

# CHARACTERISTIC PIECE

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Op. 7, No. 7

*By*

**FELIX MENDELSSOHN-BARTHOLDY**



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FINGERING, PHRASING, PEDALING, AND INSTRUCTIVE  
ANNOTATIONS ON FORM AND STRUCTURE  
AND METHOD OF STUDY

By **LEOPOLD GODOWSKY**

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## Characteristic Piece Op. 7, No. 7

Biographical Sketch—Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy

Born in Hamburg, Germany, February 3, 1809

Died in Leipsic, Germany, November 14, 1847

FELIX MENDELSSOHN was of pure Jewish extraction, being the grandson of the distinguished philosopher, Moses Mendelssohn. He was, however, baptized as a Lutheran Christian, and his given name was Jacob Ludwig Felix. His father was a wealthy banker in Berlin, and Felix started life with all the advantages that a refined and artistic environment could bring. His talent for music developed itself at a very early age, and when only seventeen he had composed one of his finest works, the exquisite *Midsummer Night's Dream* overture. He was the founder and the first director of the Leipsic Conservatory of Music, and in 1840 he was appointed director of the department of music in the Academy of Fine Arts at Berlin. The greater part of his life was spent in Berlin, Leipsic, and Düsseldorf, and he made long visits to England, where he was held in the highest regard. He aroused and stimulated interest in the works of the great Johann Sebastian Bach, of whom he was an enthusiastic admirer, and was instrumental in bringing several other musicians to the notice of the world.

Mendelssohn had a great facility in composition, and his works are distinguished by much elegance and refinement. Symphonies, oratorios, overtures, and chamber music flowed from his pen. His earlier orchestral works show more freshness and vigor than his later compositions. The overture *The Hebrides*, written after his first visit to Scotland, is extremely picturesque and is considered one of the happiest pieces of tone-painting in existence. He wrote three symphonies, *The Reformation*, *The Italian*, and *The Scotch*, each of which bears some characteristic features which justify its title. Of his oratorios, which were clearly inspired by the Passion music of Sebastian Bach, *St. Paul* was produced in 1836, the *Hymn of Praise* in 1840, and (the greatest of all) *Elijah* in 1846. Of his chamber music, the *pianoforte trios* in *D minor* and *C minor* and the *octet for strings* should be specially mentioned.

Mendelssohn wrote two pianoforte concertos, the *D minor* and the *G minor*, both laid out on large lines, but as a pianoforte composer his name is almost inseparably connected with his celebrated *Songs Without Words*. These compositions have done much to make his name a household word throughout the world. Among other piano compositions of his should be mentioned the *Variations Serieuses*, the *Characteristic Pieces*, the *Preludes and Fugues*, and the *Rondo Capriccioso*.

**General Information:** The seven *Characteristic Pieces* were composed in Mendelssohn's sixteenth year (1825), the same year in which he wrote his *Octet* for strings, and the year before the composition of the *Overture to Midsummer Night's Dream*—the work which brought him his first fame. Two events of importance to Mendelssohn occurred in this year. The first was

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that his father, wishing to secure Cherubini's opinion of his son's talents, took him to Paris to meet that illustrious Italian composer, who praised the gifted youth most highly. The other event was the preparation for the production of his opera, *The Wedding of Comacho*, the first performance of which, however, did not take place until the spring of 1827.

**Form and Structure:** Sonata Form, in the key of E.

The Main Theme is announced in the first eight measures. The first Section of the Theme is repeated, and the second Section forms a modulatory passage leading to the

Second Theme, in the key of B, beginning on the second beat of meas. 18 and ending on the first beat of meas. 30.

The Closing Theme, in the key of B, begins on the second beat of meas. 30 and ends at meas. 45. A dominant sept-chord (first heard in meas. 42) introduces the repeat.

The Development begins at meas. 46. The dominant sept-chord in meas. 45 which introduced the repeat now resolves to the dominant sept-chord of the relative minor (C# minor), in meas. 46. The second Section of the Closing Theme is then exploited in a series of dominant sept-chords on the following notes: G# in meas. 46, C# in meas. 50, F# in meas. 54, B in meas. 56, E in meas. 58, and A in meas. 60. At meas. 62 the Main Theme is developed, first (meas. 62-65), in the key of C# minor, and next (meas. 66-69) in the key of B minor. Then, touching on the key of A minor in meas. 70, a series of sept-chords and triads leads to an Organ Point on B, and the return to the original key is accomplished at meas. 85.

Recapitulation. The Main Theme is presented at meas. 87, and the Second Theme now appears (beginning on the second beat of meas. 106) in the key of E. The Closing Theme, also in the key of E, starts on the second beat of meas. 120 and is extended to meas. 160. From meas. 160 to the end is of the nature of a *Coda*. The first four measures of this portion are founded upon the triad of E major, and the last seven upon the triad of E minor.

**Method of Study:** The student will find this Composition an excellent study for the *staccato* touch, and also for the crossing of the hands. In order to interpret it with any degree of success the hands must be kept close to the keys; and in order to avoid false notes, each finger should hover over its respective key before touching it. Moreover, it must be played very softly and *staccato* with the utmost nimbleness of finger, and the accents and dynamic shadings must be so delicate as to be scarcely noticeable. This elf-like Piece is distinctly characteristic of Mendelssohn's style in compositions of the Scherzo type.

The evenness of motion which is required in the passages where the eighth-notes alternate between the hands might perhaps be more clearly illustrated by the notation in the following example:



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The inner voice-parts in the passages beginning on the second beat of meas. 26 and the second beat of meas. 114, should be brought out. The voice-parts of the first of these passages are indicated by oblique lines in the following example:

The following is an easier distribution of the voices in meas. 31, 33, and 35:

The rhythmic design of the passage beginning on the second beat of meas. 30 extends over the first beat of the next measure. The working form is as follows:

The four-note motive is thus repeated sequentially. The same rhythmic design will be observed in meas. 32-33 and 34-35, and also in meas. 120-121, 122-123, and 124-125.

The last half of meas. 36 and the first half of meas. 37 can be played more effectively in the following manner:

The same distribution of the voices should also be employed in meas. 38-39.

The student is advised to bring out the middle voice of the right-hand chords in meas. 66-69. Where there are only double notes, however, the upper voice is to predominate. The inner voice-part is more clearly indicated in the following illustration:

If the four lower voices of the chords in meas. 121, 123, and 125 are played by the left hand, the right hand will be able to bring out the top notes of these chords more clearly. Moreover, by changing the fingers on the repeated notes, tonal variety can be obtained through the individual dynamic characteristics of the different fingers. Meas. 121 will serve as a model:



In meas. 126-127 and 128-129 the method of voice distribution employed in meas. 36-37 and 38-39 should be used—as follows:



The *pianissimo* of the conclusion of this Piece introduces a charming surprise in the form of a *legatissimo* passage in the treble, with sustained chords in the bass. The effect is very striking after one hundred and sixty-three measures of detached playing.

### Glossary

<i>leicht und luftig</i>	pronounced	likht oönd loöf'-tig	(lightly and airily)
<i>presto</i>	"	prës'-tō	(very fast)
<i>sempre staccato</i>	"	sēm'-prā stā-kä'-tō	(always detached)
<i>leggiero</i>	"	lěd-jā'-rō	(lightly)
<i>senza pedale</i>	"	sěn'-tsä pē-dä'-lē	(without pedal)
<i>alta</i>	"	äl'-tä	(high)
<i>simile</i>	"	sē'-mē-lā	(similarly; in like manner)
<i>grazioso</i>	"	grä-tsē-ō'-zō	(in a graceful style)
<i>scherzo</i>	"	skēr'-tsō	(a jest; play; sport)

# Characteristic Piece

Leicht und Luftig

Op. 7, No. 7

Revised and edited by Leopold Godowsky

FELIX MENDELSSOHN-BARTHOLDY

Presto  $\text{♩} = 132-144$

*sempre staccato, leggero, pianissimo, ed una corda*

*Ped. \* senza pedale*

16 17 18 19

20 21 22

23 *sempre pianissimo* 24 25

26 27 28

29 30 31

32 33 34

35 *gatta* 36 37

38 39 40

41 42 43

44 45a 45b





Measures 66-69. Treble clef, key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). Measure numbers 66, 67, 68, and 69 are indicated below the staff. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above notes. A dynamic marking *mf* is present at the beginning of measure 66.

Measures 70-73. Measure numbers 70, 71, 72, and 73 are indicated below the staff. Measure 73 is marked *dolce*. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above notes.

Measures 74-77. Measure numbers 74, 75, 76, and 77 are indicated below the staff. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above notes.

Measures 78-81. Measure numbers 78, 79, 80, and 81 are indicated below the staff. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above notes.

Measures 82-85. Measure numbers 82, 83, 84, and 85 are indicated below the staff. Measure 82 is marked *cresc.* and measure 85 is marked *pp*. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above notes.

86 87 88 89

90 91 92 93

94 *pp* 95 96 97

98 99 100 101

102 103 104 105

106 *pp* 107 108 109

110 111 112 113

114 115 116 117

118 *dimin.* 119 120 121

122 123 124 125 126

127 128 129 130

131 132 133 134

135 136 *simile* 137 138

139 140 141 142 *pp*

143 144 *pp* 145 146

147 *grazioso* 148 149 150

151 (1 2 4) 152 153 154 *f*

155 156 157 158

159 160 *staccatissimo* 161 162 *dimin.* 163

164 *pp e legatissimo* 165 166 167 168 *ppp* 169 *poco rit.*