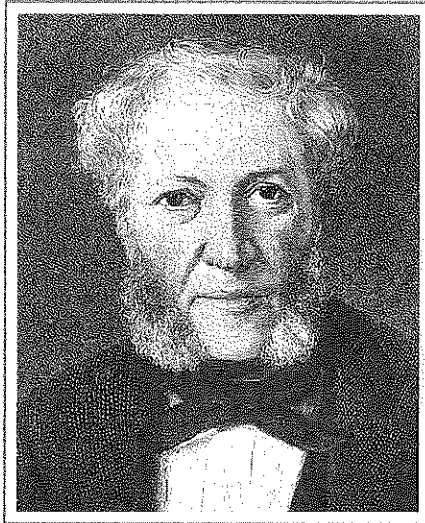


MOSCHELES' IMPROMPTU

BY JOSEPH SMITH



Ignaz Moscheles (1794-1870) recognized himself as “the connecting link between the old and the new school.” And, indeed, this composer was friendly with Beethoven and lived to teach Grieg! But Moscheles connects not merely by virtue of chronology, but also by the wide range of his musical sympathies. Although he had a deep understanding and reverence for music of the past, his intellectual integrity compelled him to look for the good in new trends—the very trends that were driving out his own music.

He perceived genius in the early music of Schumann at a time when others—even the musically progressive—found it eccentric and incomprehensible. Moscheles was Jewish, yet despite Wagner’s known anti-Semitism he was able to regard *Die Meistersinger* with admiration and understanding. It is with ambivalence that I mention Moscheles’s mentoring of the young Mendelssohn and their subsequent relationship as friends and colleagues: the story is inspiring, but it has tended to overshadow the importance of Moscheles in his own right.

Moscheles was a pioneer in presenting the canon of musical classics to the public. Until nearly the middle of the nineteenth century, a pianist giving a concert shared his program with a hodgepodge of guest artists. He played only a few pieces, generally composed by himself—the goal was not to present substantial works, but to show off. When did this change? Liszt is often credited with originating the piano recital, and indeed coined the strange term “recital” in 1840 for a London program. He did play the whole program himself—but what exactly did he play? His own transcriptions of movements from a Beethoven symphony and of Schubert songs, the *Hexameron*, a showy variation set (each of its six variations contributed by a different virtuoso), and two of his own bravura pieces. Three years earlier, also in London, Moscheles had initiated a series that he called “Classical Pianoforte Soirees.” His program presented a Weber sonata, three Bach preludes and fugues, two Beethoven sonatas, as well as his own pieces. It also included a novelty: a selection of Scarlatti sonatas played on an old, forgotten instrument: the harpsichord! A technicality precludes Moscheles’s precedence—his program included

a few vocal pieces as well. But, far more than Liszt, Moscheles established the role of pianist as public interpreter of masterpieces.

As composer, Moscheles was justly renowned for his etudes—Chopin played and taught them. While the best etudes of his predecessors Cramer and Clementi display a higher level of variety and musical thought than many pianists recognize, Moscheles brought a new poetry to this form. He provides each etude of his Op. 70 (1826) with a

prefatory note, defining its purpose. Significantly, these notes address not just technical problems, but also mood and character. For instance, No. 5 in A minor is a study in differentiating two voices, one melody and the other accompaniment, in the right hand, demanding “extension and elasticity of the fingers.” But Moscheles goes on to say that the agitated and passionate character of the study “permits and even demands departing from the tempo. The taste and feeling of the pianist will indicate where he must slow down or speed up the tempo.”

In his *Characteristic Etudes*, Op 95 (1836), he uses a new means to define their mood—he gives each one a descriptive title, such as “Anger” or “Moonlight on the Seashore.” Was he the first to do so? In any case, in this respect, he anticipates Adolf Henselt by two years, and Liszt by twelve. (Henselt’s titles are certainly the juiciest. For example: “Storm, you cannot subdue me!” or “It is youth that has golden wings!”) In the Op. 70 remarks and the Op. 95 titles we find the same concern: techniques towards esthetic goals.

The present *Impromptu* is not as long or as difficult as the etudes, but it shows the same seriousness, harmonic refinement, and attention to voice-leading (the sign of a cultivated musician). Its mood of nervous energy may remind the listener of the music of Moscheles’s great protégé, Mendelssohn. This impromptu, unlike those of Schubert and Chopin, may actually justify the title—it seems to have been dashed off on the spur of the moment. It was composed in 1848 as a token of friendship for the pianist-composer Carl Reinecke, and was never published in Moscheles’s lifetime.

See Moscheles’s *Impromptu* on page 69.

Impromptu

IGNAZ MOSCHELES
(1794-1870)

Allegro agitato

The score is written for piano and voice. It begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a tempo marking of **Allegro agitato**. The vocal line has lyrics: "cre - scen - do". The piano accompaniment includes various dynamics such as *ff*, *[mf]*, *f*, and *pp*. The piece concludes with a **calando** marking and a final *ff* dynamic. Fingerings and articulation marks are provided throughout the score.

Lyrics: cre - scen - do