful things she had ever heard in her life. She said 'in hearing him one forgot the *player* and only revelled in the full enjoyment of the *music*.'

Joachim said that Mendelssohn's playing in a *staccato* passage was 'the most extraordinary thing possible, for life and crispness.' He had great 'fire' in his playing, yet great delicacy, and he must have listened and trained himself to get very good tone, because in the softest passages everything could be clearly heard, even in the largest hall, whilst in the loudest passages the effect was never harsh. It is in the tone they produce that many well-known players of to-day fail. Mendelssohn's phrasing was beautifully clear, and he used the sustaining pedal with great thoughtfulness. '*Strict time was one of his hobbies.*'

Mendelssohn as Organist

As an organist, too, Mendelssohn was celebrated. Whenever he came to England he had to play on all the greatest organs. He had written six fine Organ Sonatas, which you can often hear nowadays at recitals,

MENDELSSOHN

and he was very fond of playing Bach's organ fugues, and did a great deal to make these popular amongst English organists. But one thing he could not do that you or I could probably do quite well. After a church service he could not 'play the people out,' and once at St. Paul's Cathedral, when the organist got him to play a concluding voluntary, as the congregation did not go, the vergers, who wanted to get home to dinner, went to the organ-blower and made him leave his work, so that the playing came to a sudden end in the middle of a bar, and the people quickly dispersed.

Mendelssohn and Bach

You have read about Bach in *The First Book of the Great Musicians*. After his death, the style of music changed for a time; Fugues and Suites went out and Sonatas and Symphonies came in. And old Bach was almost forgotten, and whilst his sons lived their music was more thought of than his. Then came Haydn and Mozart and Beethoven, and so people went on forgetting old Bach. It was Mendelssohn who did more than any one else to bring Bach to life again. As a youth of eighteen he prepared a choir in the great *St. Matthew Passion*, and gave the first performance of this that had taken place since Bach died, over seventy years before. We owe him a great debt for making us realize the beauty of Bach, as we do also an English organist who did much the same here—Samuel Wesley.

Mendelssohn and an English Composer

Another thing we owe to Mendelssohn is the discovery of Sterndale Bennett. When Mendelssohn first started coming to this country British people had an idea that no Briton could compose fine music. But Mendelssohn went to a concert at the Royal Academy of Music, heard a student, Bennett, play some of his own music, and was so much struck with his compositions that he invited him to Germany and made much of him there, as did other great German musicians, such as Schumann. Then the English musicians, seeing one of their young countrymen taken up in musical Germany, thought there must be something in him, and so gave him a chance in his own country. And so gradually people awoke to the fact that one can be an Englishman and at the same time a composer. Sterndale Bennett wrote some fine music (a little in Mendelssohn's style) and then, unfortunately, left off composing in middle life, so that he never came to his full development. But, all the same, with him the tide of British music turned. *Thank you, Mendelssohn!*

QUESTIONS

*(To See Whether You Remember
the Chapter and Understand It)*

1. Tell anything you remember showing what sort of a youth Mendelssohn was.
2. Were his family musical? If so, tell anything you remember about their musical doings.
3. What do you remember about some music Mendelssohn wrote for a certain Shakespeare play?
4. Mention the names of any other Orchestral pieces by Mendelssohn, and say what you remember about them.
5. What Oratorios did Mendelssohn write?
6. And what Piano music?
7. What do you know about his Piano playing?
8. And his Organ playing?
9. What did he do for Bach?
10. And what for British music?

THINGS TO DO

1. Get the *Midsummer Night's Dream* Overture as a Gramophone record, or a piano piece, and listen to it carefully to see what there is in it, and how it is made

SECOND BOOK OF THE GREAT MUSICIANS

up. If you get the Gramophone record, try to find out, by listening carefully, which instruments are playing the different bits. Get the *Notturmo* also.

2. Play, or get somebody to play to you, some of the *Songs without Words*, and then study them to find out how they are made. Do the same with any others of the piano pieces.

3. Get Gramophone records of some of Mendelssohn's Chamber Music, and study it until you know it thoroughly.

4. Get somebody to sing you parts of *Elijah*, or else get these for the Gramophone. Look at a copy of the Piano Score, and find out where in the story of *Elijah* comes each song that you hear.

5. Get a friendly church organist to play you one of Mendelssohn's Organ Sonatas—several times, so that you can study it, and remember it. It will help you if the organist will play the chief bits first, and explain to you how Mendelssohn has worked them up into his 'movements'.

6. There is a favourite Christmas Hymn Tune of yours which is adapted from a work of Mendelssohn's. Look through a Hymn Tune book and find out what it is.

7. Get a Violinist and Pianist to play you part of the Violin Concerto, or get the Gramophone record of one of the movements of this.