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Album Leaf: Piano Works by Felix Mendelssohn
Sophia Agranovich
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55 minutes

Album Leaf: Piano Works by Felix Mendelssohn is a collection of solo piano pieces performed to perfection by Sophia Agranovich, an artist I have come to have the utmost respect and admiration for. We did a fascinating interview [<https://mainlypiano.com/interviews/sophia-agranovich-2021-july>] in July 2021 where we talked about her life and career - and what an inspiration she is! *Album Leaf* is Sophia's eleventh full-length album (plus a few singles) and the fifth that I have reviewed. The album consists of eleven solo piano tracks that include a three-movement sonata, the nineteen-part "Variations sérieuses," four etudes and Rondo Capriccioso. The music varies widely in style and mood, but Sophia's performance is stunning from the first note to the last.

The album includes an eight-page booklet written by Sophia that includes a short biography of Mendelssohn as well as her thoughts and the history of the music that is included on the album. I have to admit that I am the most familiar with Mendelssohn's "Songs Without Words," as I worked on many of those with my own piano students over the years. The music on this album is much more demanding and virtuosic, but there are still many moments of delicate beauty and tenderness. In our interview, I thought Sophia's explanation of her approach to her performances was especially enlightening:

"I don't aspire to do anything unusual; just reproducing what I feel without fear of being wrong. I subdue myself to become a medium for the music. I am trying to produce energy, feelings and thoughts of a composer and atmosphere of the piece. What is interesting, while playing, I feel a change in my own personality, like a possession. I push it to the limit until I almost have an out-of-body experience. Being able to do this requires a lot of technical preparation and analysis."

The album begins with the three-movement "Fantasia in F# minor, Op. 28 ('Sonate écossaise')," a sonata that Mendelssohn completed in 1833. The first movement is darker and more emotionally expressive while the second is faster and more playful; the third is almost dizzying with fingers flying all over the piano keyboard (Sophia seems to handle this with ease).

"Albumblatt (Album Leaf) in E minor, Op. 117" is beautifully expressive as is my favorite track on the album - probably because I have played it many times!

"Caprice, Op. 33 No.1" expresses a wide range of emotions - from grief to almost exhilaration - a musical thrill ride for sure!

"Variations sérieuses, Op. 54" includes the opening theme in D minor, seventeen variations on the theme and a coda. Quoting Sophia's notes:

"These Variations possess wide diversity of moods, coloration, and pianistic invention, requiring a virtuoso technique. They are not only 'serious,' they are tragic: A suffering man bares his heart."

The "Three Etudes, Op. 104b" are considered to be among Mendelssohn's finest piano works - a wonderful balance of technical virtuosity and musical beauty. All three are dazzling performances that Sophia pours her heart and soul into.

"Etude in F minor, WoO1" has a rather (deceptively) simple melody played over rapid arpeggios and a bass line. Another powerful and inspiring performance!

The last track on the album is "Rondo Capriccioso in E major, Op. 14," a gorgeous piece Mendelssohn originally composed when he was just fifteen years old. Several years later, he reworked it and it became a favorite virtuoso concert piece of the nineteenth century and continues to be a favorite.

Album Leaf: Piano Works by Felix Mendelssohn will be released on November 3, 2023. Links will be added as they become available. If you love classical piano music, you will love this album as much as I do!

Kathy Parsons
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