

# The premiere of Fanny Hensel's Overture C Major and the revival by Elke Mascha Blankenburg

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## Abstract

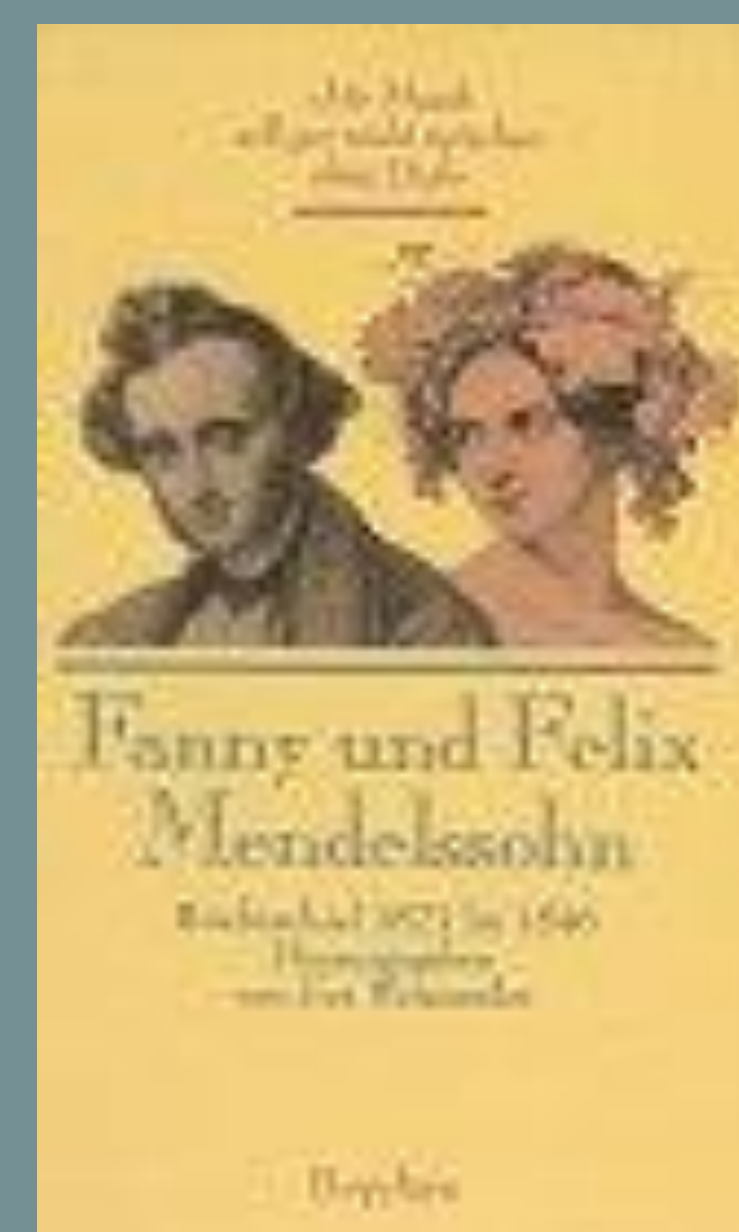
In 1834 Fanny Hensel organized the "Sonntagsmusiken", a (semi-)private music event in the garden of her family, the Mendelssohn's. During this event she conducted her first and only work for pure orchestra. In her letters to her brother, she told him about the very successful premiere. Yet, this overture was never published and the premiere the only performance we know about. Until the conductor Elke Mascha Blankenburg edited and published this piece and performed it with the Clara-Schumann-Orchestra during the public event "Festival der 1000 Frauen". Blankenburg, dressed as her idol Hensel revived the Overture in C Major and so made an important contribution to research about women composers. Since the revival, amateur and professional orchestras began to integrate this piece into their program.

## Introduction

The Overture C Major is already an exception, it is the only known piece Hensel composed for orchestra only. The fact that it didn't get published during her lifetime, not even under her brother's name like many of her works, makes it even more outstanding. Yet, it is somehow handed down until the present day, but how and why?

## Methodology

The essay includes a short analysis and comparison of the autograph by Hensel and Blankenburg's edition. Fanny Hensel's letters to Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy were an important source and contributed to classify the event the premiere took place in, the "Sonntagsmusiken" and gave information about the event itself and the success of the premiere. The "Sonntagsmusiken" were a private event, organized by Fanny Hensel. The premiere of the overture was very successful, yet it remained a one-time-event we only know about from her letters to Felix.



Hensel's letters to her brother



"Dinner Party"-Ritual in Frankfurt



"Playing with history - The Festival of thousand women"



"Unadventurous seriousness and prescribed Pathos"

The "Archiv Frau und Musik" presented a collection of newspaper and magazine articles about the revival in 1986. These sources were vital to classify the event Festival of thousand women and also presented contemporary opinions about the Festival. The festival was limited in participants (women only) but was of public interest, so the extraordinary events taking place there were spread through the media.



Conductor Elke Mascha Blankenburg

## Results

If a piece gets handed down and survives the author depends on many different factors. In the case of Hensel's Overture, the "Sonntagsmusiken" as private event, the performance of this piece as one-time-event and the missing publication played a major role in the interrupted tradition. The revival during an event of public interest, the festival of thousand women on the other hand and the edition by Elke Mascha Blankenburg made this piece available for future research and orchestras.

## Conclusion

The Overture C major is just one example of many pieces by women composers who barely got handed down until our present day and there are even more pieces that became forgotten. Future research will have many opportunities to revive "forgotten" pieces and composers.

## Acknowledgements

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