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### **Felix MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847)**

Six Organ Sonatas Op. 65 [69:51]  
Allegro in B-flat major [2:54]  
Allegretto in D minor [2:16]  
Allegro moderato maestoso in C major [2:16]  
Fugue in F minor - Andante sostenuto [4:34]  
Andante in F major [2:53]  
Fugue in B-flat major [3:32]  
Allegro, Choral and Fugue in D minor/D major [7:39]  
Andante and Variations in D major [5:11]  
Nachspiel in D major [4:57]  
Anders Eidsten Dahl (organ)  
rec. Sofienberg Church, Oslo, Norway, June 2015  
**LAWO CLASSICS LWC1108** [69:51 + 36:25]

I have always wondered why the organ works of Felix Mendelssohn are so underrated. Yes, there are plenty of recordings, but the music is hardly talked about. It is seen more as the poor relation to the rest, but then this could be said of all of his keyboard music, the *Lieder ohne Worte*, being the only exception. This is strange when you consider how interesting and varied his organ music, not to mention the rest of his piano output, is.

When it comes to his *Six Organ Sonatas* Op. 65 there seem to be two trains of thought: accommodating them on a single disc or spreading them over more than one. In the case of my preferred version, that by Peter Planyavsky for Motette, comes on three discs (CD11271, CD11281, CD11291). In fact, he could probably have fitted them all on one disc. There is a third way, one which Giulio Piovani proffers. In his case, slightly more relaxed tempos mean that whilst the first sonata is on disc two of his complete organ music set for Brilliant (94845), the remaining five have the third disc to themselves. Whilst it is nice to have all the sonatas on a single disc, as here, each approach has its own validity and place.

Mendelssohn composed his *Six Organ Sonatas* in 1844 and 1845, with the first three originally conceived as voluntaries. Indeed in a letter to his friend and publisher, Charles Coventry, Mendelssohn stated that "I should like to call the pieces "Three Sonatas for Organ" instead of 'voluntaries'." At any rate his first three sonatas were born and they were swiftly to be joined by another group of three and published under the single opus number. The sonatas are some of the finest of all the early romantic organ repertoire. Just listen to the exuberant fourth movement *Allegro assai vivace* of the First Sonata. It is in complete contrast to what has gone before. The previous movements are slow and sedate, yet this is an ideal conclusion to the Sonata. This is achieved despite being composed after the slow movement of the Third Sonata, something which is made clear in the excellent booklet note. People might recognise the opening *Con moto maestoso* of the Third Sonata, as it deploys the chorale *Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir*, used by J.S. Bach in his BWV 38 and 686, for some of the thematic material. This is music Mendelssohn had used in the wedding music he had written for his sister Fanny, recycling it into a wonderful sonata opening. The final sonata of the six opens with a *Choral (Vater unser im Himmelreich) - Andante sostenuto - Allegro Molto*. It was composed at the end of January 1845 whilst Mendelssohn was compiling his edition of the Bach organ works for his friend Charles Coventry's publishing house. He uses the chorale, one which his hero had previously set, BWV 737, as the major theme for this movement. He builds on it to produce a growing intensity; this is then followed by a slowish *Fuga* that builds upon the themes of the first movement. Unusually the final movement *Finale - Andante*, is the slowest of the three, with the sonata ending on a graceful and fitting melody.

The nine pieces without opus numbers as presented here are not a set and were not intended to be conceived as such. They were actually composed over a number of years, indeed the opening

piece, *Allegro in B-flat major*, and the penultimate, *Andante and Variations in D major*, are usually published as the Two Pieces (1844). However, bringing them together is quite a good idea, as they represent an aspect of Mendelssohn's artistic output which is all too often overlooked. These pieces without opus numbers offer the listener an in-depth look into the creativity of a composer of fine organ music. There is a rich variety of styles and tempos on offer here, with some being composed at the same time as his Op. 65 and showing the same traits as the sonatas. For example the slow *Fugue in F minor - Andante sostenuto* (1839), often regarded as one of Mendelssohn's loveliest, is a pure romantic exposition of the fugue. The final piece on the disc, his *Nachspiel in D major* (1831) with its binary structure and second section fugue is an organist's *tour de force*. This is a disc that makes you lament that it is only 36 minutes long. Here, as in the sonatas, Anders Eidsten Dahl proves a consummate interpreter of Mendelssohn's music.

Dahl is evidently an intelligent organist and interpreter. While choosing tempos that allow all six sonatas to be accommodated on a single disc he never sounds hurried, giving the sense of a thoughtful performer. The same can be said of the nine pieces. He is able to make the most of the slow quieter sections whilst also offering a degree of excitement in the more exuberant ones. His excellent booklet notes only add to the enjoyment of these discs. They are detailed, treating each movement as a separate piece.

Dahl is helped by the acoustic of the Sofienberg Church and its lovely-sounding Hermann Eule instrument which helps to bring out the best from this music. My wish is that Lawo gives Dahl the opportunity to record the rest of the Mendelssohn organ works in Sofienberg Church, as I for one would invest.

**Stuart Sillitoe**

[http://musicweb-international.com/classrev/2017/Mar/Mendelssohn\\_organ\\_LWC1108.htm](http://musicweb-international.com/classrev/2017/Mar/Mendelssohn_organ_LWC1108.htm)