





# ELIJAH



AN ORATORIO

by

FELIX MENDELSSOHN-BARTHOLDY

## Rochester Oratorio Society

THEODORE HOLLENBACH

Conductor

Elijah	William Warfield, baritone
Widow, Queen, Angel	Judith Coen , soprano
Angel	Ann Yervanian , mezzo
Obadiah, Ahab	James Wagner , tenor
Youth	Michael Dash , soprano

members of the

ROCHESTER PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

Sunday Evening November 10, 1968 8:15 P.M.



EASTMAN THEATRE OF THE EASTMAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC  
Rochester, New York

PART I

INTRODUCTION

As God the Lord (Baritone)

OVERTURE

CHORUS. Help, Lord!

DUET (Soprano and Contralto) with  
CHORUS. Lord, bow thine ear

RECITATIVE (Tenor). Ye people, rend  
your hearts

ARIA (Tenor). If with all your hearts

CHORUS. Yet doth the Lord

RECITATIVE (Contralto). Elijah, get  
thee hence

RECITATIVE (Contralto). Now Cherith's  
brook

{ RECITATIVE (Soprano). What have I do  
to with thee  
RECITATIVE (Bass). Give me thy son

CHORUS. Blessed are the men who fear  
Him

RECITATIVE (Baritone) with CHORUS.  
As God the Lord of Sabaoth

CHORUS. Baal, we cry to thee

{ RECITATIVE (Baritone). Call him  
louder!  
CHORUS. Hear our cry, O Baal!

{ RECITATIVE (Baritone). Call him  
louder!  
CHORUS. Baal! Baal!

RECITATIVE and AIR (Baritone). Draw  
near, all ye people

CHORUS. Cast thy burden upon the  
Lord (Chorale)

{ RECITATIVE (Baritone). O Thou, who  
makest thine angels spirits  
CHORUS. The fire descends

ARIA (Baritone). Is not His word like a  
fire?

RECITATIVE (Tenor). O man of God,  
help thy people!

RECITATIVE (Baritone) with CHORUS.  
O Lord, Thou has overthrown thine  
enemies

CHORUS. Thanks be to God!

INTERMISSION

PART II

ARIA (Soprano). Hear ye, Israel!

CHORUS. Be not afraid

RECITATIVE (Baritone) with CHORUS.  
The Lord hath exalted thee

CHORUS. Woe to him!

RECITATIVE (Tenor and Baritone).  
Man of God

ARIA (Baritone). It is enough

RECITATIVE (Tenor). See, now he  
sleepeth

TRIO (or CHORUS). Lift thine eyes

CHORUS. He, watching over Israel

{ RECITATIVE (Contralto). Arise, Elijah  
RECITATIVE (Baritone). O Lord, I have  
labored in vain

ARIA (Contralto). O rest in the Lord

CHORUS. He that shall endure

{ RECITATIVE (Baritone). Night falleth  
round me  
RECITATIVE (Soprano). Arise, now!

CHORUS. Behold, God the Lord

RECITATIVE (Baritone). I go on my  
way

ARIOSO (Baritone). For the mountains  
shall depart

CHORUS. Then did Elijah

ARIA (Tenor). Then shall the righteous  
shine forth

CHORUS. And then shall your light  
break forth

# Felix Mendelssohn - Bartholdy

Born in Hamburg, February 3, 1809; died in Leipzig, November 4, 1847

Felix Mendelssohn's short life was a happy one. He was born to a prosperous Jewish family who had been distinguished for generations. Moses Mendelssohn, his grandfather, was a famous philosopher and writer with a lifelong desire to promote understanding between Jews and Christians. His success in this undertaking is evidenced by the fact that Abraham, Felix's father, became a Lutheran. Abraham added the Bartholdy to his surname to distinguish himself from the Jewish Mendelssohns.

The Mendelssohn family life was one that encouraged musical ambition. Felix's oldest sister, Fanny, became a talented pianist and composer; Felix included several of her compositions in his own works. Another sister was a singer, and his brother played the cello. Felix began his studies at the age of three--piano, violin, harmony, drawing and language lessons beginning at 5:00 a. m. kept the boy out of mischief. There was room for fun in the household, however, as the Mendelssohns entertained lavishly, and games, lively talk, and good food were important parts of the family scene.

In 1818 Mendelssohn made his first public appearance, as a pianist. By his eleventh birthday he had composed more than sixty pieces, and at fifteen he was a competent conductor (he stood on a stool to be seen above the instruments). At the advanced teen-age of seventeen he composed one of his best loved works, the overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (the incidental music to that play waited seventeen more years to be released from his brain). Before he was twenty-one, he had developed talents in swimming, riding, dancing, painting, and languages at the University of Berlin, revived public interest in Bach's neglected *St. Matthew Passion*, and established his musical reputation in England on a tour there.

Mendelssohn's tendency toward major undertakings at an unusually early age did not extend to marriage; he was twenty-eight when he married his seventeen year old bride. His married life was extremely happy, and he was a doting father to their five children.

Although he had begun to plan the oratorio *Elijah* in 1837, he completed it in 1846 just in time for the *premiere* at the Birmingham Festival. This was an overwhelming success; the audience demanded encores of eight numbers! He exultantly wrote to his brother, "No work of mine ever went so admirably the first time of execution, or was received with such enthusiasm, by both the musicians and the audience, as this oratorio."

Mendelssohn's triumphs were physically exhausting in his state of increasingly poor health. On the return from his tenth trip to England, he was told abruptly that his favorite sister, Fanny, had died, and this tragic news brought on a state of continuing depression. A few months later, his will to live gone, he died of apoplectic strokes.

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The text of *Elijah* is taken from the events recorded in the First Book of Kings. The prophet Elijah's life was full of drama--an evil king egged on by a more evil wife made his life miserable and uncertain, he was miraculously rescued from starvation and thirst, and he himself performed miraculous deeds to prove the might of God over the heathen idols.

At the beginning of the story, God commanded Elijah to hide by the brook Cherith during the time there would be no dew or rain. Elijah obeyed, and lived on water from the brook, and bread and meat brought to him by ravens twice a day. When the brook dried up, Elijah was commanded to go to a widow's house in Zarephath. When he first saw the widow, she was about to prepare a meal from her last handful of flour and a few drops of oil, then to feed her son and herself and resign themselves to death. At Elijah's bidding, she fed him first, and from then until the end of the drought, her supply of flour and oil did not diminish. During his stay at the widow's house, her son fell sick and died. Elijah prayed for the boy's revival; his prayers were answered and the widow's joy was restored.

After three years God told Elijah to appear before Ahab, the king. Ahab was extremely wicked; he "did yet more to provoke Jehovah, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him". His household steward, Obadiah, was a God-fearing man who did what he could to counteract the evil deeds of Ahab and Jezebel, the queen. Ahab and Obadiah were on a tour of the land, searching for water and grass to save the horses and mules from dying, when Elijah appeared, requesting all the people of Israel to be summoned to Mount Carmel. Ahab complied, and when the people were gathered, Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal, the pagan god, to a contest between Baal and Jehovah.

The contest rules decreed that each side should build an altar with a sacrifice, but no fire was to be lit. Each side was to call on its god to send fire to the altar, and the people agreed that the god that sent fire would be the true God. Elijah gave the prophets of Baal a full day to call fruitlessly for fire for their altar, during which time he mocked and taunted them because of their helpless god. Then Elijah's turn came. To make things more challenging, he drenched the altar, wood and offering three times with water and filled a trench around the altar with water. He then called on Jehovah. Fire came, and "consumed the burnt-offering, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench". The people admitted Jehovah's power, and the priests of Baal were slain.

Now it was time for the promised rain. Elijah went to the top of the mountain to wait, sending his servant to look toward the sea for signs of rain. Each time the servant came back with the word, "There is nothing." The seventh time he reported a cloud as small as a man's hand. Soon the sky was black with clouds and wind, and a great rain ended the dry season.

The second part of the oratorio tells of Elijah's persecutions by Jezebel, who was enraged by the destruction of her priests. She promised Elijah the same treatment, and to escape her wrath, he fled to the wilderness. Discouraged, he prayed that God would end his life, but while he slept, an angel brought him food and water. Elijah stayed in the wilderness, living in a cave, until he was commanded to go out on the mountain (Horeb) to wait for God. As he stood there, a strong wind came, then an earthquake, and then a fire, but God was in none of these. Then there came "a still small voice" and in it was God.

Elijah returned to Israel and found there were seven thousand people who had not worshipped Baal. Periods of war and peace between Syria and Israel followed, and during one of these wars Ahab was killed. When Elijah's work was ended, he walked to the river Jordan, accompanied by his successor, Elisha. As Elisha watched, a chariot and horses of fire appeared, and Elijah went up into heaven in a whirlwind.

Mary J. Youngquist

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