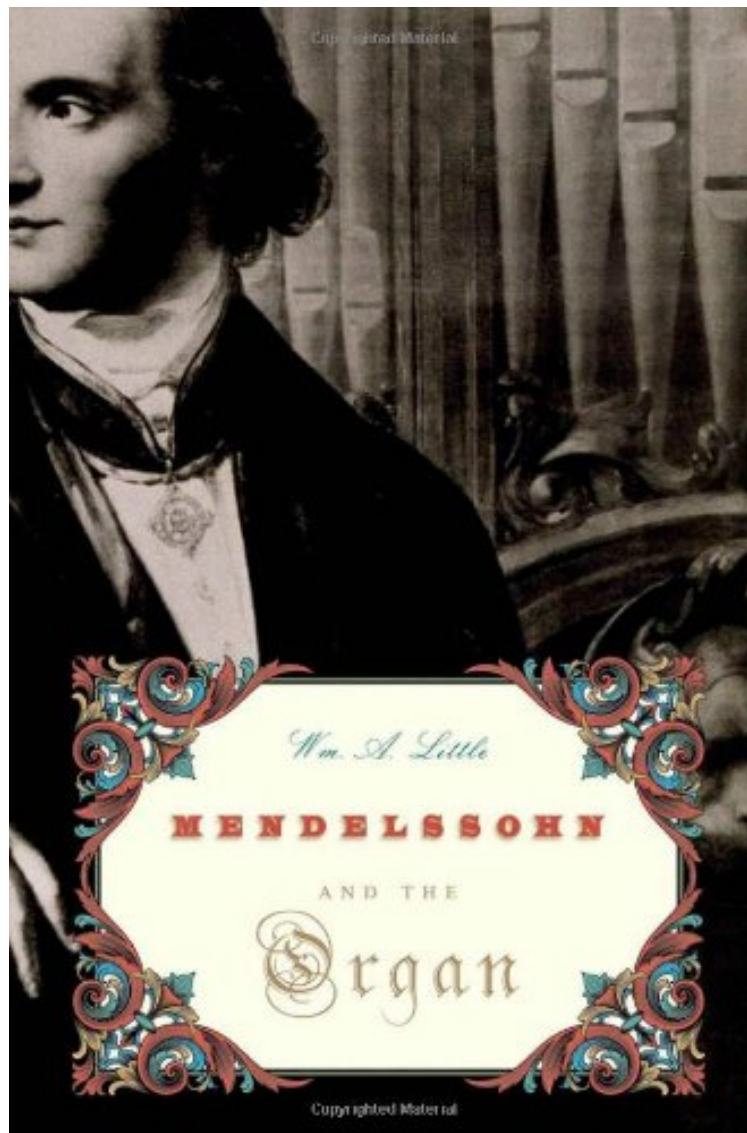


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Mendelssohn and the Organ

Wm. A. Little

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Wm. A. Little : Mendelssohn and the Organ before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Mendelssohn and the Organ:

Although Mendelssohn was most famous during his lifetime as a composer, virtuoso pianist, and conductor, he also enjoyed an enviable reputation as a highly skilled organist. The instrument had fascinated - one might almost say

mesmerized - him from earliest youth, but aside from a year or so of formal training at the age of about twelve or thirteen, he was entirely self-taught. He never held a position as church organist, and he never had any organ pupils. Nevertheless, the instrument played a uniquely important role in his personal life. In the course of his many travels, whether in major cities or tiny villages, he invariably gravitated to the organ loft, where he might spend hours playing the works of Bach or simply improvising. Although the piano clearly served Mendelssohn as an eminently practical instrument, the organ seems to have been his instrument of choice. He searched out an organ loft, not because he had to, but because he wanted to, because on the organ he could find catharsis. Indeed, as he once exclaimed to his parents, after reading a portion of Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell*, "I must rush off to the monastery and work off my excitement on the organ!" Mendelssohn's public performance on the organ in Germany was rare, and he gave but one public recital - in the Thomas-Kirche in Leipzig in 1840. In England, however, he evidently felt more comfortable on the organ bench and played there often before large crowds. Indeed, he performed as Guest Organist twice at the Birmingham Music Festivals, in 1837 and 1842. Given Mendelssohn's profound affinity for the organ, it is remarkable that he composed but relatively little for the instrument, and assigned an Opus number to only two works - his Three Preludes and Fugues for Organ (Op. 37) and his Six Sonatas for the Organ (Op. 65). A small number of organ works, plus sketches and drafts, were scattered among his musical papers; most of these only gradually found their way into print, and it was not until the late twentieth century that an edition of his complete organ works was finally published. This volume is intended as a companion to that edition.

"Likely the final word on Mendelssohn and the organ. Wm. A. Little casts his net wide, to examine the instruments Mendelssohn encountered in the course of his many travels, his organ repertoire, his efforts as editor of Bach's music, his organ parts for Handel's oratorios, and much more. An authoritative survey of the composer's complex relation to the instrument and the music he wrote for it." --R. Larry Todd, author of *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music* and *Fanny Hensel: The Other Mendelssohn* "At long last, a truly comprehensive investigation of Felix Mendelssohn and "the king of instruments," written by the leading authority on the subject. Meticulously researched and elegantly written, Little's magisterial study is an invaluable contribution to the Mendelssohn literature. It is must reading for organists, scholars, and music lovers in general." --Russell Stinson, Josephine Emily Brown Professor of Music and College Organist, Lyon College "Little's book is an enduring capstone to a lifetime of investigation into Mendelssohn the organist and scholarly engagement with his music for the instrument. No study has been so probing or so complete. Elegantly written and thoroughly engrossing, Little has garnered a vast compilation of contemporary observations not available heretofore. The general reader who aspires to a full understanding of Mendelssohn should not be without this book." --Thomas Murray, Professor in the Practice of Organ Performance and University Organist, Yale University "Rarely does a book appear that can genuinely be said to offer a quantum leap forward in the study of its topic, and perhaps even more rarely does this occur in the study of organists and organ music. Wm. A. Little's *Mendelssohn and the Organ* is such a book...Comprehensive in its coverage, it presents an astonishingly rich biography of Mendelssohn and his activities with the organ...Organists, specialists in 19th-century music, and all those interested in Mendelssohn and his music should welcome this wonderful addition to the scholarship of the organ, its players, and their music." --The *Tracker* "[A] well-researched study...The richness of detail Little provides gives a view of Mendelssohn rarely seen: the retrospective, even scholarly, almost-private man. Well written and accurate, this study is a pleasure for both reading and reference. Highly recommended." --*Choice* "A comprehensive examination of the important role of the organ in Mendelssohn's professional and private life... For the organ virtuoso, or the Sunday organist, this book may provide the boost needed to learn some of Mendelssohn's lesser-played pieces. And, naturally, the armchair music lover will be thrilled by its easy-to-read format and wealth of facts." --*The Diapason* "Hugely detailed, generous and thorough...The book will remain indispensable in its coverage of many topics important to German history." --*Times Literary Supplement* "For an account of the role...played by the organ in Mendelssohn's life and work, no one will need to look further for many years to come." --*Early Music* "As winner of the 2010 John Ogasapian Publication Prize from the Organ Historical Society, *Mendelssohn and the Organ* has already achieved status as one of the most significant new publications on Mendelssohn to appear in recent years. As a volume dedicated to just one aspect of Mendelssohn's multifaceted career, its 502 pages attest to the wide range and extraordinary depth of the information offered within. And, as the product of a lifetime of research by the editor of Mendelssohn's complete organ works, *Mendelssohn and the Organ* stands as both a scholarly milestone for Mendelssohn studies and a celebrated achievement for Little." --*Notes About the Author* Wm. A. Little is Professor of German and Music, Emeritus, University of Virginia, and Editor of *Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy: Complete Works for the Organ, 5 Volumes* (Novello, 1987-1990)