

**EUGENE YSAÏE** was one of the finest violinists in the storied history of the instrument. Like many performers of earlier generations, he wrote a substantial number of works for his own concerts, as well as for his students and friends. The current work is based on a piece by Camille Saint-Saëns, who was not known as a deep or probing composer, and a virtuosic caprice built upon his tunes has little potential to be a life-altering musical experience. But this is not a flaw: Saint-Saëns had no intentions to write metaphysical works, and neither did YsaÏe. And even the simplest works of YsaÏe defy dismissal. His virtuosity is too inviting; his insights are too acute; and his sense of what to give as a neighborly offering is unfailingly warm. This brief fantasy is not only built upon the work of Saint-Saëns, but upon YsaÏe's unmatched knowledge of the possibilities of music as it lies in the wood of the instrument itself.



In this, the 200th anniversary of the birth of **FELIX MENDELSSOHN**, it is worth reflecting not only upon the music he wrote, but also upon his remarkable family and his influence on the practices and canon of European music. Felix was the son of Abraham Mendelssohn, an affluent banker in Hamburg; Abraham was the son of Moses Mendelssohn, a prominent philosopher of the 18th century. Abraham famously remarked that he was “once the son of a famous father, now the father of a famous son.” The household was phenomenally erudite. Immanuel Kant was a friend and colleague of the grandfather Moses, and the von Humboldt brothers visited often. Even in this extraordinary environment, Felix Mendelssohn was outstanding. Goethe (always at the center of things) was amazed at the 11-year-old boy's musical skills and related the following discussion with Mendelssohn's teacher Carl Friedrich Zelter:

*Goethe: ‘Musical prodigies [...] are probably no longer so rare; but what this little man can do in extemporizing and playing at sight borders the miraculous, and I could not have believed it possible at so early an age.’ Zelter: ‘And yet you heard Mozart in his seventh year at Frankfurt?’ Goethe: ‘Yes [...] but what your pupil already accomplishes, bears the same relation to the Mozart of that time, that the cultivated talk of a grown-up person bears to the prattle of a child.’*

The string octet and *Midsummer Night's Dream* overture, both from Mendelssohn's late teens, do indeed border on the miraculous. And that was not all: at the age of 20, he summoned the forces of the Berlin Singakademie to give the first performance of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* since 1750. This revival was not merely an enormous success. It brought Bach back into the German, and then into the world's, performance repertoire, where Bach's music lives strongly to this day. It was this spectacularly gifted youth who wrote the sextet for piano, violin, violas, cello, and contrabass in 1824. It is not a particularly complicated work. But one need not know it is the work of a 15-year old to find it absolutely brilliant.



**From JOHN HARBISON:**

*Six American Painters* was commissioned by radio station WGUC Cincinnati in honor of Ann Santen, for performance by Cincinnati Symphony principal flutist Randall Bowman. Bowman gave the first performance on the Linton Music Series, April 14, 2002, with Timothy Lees, violin, Michael Strauss, viola, and Eric Kim, cello. Each of the movements was begun as a musical description of six paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Eventually they ranged further and it seemed more helpful to name them for the painters rather than for the specific paintings. I wanted to evoke the artists' after-images, rather than any of the individual paintings. When you look at a picture, you take away with you a general impression, a mood or color, that dominates the details; in music, on the other hand, one is apt to remember the details, a tune or a harmony. I wanted these movements to be a perceivable whole, an act of seeing. Most of my viewing was done at the Metropolitan Museum in New York. Like many musicians, I've always felt that looking at art has been the least alert of the things I do. I hoped to develop my visual sense; I did a lot of research, and I spent many hours looking at paintings. The movements tend toward brevity. I had two intentions: not too slow, and not too long.



Considering that the fifth Brandenburg Concerto was written explicitly to celebrate the possibilities of a new harpsichord brought from Berlin to Cöthen in 1719, and considering that there are plenty of harpsichords and harpsichordists around these days to make honest and beautiful attempts at authentic delivery, one feels a bit guilty programming the work for 'grand piano' in 2009. But the reception history of the fifth Brandenburg concerto, aside from whatever performances it may have received in **JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH's** time, is in fact quite piano-dependent. The six Brandenburg



Bach Brandenburg Concerto No. 5 (Mov't 1)  
Ritornello Structure with dramatized keyboard cadenza

Bars 1-9: Opening (shown above)  
**(A)(B)(C)(D) in D Major**

Bars 10-11  
**(A) 1**

Bar 13  
**(A) 2**

Bars 19-20  
**(A) in A Major**

Bars 29-31  
**(B)**

Bars 39-41  
**(C) in b Minor**

Bars 58-60  
**(B) in D Major**

Bars 101-102  
**(A) in A Major**

Bar 112  
**(A) 1 in D Major**

Bar 114  
**(A) 2**

Bars 121-125  
**(A)(B)**

Bars 138-140  
**(B) in D Major**

Bars 219-227: Opening (shown above)  
**(A)(B)(C)(D)**



concertos, not mentioned in early biographies, were not revived by Mendelssohn when he championed other major Bach works, and not even the rediscovery of autograph manuscripts for the six concertos, and subsequent publication by Schott in 1850, brought much non-musicological notice. It was not until the arrival of radio, the LP, and the modern piano (especially in recordings with Rudolf Serkin, the Busch Chamber Players, and Pablo Casals at Marlboro) that this set of works became a familiar favorite from Bach's output. These performances, which many of us grew up smiling to hear on FM radio, also conjure a context, and the works themselves are plenty celebratory even when not aimed specifically at a harpsichord. So in this spirit we proceed — a bit guiltily, from a musicological standpoint, but happily enough anyway.

The first movement rides on the opening *tutti*, which is broken apart and traveled by the solo voices. (This is a special case of a *ritornello* structure, which can basically be seen as an advanced 'refrain' — as in 'Welcome to the Hotel California'). There is a fantastic, outsized keyboard cadenza which

brings the final, complete *ritornello*. The second movement is reduced to a trio-sonata (violin-flute-keyboard), also in a *ritornello* structure; the third movement is a fugal *gigue* ('gigue' can translate to 'jig', though Bach's Continental version has a less explicitly nautical/folk vibe than the British source.) Perhaps that is enough for introduction. Too much is lost in mere description. Bach's Brandenburg concertos are at once familiar and incredible, full of life and arching expression — such bright and ingenious work stands out even in the grand works of Bach.

— *Tim Summers*