

Fanny: The Other Mendelssohn



UK | 2023 | 80m | PG

Director: Sheila Hayman

Starring: Isata Kanneh-Mason, Sheku Kanneh-Mason, Alison Langer

In line with FilmBath's focus on female leading figures in culture, *Fanny: The Other Mendelssohn* arrives depicting a long overdue – nearly two hundred years, in fact – portrait of Felix Mendelssohn's equally talented but unjustly ignored older sister, Fanny. Author of over 450 works – many of which are rightly considered both groundbreaking and technically brilliant – Fanny shared a comprehensive musical education alongside her brother, but was effectively forbidden to publish her own works until the age of forty.

Rather fittingly, her great, great, great granddaughter and BAFTA award-winning filmmaker Sheila Hayman (*Mendelssohn, the Nazis, and Me*), steers this sensitive and revelatory documentary that goes a long way in bringing further attention to this often overlooked composer. With a host of distinguished talking heads and a depressingly familiar litany of reasons from the time as to why Fanny's obvious talent was ignored in favour of her brother, Hayman explores her subject with a deft style, outlining how increasingly influential Fanny is in the 21st century. For an example of these social and contextual constraints, we can turn to the German composer, Carl Friedrich Zelter who praised her by declaring: 'She plays like a man!'

The major driver of the film is the story of the discovery in 1971 of the Easter Sonata, a notoriously difficult piece for piano, which is

mistakenly attributed to her brother, Felix. Here performed in Buckingham Palace by rising classical music star Isata Kanneh-Mason, the audience is given the chance to experience first-hand the brilliance of Fanny's composition and make up their own minds about whether the gifted pianist warrants greater attention. Even today, only five per cent of music programmed in concert halls is composed by women.

Fanny: the Other Mendelssohn seeks to challenge our perceptions and serve as a foundation to alter the spectrum of appreciation and recognition for female composers and their contribution to music and culture.

'A great story of a long-overdue revival,' Peter Bradshaw, *The Guardian*.



Excellent

Fair

Poor

What did you think of the film? Please mark or tear the number.

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Did You Know?

- Fanny had such natural musical ability that at the age of 14, she could play all 24 preludes from Bach's *The Well Tempered Clavier*, from memory alone.
- Despite his backhanded compliments, Zelter was an early champion of Fanny, describing her in one letter to Goethe as being 'really something special.'

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