

The Roman Holiday of Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel ¹

MICHAEL BAR-SHANY

“Let God grant us a good journey without mishaps and always good news from home, and He should let us find everything unchanged, then shall we experience a wonderful time. I am looking forward to this big event with quiet joy; let it be a good omen! Amen!” ²

These are the last lines in Fanny Mendelssohn’s diary prior to her leaving Berlin with her husband Wilhelm Hensel, the Prussian court painter, and her nine-year-old son, Sebastian. An Italian journey had been Fanny’s life-long desire. Her brother, Felix, who was given all the moral and material support by his upper middle-class family, had traveled extensively abroad, including a tour of Italy in 1830-1831. But while Fanny had been given equal opportunities in her education at home, travel on one’s own for a female member of a “proper” family was out of the question. Her father, Abraham, in a much cited letter of July 16, 1820 to Fanny when she was fifteen years old wrote: “Perhaps for him (Felix) music will become a profession, while for you it will always be an ornament and can and should never become the ground bass of your being and doing.”³ In a later letter, when Fanny was 23 years old, he preached: “You should pull yourself together, and collect yourself; you should educate yourself more seriously and assiduously towards your real goal, that of a housewife, the only profession for a girl.”⁴ Clearly Abraham saw no point in breaking the “no travel” convention on behalf of his daughter, destined to marry and have

¹ This article evolved from a paper for a seminar course on the Mendelssohn family given at the Bar Ilan University, Israel by Beth Shamgar. I gratefully acknowledge her advice and suggestions, as well as her meticulous reading and correcting of the drafts which contributed considerably to the paper. I am very thankful to Bathia Churgin for her thorough reading of the final draft and helpful comments. I also want to express my appreciation to Roland Schmidt-Hensel, the present head of the Mendelssohn Archiv of the Berlin Staatsbibliothek, who during the final stages of this article, drew my attention to recent publications and provided copies of material not available in Israel.

² Sebastian Hensel, *Die Familie Mendelssohn 1729-1747, Nach Briefen und Tagebüchern*, edited by Friedrich Brandes (Leipzig: Hesse und Becker, 1929), 2: 65. Hensel’s book is a primary source of first importance. Many of Fanny Mendelssohn’s letters and diary entries have been translated by the writer from this source. In some cases translations from the dissertation of Victoria R Sirota, “The Life and Works of Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel” (D. M.A, dissertation, Boston University, 1981) have been used. Additional reference material: Marcia J. Citron, *The Letters of Fanny Hensel to Felix Mendelssohn*, (Stuyvesant, N.Y: Pendragon, 1987); .Françoise Tillard, *Fanny Mendelssohn* translated by Camille Naish (Portland Oreg: Amadeus, 1996); Sarah Rothenberg “ ‘Thus far but not farther’: Fanny Mendelssohn- Hensel’s Unfinished Journey, “ *The Musical Quarterly* 77 (1993): 689-708; Ute Büchter- Römer, *Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel* (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch, 2001); Fanny Hensel, *Briefe aus Rom an ihre Familie in Berlin 1839/40*, edited by Hans-Günter Klein (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2002); Fanny Hensel, *Tagebücher*, edited by Hans- Günter Klein and Rudolf Elvers (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 2002).

³ Hensel, *Die Familie Mendelssohn*, 1:102.

⁴ Hensel, *Die Familie Mendelssohn*, 1:104

children. The realization of Fanny's dream could only come true after her marriage, her father's death and her financial independence.

Fanny, like many of her artistic and intellectual contemporaries, had an enthusiastic view and considerable knowledge of Italy derived from the travel and general literature available to her. She had read and reread Goethe's *Italian Journey* (1816), dealing with the impressions during his 1786-88 voyage through Italy, and was familiar with Heine's *Reisebilder* (1828-29), in which he devoted several chapters to a four months journey in 1828 through northern Italy. She had also read Wilhelm Müller's⁵ *Rom, Römer und Römerinnen* (1820), in which Müller writes down his recollections of his stay in Rome (1818) in the form of letters addressed to an imaginary friend in Germany. Felix had reported to his family in long descriptive letters during his travels abroad.⁶ Fanny corresponded with her maternal uncle, Jakob Bartholdy, who since 1815 had been the Prussian consul in Rome, and also received letters from Italy from her aunt, Dorothea Schlegel.⁷

In 1822, the seventeen-year old Fanny traveled for four months with her parents and siblings through Switzerland. After reaching the Gotthard, the family turned back. Thus, Fanny's hope to cross the Alps and catch a glimpse of Italy was not realized.

In a letter to her cousin, Marianne,⁸ Fanny expresses her frustration and her longing for the country of her dreams:

"What one does not see acts on the mind not less than the visible environs. The idea of the land that begins behind those mountains, indeed, the tangible nearness of Italy, the mere fact that the country people have all been to Italy, speak Italian and greet the traveler with the sweet sounds of the lovely language moved me immensely."

Wilhelm Hensel met Fanny in 1821, fell in love and asked for her hand in marriage. Although the family initially encouraged the relationship, when Wilhelm in 1823 left on a five-year study trip to Italy, Fanny's parents did not agree to a formal engagement. In their eyes, Hensel was not the ideal choice for a husband. He was eleven years older than Fanny, the son of a poor rural Protestant minister; his sister, Louise, was a devout Catholic convert who encouraged Wilhelm's tendency to join the Catholic Church, which, as far as the Mendelssohns were concerned, would absolutely disqualify him as a son-in-law.

Fanny's parents did not allow any direct letter exchange between the young people. Lea, Fanny's mother, was the one who through the long years corresponded with Hensel. When Hensel returned to Berlin and the parents realized that Fanny's affection for him had not diminished, they relented and the marriage took place at the end of 1829.

Ten years after Fanny's marriage it became possible to realize her long cherished dream of an Italian journey. Wilhelm's love for Italy reinforced Fanny's desire. It should be added that a contributing factor to the couple's decision to travel was Louise Hensel, who resided in their house. As already mentioned, she was a fervent Catholic who resented anything that disturbed her praying and self-communion. This included practically any social intercourse and certainly Fanny's *Sonntagsmusik*, the musical soirées that for many years were Fanny's responsibility and were a major part

⁵ German poet (1794-1827), whose poems, including the cycles *Die schöne Müllerin* and *Die Winterreise*, were given enduring fame by Schubert.

⁶ Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Letters from Italy and Switzerland*, translated by Lady Grace Wallace (London: Longman, 1864).

⁷ Literary personality (1763-1839), oldest daughter of Moses Mendelssohn and wife of Friedrich Schlegel, German writer and critic.

⁸ Hensel, *Die Familie Mendelssohn*, 1:130.

of her musical activity. Louise disapproved vigorously of the couple's way of living and made Fanny's life difficult with her constant complaints and reproaches. At the end of August 1839, the Hensels embarked on their Italian journey.

Fanny was a most accomplished letter writer in the best German Romantic tradition, as were Felix and other members of her family. During the entire year of her voyage, Fanny kept a travel diary and wrote many letters to her family in Berlin as well as to Felix and his wife in Leipzig. The diary and the letters, edited and introduced by Eva Weissweiler,⁹ are an important source on the Italian journey.

Though personal, as is true for so many diaries and letters, they were written with the awareness that they might be read not only by the addressees but might also be preserved for posterity and be published. Fanny writes with humor, discernment and with a critical spirit. Her Judeo-Christian, Prussian upper middle-class upbringing is also reflected in her writing. Fanny's letters report on the Hensels' activities, with emphasis on the cultural and in particular the musical scene. Though she comments on her new surroundings as contrasted with her life in Berlin, Fanny shows little interest in or awareness of the political turmoil in Italy.

Italy, after Napoleon's fall and the Congress of Vienna (1815), was just a "geographical" term. In 1839 only Sardinia and Sicily were ruled by local princes. The Pope ruled the restored Papal State; Austria ruled Lombardy and Venice; princes from the house of Habsburg were installed in Toscana and Modena, and the Bourbons had returned to Naples. There was considerable dissatisfaction and unrest among the local population because of these foreign rulers. The *Risorgimento*, the national independence movement led by intellectuals and literary figures, which had the ultimate objective of achieving the unification of Italy, was spreading.

The Hensels' first destination was Leipzig, where they spent a pleasant week with Felix and his wife. The travelers left Leipzig on September 4 and reached Munich on the 10th, where they stayed for the next two weeks, visiting museums and meeting local artists, in particular painters who Wilhelm knew from his stay in Rome. Fanny was delighted to make the acquaintance of Delphine Handley (1814-1881), a talented pianist and composer to whom Felix had dedicated his g-minor Piano Concerto (1831). She made Fanny feel very welcome, showed her much friendliness and enjoyed playing music with her.

The Hensels left Munich on September 24, crossed the Alps three days later, and after short stops at Lake Como and Monza reached Milan. From there they continued via Verona and Padua, about which Fanny had nothing good to say. The cities were run-down, the streets dirty, and even the palaces and museums were neglected. Thus, the first weeks in Italy were quite shocking for Fanny.

The Hensels reached Venice on October 12. Except for the date, Fanny's letter to her family on the next day begins with a word-by-word quote of Goethe's travel diary¹⁰:

"It was written then on my page in the Book of Fate that at two, according to our watch in the afternoon of the twelfth October in the year 1839, I should see Venice for the first time as I entered from the Brenta into the lagoons, and that I should soon afterwards set foot and visit this wonderful island city, this beaver republic."¹¹

She did not need to state that she was quoting Goethe – her mother was as familiar with Goethe's *Italian Journey* as she was. Unlike Milan, Padua and Verona, Venice

⁹ Fanny Mendelssohn, *Italienisches Tagebuch*. Second edition. Edited with introduction by Eva Weissweiler (Frankfurt: Societäts-Verlag, 1983)

¹⁰ Wolfgang Johann Goethe, *Italienische Reise*, Goethes Werke, Band XI (Hamburg: Christian Wegner, 1950). Original printing 1816-17.

¹¹ Hensel, *Die Familie Mendelssohn* 2:75-76

delighted Fanny. The Hensels stayed there for over three weeks, during which time they toured the city, visited churches and admired the paintings of Tintoretto, Titian and Veronese. Their next stop was Florence, where they visited the art treasures of the Pitti and Uffizi. From there they continued to their final destination Rome, which they reached on November 26.

After settling in a four-room apartment, the Hensels proceeded to renew Wilhelm's contacts with old acquaintances and to meet people who had befriended and admired Felix while he stayed in Rome. Wilhelm was happy in the company of old friends, while Fanny hardly knew anybody.

During the first week in Rome, Fanny took part in a musical soirée at the home of Ludwig Landsberg (1807-1858), a German violinist and collector of Beethoven sketches, who had moved to Rome in 1835. She did not think that the musical standard matched the *Sonntagsmusik* that she used to organize at home and while she participated later in several soirées, she did not particularly enjoy doing so.

She also visited the Sistine Chapel and made some unflattering remarks about the performance of the Mass:

"...one has to sit for three hours and listen to the very unclean and mediocre singing of the Papal Chapel, and the not so short recitation of the Mass by the trembling voices of a couple of cardinals".¹²

Although the first weeks in Rome were disappointing, the six months Fanny spent in Rome were to be among the happiest in her life. The turning point was December 7 when the Hensels were invited by the famous French painter Jean-August-Dominique Ingres (1780-1847), the director of the Académie Française, to the Villa Medici, where, after dinner, trios were performed, with Ingres playing the violin. Fanny reports enthusiastically about it all: the institution, the Villa, Ingres, the Prix de Rome scholars. The Villa Medici and its inhabitants were to play an important part in her Roman holiday. Fanny would spend many Sunday evenings at the Villa, making music in a congenial environment. It is also there that she would meet and become especially friendly with three of the Prix de Rome scholars, the composers Charles Gounod (1818-1895) and Bousquet (1818-1854), and the painter, Charles Dugasseau (1812-1885), whose transformative influence on Fanny will be described later.

February was the month of the Roman carnival. In letters to her family in Berlin and to Felix in Leipzig, Fanny gives detailed descriptions of the goings-on, the bustle in the streets, the cheerful atmosphere. In a letter of February 25, 1840, she says:

"In the meantime, we are continuing to enjoy the carnival, and this crazy thing amuses me way beyond my expectations. I can spare you the formal description of the matter, since more than fifty years ago, Goethe has taken this trouble, and nothing has changed in the main features nor in the individual masks. The main (carnival) day *Maccoletti* is still to come."¹³

Fanny continued to visit St. Peters, but her opinion about Roman church music did not improve. As a Protestant brought up in the Bach tradition, she did not enjoy the unison chants and continued in her letters to criticize the mediocre performances. She was impressed, though not overwhelmed, by the pomp of the papal ceremonies, as were most contemporary travellers. In her diary entry of April 5,¹⁴ she describes examples, which she noted down with detailed commentaries on the music and performance. Describing the performance of the Passion, she writes:

First the Passion was sung, and this time I could keep up and follow to the end. The division is essentially the one Bach retained, Jesus was sung by a beautiful bass voice,

¹² Letter of 2 December, 1839, Hensel, *Die Familie Mendelssohn*, 2:87.

¹³ Hensel, *Die Familie Mendelssohn*, 2:96.

¹⁴ Hensel, *Die Familie Mendelssohn*, 2:105.

the Evangelist by a rather screaming baritone. The choirs of the people are by Vittoria. The words, arranged in short phrases for four voices, were sung once, without any expression, but still these short musical phrases are very important for the recovery from the unbelievably monotonous drawl of the Passion.”

In the same entry she relates her meeting with the French painter, Horace Vernet (1789-1863), at the Villa Medici. It was to Vernet that her husband expressed his desire to visit North Africa. Vernet’s reaction was a puzzled look and a statement: “you could be there in fourteen days”

Fanny continues:

. . . the happy lightness with which a Frenchman grasps all external circumstances and knows how to handle his life, has something contagious, so that at that moment I really did not see any obstacle or difficulties and urged my Wilhelm sincerely and out of my truest heart to bring us to Triest and then embark. However I had to yield to his serious and dignified objections.

A few sentences later she comments more reflectively:

That we Germans always wait! Always let the moment slip! Always are late! That it is so difficult to lift oneself up from one’s time, one’s family, one’s own self. This moves and affects me deeply.

The contrasting attitudes of the French painter and her husband could not have been more striking.

Fanny found Roman society boring and particularly disliked the rigid German colony. Right at the beginning of her stay in Rome, in a letter on December 16 to her sister Rebekka in Berlin, Fanny wrote: ¹⁵

Entre nous soit dit, such a group of boring people of every age and sex I have hardly ever encountered. It is unbelievable; it seems they have come from all over Europe with the intention to form an ensemble like no other.

In a diary entry of May 3, Fanny gives a most unflattering opinion about the German painter Johann Friedrich Overbeck (1789-1869). She writes: “We visited Overbeck to look at his holy, boring, poetically dull, sleek, pretentious painting.”

Also in a letter to Felix (May 10), Fanny writes:

. . . . because that is the shadow side of Rome, the many, unbearably boring people, especially among the official dignitaries and particularly among the German officials. God! what people! But quiet, I have promised my husband not to criticize anybody in letters¹⁶

As time went on Fanny began to appreciate the street life of Rome and under the influence of the easy going, spontaneous French young friends at the Villa Medici, she gradually shed her Prussian seriousness and reservations.

During the last two months of her stay in Rome, Fanny’s letters to her family dealt more with her personal doings, her thoughts and feelings, her insights into people and herself. This was in marked contrast to her prior correspondence, which, following the travel-letter tradition of the times and of her family, had concentrated mainly on description and discussion of the buildings, art-works and landscapes.

After her first visit to the Villa Medici in December, Fanny returned there on many a Sunday and played Beethoven sonatas for the young French musicians, introduced them to Bach’s works of which they were quite ignorant and also

¹⁵ Hensel, *Die Familie Mendelssohn*, 2:92.

¹⁶ Fanny Mendelssohn, *Italienisches Tagebuch*, 106.

performed some of her and her brother's compositions. Gounod, Bousquet and Dugasseau were full of praise. They appreciated Fanny as both pianist and composer, and they also liked her as a person. In short, they had become Fanny's fervent admirers.

During April and May, the Hensels spent a lot of their time with the young Villa Medici students, not only in musical reunions but also in partying and outings within Rome and its surroundings. Fanny was happy and relaxed in their easy-going, amusing company. On April 26 Fanny writes in her diary:

Leaving Rome is costing us both a heavy struggle; I would never have thought that it could make such an impression on me. I will not conceal it from myself, that the atmosphere of admiration and respect with which I am surrounded has partly contributed to it. In my early youth I have never been so courted as now, and who can deny that this is very pleasant and gratifying.¹⁷

On May 17 she notes in her diary: "With all the changes and the many experiences I do not feel that I have become older; on the contrary, I feel rejuvenated. On such a journey, one acquires an eternal treasure."¹⁸ A few days later in a letter to her family in Berlin, Fanny exclaims: "Ah, life is beautiful! What a pity that it is used up every day! To some days one would like to say: stop! Stand still, let one have a closer look!"¹⁹

Fanny's last days in Rome were very intensive. She received many visits and took leave of her Roman acquaintances. On May 20 and on May 31, the day before last in Rome, two farewell parties took place lasting from morning until late in the night.

The happenings on these two days, the first at the Villa Wolchonsky and the second at the Académie Française, are described enthusiastically and in detail by Fanny in two letters to her family in Berlin. The parties included music making, walks in the garden, picnics and exchanges of presents. Gaiety and sadness mixed. Fanny was very much aware that a wonderful period in her life was coming to a close. In her last diary entry in Rome on June 1, she wrote:

And a wonderful, lovely, rich time has passed! How can one thank God for two months of uninterrupted bliss! The purest enjoyments of which a human being's heart is capable of have followed each other, almost no disturbing quarter of an hour during the whole time, no pain except that the time has expired. The final farewell from St. Pietro in Montorio was not easy for us. But I have an eternal, imperishable picture in my soul, which will never fade. I thank you, oh God!²⁰

On June 1 the Hensels left Rome and after a few days arrived in Naples, where they settled in a beautiful apartment that included a balcony with a breathtaking view of the Bay of Naples, Vesuvius and Capri. Fanny spent many an hour on the balcony in a melancholy mood, reliving her stay in Rome. At the beginning of July, Wilhelm left for a three-week visit to Sicily. During his absence, Gounod, accompanied by Bousquet, showed up in Naples and spent time with Fanny. In a July entry in her diary, Fanny gushes:

Oh, you beautiful Italy! How much you have enriched me! What an incomparable treasure do I carry home in my heart! Will my memory stay faithful? Shall I remember as vividly as I felt?²¹

¹⁷ Hensel, *Die Familie Mendelssohn*, 2:112-113.

¹⁸ Hensel, *Die Familie Mendelssohn*, 2:124.

¹⁹ Hensel, *Die Familie Mendelssohn*, 2:129.

²⁰ Hensel, *Die Familie Mendelssohn*, 2:133-134.

²¹ Hensel, *Die Familie Mendelssohn*, 2: 158.

The relationship between Gounod and Fanny played an important role during her “Roman Holiday”. His admiration contributed, perhaps more than anything else, to Fanny’s process of building her self-confidence. Gounod’s feelings would appear to have gone beyond just liking Fanny.²² He was thirteen years younger than Fanny and had a very domineering mother whom he missed, which might be one reason for his attraction to Fanny. Fanny, however, never claimed or even implied that Gounod was in love with her. In her letters and diary entries of April and May, Fanny writes about Gounod’s gratitude for being introduced to German music, his praises for her playing and his appreciation of her compositions. Yet she also refers to his excitable and enthusiastic nature, his passionate and immature outbursts and “his lack of words to express the influence I have on him and how happy he is to be with us.”

Neither in his letters nor in his memoirs did Gounod mention an infatuation with Fanny. The memoirs contain the following paragraph:

Madame Hensel (sic) was a first rate musician – a very clever pianiste, physically small and delicate, but her deep eyes and eager glance betrayed an active mind and restless energy. She had rare powers of composition, and many of the “Songs without Words” published among the works and under the name of her brother were hers. Thanks to her great gifts and wonderful memory, I made the acquaintance of various masterpieces of German music which I have never heard before, among them a number of the works of Sebastian Bach – sonatas, fugues, preludes and concertos – and many of Mendelssohn’s compositions, which were like a glimpse of a new world to me.²³

In his memoirs Gounod mentions his Naples visit in the summer of 1840 but, curiously, not a word about Fanny. In April 1843 Gounod was a guest of the Hensels’ in their home in Berlin. At Felix’s death he states: “He died only six months after the charming woman to whom I owe the acquaintance with her gifted brother.”

Paul Landormy, one of Gounod’s biographers, discounts the possibility of any attachment on Gounod’s part and also minimizes the musical influence of his introduction to German music. He writes: “From the artistic point of view, Gounod has a very solid nature, well defined, which could be more or less helped or its development hastened, but one that would not undergo important changes. It is and will stay quite French.”²⁴ And a few sentences later: “Mrs. Hensel confers upon herself a role which is not hers. She was useful to the young artist in allowing him to become more quickly aware of himself. Nothing more.”

Yet the MGG entry on *Gounod*²⁵ voices a different opinion. It states: “At the same time he (Gounod) had a *Liebeserlebnis* (love experience): he met Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel, the sister of the composer. She did, as he acknowledged in his memoirs, familiarize him with German music.” It seems that the Germans view Gounod’s infatuation and Fanny’s influence on him as a fact, while the French minimize it.

The Hensels left Naples on August 11 and after a four-day, rather stormy sea voyage, during which Fanny was mostly seasick, arrived in Genoa. From there they proceeded to Milan and then continued via Zurich and Luzern to Leipzig, where they

²² Antje Olivier, *Mendelssohns Schwester Fanny Hensel: Musikerin, Komponistin, Dirigentin*, (Düsseldorf: Droste, c. 1997), 122.

²³ Charles Gounod, *Autobiographical Reminiscences*, translated by W. Hely Hutchinson (New York: Da Capo, 1970). Republication of the first edition published in London in 1896.

²⁴ Paul Landormy, *Gounod*. (Paris: Gallimard, reprinted 1946), 39.

²⁵ Emil Haraszti, “Gounod”, *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, (edited by Friedrich Blume, 1956), V, 594.

spent a week with Felix and his family. On September 11 they returned to their home in Berlin after a full year's absence.

The Italian journey, and in particular the period in Rome, resulted in important changes in Fanny's outlook on life and attitudes. Under the influence of her new ever-growing circle of friends, and especially the young French students of the Villa Medici, Fanny gradually distanced herself from her initial prejudicial Prussian views. The criticism expressed at the beginning of the voyage – of the dirt in the streets, the decaying buildings, and the people – gives way to an appreciation of the southern charm. Fanny discovered that *Dolce far niente* – taking it easy – was not a sin nor was it detrimental to her creative potential. She became aware of the fact that feelings of duty, good organizing, planning in advance are all commendable qualities, but they should not prevent spontaneity. The contrast between Vernet's and her husband's outlook on life had left a deep impression on Fanny.

Most important of all, the admiration the young French friends bestowed on Fanny as a pianist, a composer and as a woman, admiration expressed without restraint, in particular by Gounod, worked on her like an elixir. Fanny's composing during the years preceding the Italian journey had almost come to a halt. In a letter to Felix in March 1838, she had written:

Dear Felix, this winter I have composed absolutely nothing, to be sure, the more so, I made music, but I do not know anymore the feeling of wanting to compose a Lied. Will this feeling return? Or was Abraham getting old? Actually who cares.

²⁶

The reasons for this compositional inactivity were several. Fanny's family duties and the organization of the *Sonntagsmusik* evenings required much of her time. Also the presence in her house of Louise, Wilhelm's sister, had a negative influence on her mood. But primarily it was Felix's continued opposition to her publishing, an attitude he inherited from his father, that increased her lack of self-confidence and dampened her desire to compose.²⁷

Fanny's stay in Italy freed her from the lethargy of the last Berlin years. Not only did she compose while in Italy but she also jotted down musical ideas and sketches, which she would later use in her compositions.

Oliver (see note 21), Quin²⁸ and Nubbemeyer²⁹, among others, mention some of the works, but none of these sources contain a complete listing. Quin quotes from a letter written by Fanny in April 1840 to her sister Rebekka, "I have been composing a good deal lately and have called my piano pieces after the names of my favorite haunts..."

Nubbemeyer quotes from an unpublished letter by Fanny (November 11, 1841):

²⁶ Fanny Mendelssohn, *Ein Portrait in Briefen*, edited with notes and epilogue by Eva Weissweiler (Frankfurt: Ulstein, 1985)

²⁷ Fanny's father had, from her earliest youth, discouraged her from anything that would expose her to the public, whether performing or publishing. Felix, like his father, did his best to discourage Fanny from publishing; the only difference was that Abraham expressed his thoughts bluntly, while Felix used, rather condescendingly, humor and irony. Fanny took a leading part in the *Sonntagsmusik* at the Mendelssohn home and performed her compositions, but this was strictly before friends and guests. The only time Fanny performed in public was in 1838 after her father's death. It was a charity performance before a select audience and Fanny played her brother's g-minor concerto.

²⁸ Carol Lynelle Quin, "Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel: Her Contribution to Nineteenth Century Life" (PhD dissertation, University of Kentucky, 1981), 261.

²⁹ Annette Nubbemeyer, "Italienerinnerung im Klavieroeuvre Fanny Hensel: Das verschwiegene Programm im Klavierzyklus *Das Jahr*, " in *Fanny Hensel, geb. Mendelssohn Bartholdy: Das Werk*. edited by Martina Helmig. (München: Die deutsche Bibliothek, 1997), 68.

. . . . a small copybook of my Italian compositions (I have selected 18 of them) . . . which he (Wilhelm Hensel) has embellished with lovely vignettes. The book is now finished, cleanly bound and looks very nice. Now I am doing another small work, which I enjoy very much, to wit, a series of twelve piano pieces, which are supposed to represent each month of the year; I have completed over a half . . .

Actually, the “another small work” was Fanny’s outstanding Italian work, *12 Charakterstücke für das Forte-Piano*, to which Fanny gave the title, *Das Jahr*. It was sketched partially in Italy and composed during the last four months of 1841. The 12 movements were named for each month of the year to which a postlude was added.

Though their order does not correspond to the period of the Hensels’ stay in Italy, nor were they composed chronologically, one may consider these movements as a kind of “second diary”, in which Fanny gave expression to her reminiscences and newly won impressions. They constitute a major cycle for the piano.³⁰ The copybook mentioned in the above letter had been considered lost. But on November 17, 1999 the “Reisealbum” surfaced at an auction and was acquired by the Mendelssohn – Archiv of the Berlin Staatsbibliothek. Klein, the former head of the Mendelssohn – Archiv published a detailed listing and description of the 18 works.³¹ Seidel³² also referred to the rediscovery of the “Reisealbum”. Between the Klein article and the publication of a thematic catalogue,³³ it becomes possible to list Fanny’s compositions during her stay in Italy and in the immediate aftermath. The works in the “Reisealbum” are presented in the original order. The H-U numbers refer to listing in the thematic catalogue.

³⁰ For more on *Das Jahr* see Claudio Bolzan, “Un richiamo dai sogni”: Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel tra idillio ed emancipazione artistica (1833-1843)”. *Nuova rivista musicale italiana*, 27 (1993): 563-594; Sarah Rothenberg, “Fanny Mendelssohn’s Musical Diary,” *Keyboard Classics* (July/August 1991): 6-7. John E. Toews, “Memory and Gender in the Remaking of Fanny Mendelssohn’s Musical Identity: The Choral in *Das Jahr*,” *The Musical Quarterly*, 77 (1993): 727-42; Annette Nubbemeyer (see note 28).

³¹ Hans-Günter Klein, “O glückliche , reiche, einzige Tage” – Fanny and Wilhelm Hensels Album ihrer Italienreise 1839/40. *Jahrbuch Preussischer Kulturbesitz* 36 (1999), 291-300.

³² Katrin Seidel, Anmerkungen zu den Klavierkompositionen im ersteigerten “Reisealbum Deutschland – Italien 1839/40” von Fanny Hensel. *Musikforschung* 5 (2000), 481-483.

³³ Renata Hellwig-Unruh. *Fanny Hensel geb. Mendelssohn Bartholdy. Thematisches Verzeichnis der Kompositionen*. Adliswil, Edition Kunzelmann: 2000.

<u>The Work</u>	<u>H-U No.</u>
1. Lied Nach Süden, Allegro molto vivace "Von allen Zweigen schwingen". Text: <i>Wilhelm Hensel</i>	373
2. Duet "Das holde Tal hat schon die Sonne wieder" for soprano, tenor and piano. Allegro vivace. Text: <i>Goethe</i>	351
3. Piano piece, g-minor Gondelfahrt (Serenata)	345
4. Lied Gondellied (O komm zu mir) Allegretto Text: <i>Emmanuel Geibel</i>	377
5. Quartett "Lass fahren hin", for 2 tenors and 2 basses a cappella Text: <i>Goethe</i>	360
6. Piano piece, A ^b - major. Villa Medici	353
7. Piano piece, b-minor. Capriccio	349
8. Piano piece, E-major. Villa Mills	357
9. Duet "L'âme triste est pareille", for soprano, tenor and piano. Text: <i>Alphonse Lamartine</i>	354
10. Piano piece, a- minor, Abschied von Rome. (Ponte Molle)	352
11. Piano piece, a-minor. Tarantella (Il Saltarello Romano) Allegro molto	372
12. Piano piece, B-major, Lied für das Pianoforte. Allegro molto	356
13. Duet "Mein Liebchen wir sassen beisammen" for two sopranos and piano, Allegro Text: <i>Heine</i>	362
14. Quartett "Dämmernd liegt der Sommerabend" Text: <i>Heine</i>	361
15. Lied Schwanenlied (Es fällt ein Stern herunter) Andante. Text: <i>Heine</i>	358
16. Lied "Der Fürst vom Berge" (Hoch thront der Fürst vom Berge). Song for voice and piano. Allegro con brio. Text: <i>Wilhelm Hensel</i>	359
17. Duet "Die Sennin" (Schöne Sennin, nach einmal sende), for soprano, tenor and piano. Allegretto Text: <i>Nikolaus Lenau</i>	383
18. Lied "Hausgarten" (Hier sind wir nun vorerst ganz still zu Haus) Text: <i>Goethe</i>	355

As Fanny stated in her letter of November 11, 1841, the copybook (“Reisealbum”) contains a *selection* of her Italian compositions. A complete identification of the works left out is not possible since there still are autographs and manuscripts in private hands. However there are some compositions dated during the Italian voyage and others in the aftermath (like some in the “Reisealbum” works and *Das Jahr*) which have a clear relation to Fanny’s stay in Italy. These compositions are listed below:

<u>The Work</u>	<u>H.U. No.</u>
Piano piece, A ^b Major (Rome, 22.2.1840)	346
Terzett for 2 sopranos and alto a cappella “Sage mir was das Herz begehrt” Rome, February, 1840 Text: <i>Goethe</i> .	347
Cavatina for voice and piano “Deh torne a me”. Rome, 13.3.1840. Text: <i>Ludovico Ariosto</i>	348
Piano piece, g-minor, Largo- Allegro con Fuoco. Rome, 29.3.1840.	350
Lied Auf dem See (Como) “Und frische Nahrung, neues Blut” for voice and piano. 11.8.1841 Text: <i>Goethe</i>	382
Das Jahr — Zwölf Characterstücke für piano. Berlin, 28.8-23.12.1841	385

For more details on all the listed compositions refer to Klein’s article on the “Reisealbum” (see note 30) and Hellwig–Unruh’s thematic catalogue (see note 32).

Fanny’s return from Italy led to an intensive period of composing. During 1841 she completed the “Reisealbum” and *Das Jahr* with works based on her Italian sketches and impressions. During the same year she also composed additional works, some possibly based on motives or phrases jotted down in Italy. It is beyond the scope of this article to identify such works. Autographs, manuscripts, fragments and letters are still in private hands or have to be considered lost.

With her regained confidence in her creative abilities, Fanny gradually decided to start publishing her works.³⁴ In this, she was constantly encouraged by her husband. In 1846 she met Robert von Keudell,³⁵ a talented musician about whom she wrote at the end of July:

as to music making, he keeps me on my toes and in constant activity as did Gounod. He follows with great interest whatever I write and draws my attention when anything is missing, and in general he is right.³⁶

Two important Berlin publishers, Bote and Bock as well as Schlesinger, competed for the right to publish her works. Fanny finally selected six songs from among the

³⁴ The only published works of Fanny prior to her Italian journey had been six songs which Felix incorporated under his own name in Lieder op. 8 (1828) and op. 9 (1830). Also one song, *Die Schiffende*, appeared in an anthology published by Schlesinger (1837).

³⁵ R.V. Keudell (1824-1903) studied law and music, and became a concert pianist and critic. Later he entered the Prussian civil service, and served as ambassador in Rome (1873-1887).

³⁶ Hensel, *Die Familie Mendelssohn*, 2:348.

hundreds she had composed, and had Bote and Bock publish them under the name: “*Sechs Lieder für eine Stimme mit Begleitung des Pianoforte, op. 1*”.

This time Fanny did not ask for Felix’s approval – she just wrote him of her decision. It took Felix some time to send his ironic, reluctant blessing, but Fanny, while she cared to have her brother’s approval, was no longer dependent on it.

In the same year she published *Vier Lieder für das Pianoforte, op. 2*. The positive reviews of her published works encouraged Fanny to continue composing – writing what would become her most well known work, the Trio in D minor for Piano, Violin and Cello (1847). During the following year, several song collections for voice and also for the piano were published by both Schlesinger and Bote and Bock. Fanny sums up her transformed state in a diary entry of August 14, 1846:

I am, by the way, continually industrious and feel that I succeed in many a thing and this combined with a wonderful, most glorious summer, makes me inwardly and outwardly content and happy, as perhaps I have never been except for a short time during our first stay in Rome.³⁷

All her life Fanny struggled to reconcile the conflict between her conservative upbringing and her wish for personal fulfillment. In this respect Fanny’s “Roman Holiday” was a turning point. The recognition and admiration she had received as a pianist, as a composer, and as a woman, the warm friendships she had made, the easygoing relaxed life she had led in the sunny country of her dreams, all contributed to Fanny’s contentment and to the restoration of her self-confidence. She returned home both rejuvenated and liberated from her Prussian upbringing. The result was a spurt of composing and the long delayed publication of her works. But not much time was left to her. On May 14, 1847, after rehearsing a chorus from her brother’s *Walpurgisnacht*, in preparation for a performance in her *Sonntagsmusik* series, Fanny had a stroke and died within a few hours.

Felix died half a year later. Through the following years, well into the 20th century, Fanny remained in the shadow of her illustrious brother, as the talented sister of Mendelssohn - Bartholdy. It is only in the last decades that a spurt of interest and research, and the surfacing of documents and musical autographs until recently in private hands, have led to the recognition of Fanny’s talents and value not only as a pianist and *salonnière* but also, and mainly, as an important composer in her own right.

³⁷ Hensel, *Die Familie Mendelssohn*, 2:357-358.

Abstract

The year (1839-40) Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel spent in Italy, and in particular the six months she lived in Rome, deeply affected her attitudes and changed her outlook on life.

Fanny befriended three of the Academie Française scholars, the composers Gounod and Bousquet, and the painter Dugasseau. She played Beethoven for her friends, introduced them to Bach's works and performed her compositions. The recognition she received as pianist, composer, and as a woman, together with the easygoing life all contributed to a new sense of contentment and to the restoration of Fanny's self-confidence.

After the lethargy of the last Berlin years she started composing again and jotted down musical ideas, which she later used in her works. She returned home rejuvenated and liberated from her Prussian upper-middle-class upbringing. The result was a spurt of composing and the long delayed publication of her works, interrupted only by her sudden death on May 14, 1847.

The article includes recent findings on works composed during and in the aftermath of Fanny's stay in Italy, published in German and not yet available in English.

This paper is presented on the occasion of Fanny's 200th birthday anniversary.

Copyright of *Min-Ad: Israel Studies in Musicology Online* is the property of Israel Musicological Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.