



# F. Mendelssohn

CHANNEL CLASSICS

CCS 6694

symphony nr. 4 'Italian'  
symphony nr. 5 'Reformation'

**Jos van Immerseel**

conductor

**Anima Eterna**

orchestra

# F. Mendelssohn-Bartholdy

(1809 - 1847)

symphony nr. 4 'Italian'

symphony nr. 5 'Reformation'

Jos van Immerseel

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CHANNEL CLASSICS

CCS 6694

Symphony nr. 4 'Italian'  
in A Major opus 90 (1833)

- |                       |       |
|-----------------------|-------|
| 1. Allegro vivace     | 10.35 |
| 2. Andante con moto   | 06.30 |
| 3. Con moto moderato  | 06.03 |
| 4. Saltarello, Presto | 06.08 |

Symphony nr. 5 'Reformation'  
in d minor opus 107 (1832)

- |   |       |
|---|-------|
| 5. Andante-Allegro con fuoco                                      | 11.05 |
| 6. Allegro vivace   | 05.03 |
| 7. Andante  | 03.32 |
| 8. Choral: Ein' feste Burg<br>Andante con moto - Allegro maestoso | 08.25 |

TOTAL TIME 58.00

*Recording dates: 22-24 april 1994*





**JOS VAN IMMERSEEL**

*Photo:*  
Peter Maes

*cover illustration:*

Carl Blechen (1798-1840)

'Three fishermen by the Bay of Naples', ca. 1835 (detail)

The painter Carl Blechen was a contemporary of Mendelssohn's, and, like the composer, a native of Berlin. Both men journeyed through Italy. From Mendelssohn's letters we can see how he was impressed by Naples and the view of the Bay which he had from his balcony. In a letter home from Naples on 17 May 1831 he wrote: "I can enjoy nature and the blue skies here for hours at a time, thinking of nothing else."

In 1832, shortly after his return from Italy, Mendelssohn completed his 'Italian' symphony in Berlin. The view from the balcony in Naples undoubtedly contributed to his inspiration.

From his painting 'Three fishermen by the Bay of Naples', with its emphasis on the strong blue coloring of the sky, it is clear that Blechen, like Mendelssohn, was entranced by the blue skies of the Neapolitan coast. The fishermen in the painting seem possessed by the same endless concentration as Mendelssohn.

Well-known pianist and harpsichordist **Jos van Immerseel's** 'authentic' interpretations, based on a balanced combination of technique, improvisational talent, and theoretical knowledge, brought him international fame.

One particularly striking example of this is his appointment, the first awarded to a native Fleming in 150 years, to a chair at the 'Conservatoire National Supérieur' of Paris.

More than fifty recordings provide further evidence of the strong influence of primary source investigation on his performances. In Jos van Immerseel's work, terms such as 'rhetoric' and 'stylistic authenticity' are no longer sterile abstractions; on the contrary. More than any other performer, he shows that these qualities, combined with his own profound musicality, result in consistently innovative, original interpretations.

After working for many years with ad hoc- and guest ensembles, Jos van Immerseel founded an ensemble in 1985 that was better suited to the realization of his musical concepts and the results of his research. At the same time, it was intended to function as an experimental instrument for the testing of theory against practice. This was **Anima Eterna**.

In the nine years since its foundation, the orchestra has made fourteen CDs, including the unsurpassed series of Mozart's complete piano concerti; it has made concert tours in Europe and Japan and received innumerable prizes and honors (e.g. 'Cultural Ambassador of the Flemish Community', 'Best Orchestra for historical performance in 1992', awarded by the well-known American periodical CD review, the Caecilia prize of the Belgian musical press...).

One of the main factors in the orchestra's rapid rise to international fame has been the wide-ranging selections of the best musicians from more than 15 different countries; after five years of intensive work, they have succeeded in creating their own distinctive sound, a sound unmatched by any other ensemble today. In this way, Anima Eterna has gained a position in the world of historic performance which makes it the benchmark for performances of composers such as Mozart and Schubert.

*Performing Mendelssohn's fourth and fifth symphonies:  
problematic or self-explanatory?*

There is a saying: "Copy one book, and it's plagiarism. Copy two, and it's a doctoral dissertation". The same is true of descriptions and commentaries on music of the past. Certain opinions are copied, translated, rehashed, or inflated, and subsequently go on to lead a life of their own as quasi-legends. Some of these illegitimate offspring are immediately recognisable for the music-lover: the 'Diary of Anna Magdalena Bach' has lost any credibility it ever might have had, and the beginning of Beethoven's Fifth no longer inspires visions of Fate Knocking at the Door. But there are smaller leaks and deformations in the transmission of information, and these are more difficult to expose for what they are. In addition, a quotation is only rarely left in its original context, a positive invitation to a runaway sense of imagination.

Just two examples: In 1830, Mendelssohn wrote a letter from Rome: "the Italian Symphony is making great strides; it is going to be the happiest piece I ever wrote (...)". The standard literature has transmogrified this into "The

Italian sun shines in every measure of this symphony". Another example: Ferdinand Hiller wrote in 1874 that the fifth symphony was rejected by the orchestra of the Paris conservatory, during the 1831-1832 season under Habeneck: "too much fugato, too little melody". Anyone familiar with the Paris repertoire and the (military) interests of the period will recognise the self-evidence of such a quotation, but it reveals more about Paris than it does about Mendelssohn. Less obvious is the following 'appreciation', because it was published in 1986: "Thus, a flawed composition (...). It is also more austere, drawing on borrowings from Protestant liturgy, some better integrated than others (...) and betraying a musical language lacking in any striking originality, not to say a repeatedly faltering inspiration" (F.R. Tranchefort). Tranchefort's lack of insight into this fine music may not be unusual, but that does not justify the destructive criticism of a masterpiece.

Mendelssohn's enthusiasm for the world of the chorale, the organ, and counterpoint, in combination with the new symphonic language, is well known (e.g., his chorale cantatas on Lutheran subjects, his performance of the Bach St. Matthew Passion in Berlin, a year before the composition of the symphony, his performances of 'ancient music', etc.) In this context, the following excerpt from a letter is illuminating: "I laid out all my compositions from last year on the table, the d minor Symphony (the fifth) and the Hebrides Overture were among them as well as a lot of church music (...). Since then I have found this only once to such a degree - indeed I found it only by chance, because I had to compose something for the Academy - among the hymns of Luther, which had been given to me by an acquaintance in Vienna, to take along on my journey; I beg you, read through them, or, if you can't get

the collected edition, then look up the following, perhaps, in the Hymnbook: 'Mitten wir in Leben sind', or 'Aus tiefer Not', or 'Vom Himmel hoch da komm' ich her', 'Ach Gott vom Himmel sieh' darein', 'Mit Fried' und Freud', in short, all of them. The way every word calls out to be set to music, the way every stanza is a new composition, the way progression, movement, growth takes place throughout - it's too wonderful, and I am here in Rome, diligently composing on these themes, thinking of the monastery where he once lived, where he became convinced of the mad zeal of the Lord." (Rome, 2 January 1831).

Like Monteverdi or Debussy, Mendelssohn can make the connection between old and new, and he demonstrates his perfect comprehension of both worlds. But in order to follow his thinking, we need some knowledge of what leads up to it: insight into the chorale-based literature, familiarity with chorale preludes (Buxtehude, Bruhns, Walther, Bach), insight into the technique of psalm chanting, interest in counterpoint, fascination with Mendelssohn's originality in achieving balance (the Scherzo of the fifth symphony), familiarity with the specific techniques of recitative, etc.

But above all, the interpreter must be aware of Mendelssohn's organ-inspired treatment of the orchestra: in the fifth symphony, the Hauptwerk and Pedal begin the prelude, measure five sounds on the Positiv, the 'Gregorian' quotations are played on reed stops, the Dresden Amen is played on the solo division with a registration of gamba stops, or even the unda maris, the pedal bombarde supports the closing chorale (in the orchestra finale this is actually a contrabassoon), etc. But listen, too, to the andante of the 'Italian': an organ bass (an escape from Bach's Organchorales) supports a left-hand cantus

firmus, surrounded by a two-voice flute stop. In Mendelssohn's day, organ and orchestra were still partners, and conductors were often organists. It is obvious that only an orchestra composed of instruments from Mendelssohn's time can approach the sound of an early Romantic organ. But just as obvious is the freedom given to the orchestral players by the composer of the Octet: the symphonies are like gigantic Octets, mighty chamber music, but symphonic in effect. Only musicians with the mentality of chamber players, playing instruments of the correct period, can open the door to the rediscovery of these works in their original color and form.

*Jos van Immerseel*

*Translation: David Shapero*



**SYMPHONY NR. 4 'ITALIAN'  
IN A MAJOR OPUS 90 (1833)**

1. Allegro vivace	10:35
2. Andante con moto	06:30
3. Con moto moderato	06:03
4. Saltarello, Presto	06:08

**SYMPHONY NR. 5 'REFORMATION'  
IN D MINOR OPUS 107 (1832)**

5. Andante-Allegro con fuoco	11:05
6. Allegro vivace	05:03
7. Andante	05:32
8. Choral: Ein' feste Burg	08:25
Andante con moto - Allegro maestoso	

**MEMBERS**

Conductor:

*Jos van Immerseel*

First violin:

*Johannes Leertouwer*

*Balàzs Bozzai*

*Brian Dean*

*Judith Freise*

*Laura Johnson*

*Florence Malgoire*

*Barry Sargent*

*Peter van Boxelaere*

Second violin:

*Udbhava Wilson Meyer*

*Paulien Kostense*

*Mimi Mitchell*

*Diane Moore*

*Fabrizio Zanella*

*Anette Sichelschmidt*

*Rene Van Laken*

*Wanda Visser*

**OF**

Viola:

*Karlheinz Steeb*

*Laxmi Bickley*

*Paul De Clerck*

*Niek Idema*

*Jan Willem Vis*

Cello:

*Viola de Hoog*

*Bruno Cocset*

*Marion Middenway*

*Ute Petersilge*

Double Bass:

*Etienne Siebens*

*Nicholas Pap*

*Love Persson*

Flute:

*Marten Root*

*Doretthe Janssens*

**ANIMA**

Oboe:

*Frank De Bruine*

*Gail Hemmessy*

Clarinet:

*Alf Hörberg*

*Toru Sakamoto*

Bassoon:

*Philip Turbett*

*Kate van Orden*

Double Bassoon:

*Norbert Kunst*

French Horn:

*Ulrich Hübner*

*Martin Münther*

TOTAL TIME 58:00

**ETERNA**

Trumpet:

*Graham Nicholson*

*Maarten Van*

*Weverwijk*

Trombone:

*Tim Beck*

*Cas Gevers*

*Claudia Schäfer*

Timpani:

*Maarten van der Valk*



**CHANNEL CLASSICS**

CCS 6694

### **Colophon**

Recording: Channel Classics Studio B.V.  
Producer: T. A. Diehl  
Recording engineer/  
editing: Bert van der Wolf  
Cover illustration: Carl Blechen, (1798 -1840)  
Detail from 'Drei Fischer am  
Golf von Neapel', ca. 1835  
Cover design: Charlotte Boersma  
Liner notes: Jos van Immerseel  
Executive producer: C. Jared Sacks

### **Technical information**

Microphones: Brüel & Kjaer/Sennheiser/Schoeps  
(modified by Rens Heijnis)  
Mixing console: Rens Heijnis (custom made)  
Analogue to digital  
converter: DCS 900  
Digital editor: SONY DAE 3000  
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The Netherlands  
Recording dates: 22-24 April 1994

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