

An analytical study of *Das Jahr* by Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel

Mia HyeYeon Kim

A dissertation

submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Musical Arts

University of Washington

2025

Reading Committee:

Craig Sheppard, Chair

Rachel Lee Priday

Timothy Salzman

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Music

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Mia HyeYeon Kim

University of Washington

Abstract

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Mia HyeYeon Kim

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Craig Sheppard

School of Music

In recent years, increasing scholarly interest in female composers has brought renewed attention to Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel (1805–1847), often recognized primarily as the sister of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1809–1847). A highly gifted composer and pianist, she wrote over 400 works despite the societal limitations placed on women in her time. Although she was unable to pursue a professional musical career due to 19th-century patriarchal norms, she received an exceptional musical education alongside her brother and remained musically active, particularly through the *Sonntagsmusiken* (“Sunday Musicales”)—a series of private concerts held at the Mendelssohn family home—where she presented and directed many of her compositions.

One of her most significant works, *Das Jahr* (“The Year”), is a cycle of twelve character pieces—one for each month—plus *Nachspiel* (“postlude”), composed in 1841 and revised in 1842 as a Christmas gift for her husband, Wilhelm Hensel. Nearly 150 years later, the manuscript

was rediscovered and published for the first time in 1989, followed by a facsimile of Hensel's final autograph version in 2000. Due to its relatively recent publication, *Das Jahr* has received limited analytical attention, leaving room for further exploration.

This study provides an analytical examination of *Das Jahr*, situating it within the broader context of Hensel's life and musical influences. The first chapter explores her artistic development, education, relationship with Felix, and exposure to various musical traditions, while also providing a chronological overview of her compositions to illustrate her evolving style and creative ambitions. The second chapter offers a detailed analysis of *Das Jahr*, focusing on its structural, harmonic, and programmatic elements. Furthermore, this study examines *Das Jahr* as a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total artwork), a fusion of literature, music, and visual art incorporating poetic epigrams from German Romantic poets such as Goethe, Tieck, and Schiller, as well as vignettes painted by Wilhelm Hensel. Ultimately, this dissertation seeks to deepen our understanding of *Das Jahr* as one of Hensel's most significant works, highlight her distinctive compositional voice, and reassess her contributions to 19th-century piano literature.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	i
List of examples.....	ii
List of tables.....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel's Life.....	4
1.1: Early Life (1805-1820).....	4
1.2: Adolescence to Young Woman (1821-1829).....	6
1.3: Marriage Life (1830-1838).....	10
1.4: Trip to Italy and 'Das Jahr' (1839-1841).....	13
1.5: Later life and death (1841-1847).....	15
Chapter 2: Analysis of Das Jahr (The Year).....	17
2.1: Background.....	17
2.2: January.....	19
2.3: February.....	28
2.4: March.....	34
2.5: April.....	39
2.6: May.....	44
2.7: June.....	49
2.8: July.....	55
2.9: August.....	59
2.10: September.....	64
2.11: October.....	68
2.12: November.....	73
2.13: December.....	80
2.14: Nachspiel.....	85
Chapter 3. Conclusion.....	89
Bibliography.....	92

List of Examples

Example 1.1a: Fanny Hensel, January from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 1-4.....	19
Example 1.1b: J.S. Bach's <i>Es ist vollbracht</i> from the <i>St. John Passion</i>	20
Example 1.1c. L.v. Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 110, 3rd movement mm. 9-10.....	20
Example 1.1d. L.v. Beethoven's Cello Sonata Op. 69, 1st movement mm. 115-116.....	20
Example 1.1e. Haydn's <i>Die Jahreszeiten</i> , No. 1, mm. 1-4.....	21
Example 1.2. Fanny Hensel, January from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 6-10.....	22
Example 1.3. Fanny Hensel, January from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 23-4.....	23
Example 1.4. Fanny Hensel, January from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 32-4.....	24
Example 1.5a. Portrait of Fanny Mendelssohn, Wilhelm Hensel.....	26
Example 1.5b. Vignette in January from <i>Das Jahr</i> , Wilhelm Hensel.....	26
Example 2.1a. Fanny Hensel, January (mm. 58-9) and February (mm. 1-2).....	28
Example 2.1b. Shostakovich, Piano Concerto No. 2, 2nd & 3rd movements.....	29
Example 2.2. Fanny Hensel, February from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 4-8.....	29
Example 2.3. Fanny Hensel, February from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 33-4.....	31
Example 2.4. Fanny Hensel, February from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 57-61.....	32
Example 2.4. Felix Mendelssohn, Presto from <i>Rondo Capriccioso</i> , Op. 14.....	32
Example 2.5. Fanny Hensel, February from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 159-172.....	33
Example 3.1a. Fanny Hensel, March from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 1-3.....	35
Example 3.1b. Fanny Hensel, March from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 15-6.....	36
Example 3.2a. Fanny Hensel, March from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 25-6.....	37

Example 3.2b. Fanny Hensel, January from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 16-9.....	37
Example 3.3. Fanny Hensel, March from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 29-30.....	37
Example 3.4. Fanny Hensel, March from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 55-6.....	38
Example 4.1a. Siciliana Rhythm.....	39
Example 4.1b. Fanny Hensel, April from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 1-3.....	40
Example 4.2. Fanny Hensel, March from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 12-3.....	41
Example 4.3. Fanny Hensel, April from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 29-34.....	42
Example 4.4 Fanny Hensel, April from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 86-7.....	43
Example 5.1. Fanny Hensel, May from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 1-3.....	45
Example 5.2. Fanny Hensel, May from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 18-9.....	46
Example 5.3. Fanny Hensel, May from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 33-8.....	47
Example 5.4. Fanny Hensel, May from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 41-4.....	48
Example 6.1 Fanny Hensel, June from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 1-2.....	50
Example 6.2. Fanny Hensel, June from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 9-11.....	50
Example 6.3. Fanny Hensel, June from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 12-15.....	51
Example 6.3. Fanny Hensel, June from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 9-11.....	52
Example 6.2. Fanny Hensel, June from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 88-9.....	53
Example 6.3a. Fanny Hensel, June from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 104-7.....	54
Example 6.2. Felix Mendelssohn, Piano Concerto No. 2 in D minor mm. 17-22.....	54
Example 7.1. Fanny Hensel, July from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 1-4.....	56
Example 7.2. Fanny Hensel, July from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 17-20.....	57

Example 7.3a. Fanny Hensel, July from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 25-8.....	57
Example 7.3b. L.v. Beethoven, Piano Sonata Op. 31 No. 2 “Tempest,” 2nd movement mm. 19-22.....	58
Example 8.1. Fanny Hensel, August from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 1-4.....	60
Example 8.2a. Fanny Hensel, August from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 49-50.....	61
Example 8.2b. Robert Schumann, Finale from <i>Symphonic Etudes</i> mm. 1-2.....	62
Example 8.3. Fanny Hensel, August from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 66-9.....	62
Example 8.4. Fanny Hensel, August from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 97-101.....	63
Example 9.1. Fanny Hensel, September from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 1-2.....	65
Example 9.2. Fanny Hensel, September from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 33-4.....	66
Example 10.1. Fanny Hensel, October from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 1-4.....	68
Example 10.2a. Fanny Hensel, October from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 30-44.....	70
Example 10.2b. RL cycle of Fanny Hensel’s October from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 30-44.....	70
Example 10.3a. Fanny Hensel, October from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 69-72.....	71
Example 10.3b. Felix Mendelssohn, Rondo Capriccioso ending.....	71
Example 11.1. Fanny Hensel, November from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 1-4.....	74
Example 11.2. Fanny Hensel, November from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 9-16.....	75
Example 11.2a. Fanny Hensel, November from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 25-8.....	76
Example 11.2b. Fanny Hensel, November from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 146-152.....	76
Example 11.2c. Fanny Hensel, January from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 37-44.....	77
Example 11.2d. Fanny Hensel, June from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 118-9.....	77

Example 11.3. Fanny Hensel, November from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 32-8.....	78
Example 11.2a. Fanny Hensel, November from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 82-90.....	79
Example 12.1a. Fanny Hensel, December from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 1-2.....	81
Example 12.1b. Fanny Hensel, April from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 12-3.....	81
Example 12.2. Fanny Hensel, December from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 62-70.....	82
Example 12.2. Fanny Hensel, December from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 71-75.....	83
Example 12.2. Fanny Hensel, December from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 84-8.....	83
Example 12.3a. Fanny Hensel, December from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 101-9.....	84
Example 12.3b. L.v. Beethoven, Piano Sonata Op. 111, 2nd movement mm. 174-7.....	84
Example 13.1. J.S. Bach, <i>Das alte Jahr vergangen ist</i> , BWV 288.....	85
Example 13.2a. Fanny Hensel, <i>Nachspiel</i> from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 1-3.....	86
Example 13.2b. J.S. Bach, <i>St. Matthew Passion</i> BWV 244, mm. 1-4.....	86
Example 13.3. Fanny Hensel, December from <i>Das Jahr</i> mm. 3-4.....	87

List of Tables

Table 1. Composition Date and Epigram for January from Das Jahr.....	19
Table 2. Composition Date and Epigram for February from Das Jahr.....	28
Table 3. Composition Date and Epigram for March from Das Jahr.....	34
Table 4. Composition Date and Epigram for April from Das Jahr.....	39
Table 5. Composition Date and Epigram for May from Das Jahr.....	44
Table 6. Composition Date and Epigram for June from Das Jahr.....	49
Table 7. Composition Date and Epigram for July from Das Jahr.....	55
Table 8. Composition Date and Epigram for August from Das Jahr.....	59
Table 9. Composition Date and Epigram for September from Das Jahr.....	64
Table 10. Composition Date and Epigram for October from Das Jahr.....	68
Table 11. Composition Date and Epigram for November from Das Jahr.....	73
Table 12. Composition Date and Epigram for December from Das Jahr.....	80

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to everyone who has supported and guided me throughout this dissertation.

First, I am incredibly grateful to my committee chair, Craig Sheppard, for his constant support, insightful guidance, and valuable feedback. His expertise and advice have been essential in shaping this project and my development as a scholar. I also want to thank Timothy Salzman, Melia Watras, Rachel Lee Priday, and Georgy Manucharyan for their encouragement and helpful suggestions during the research process. Their input has inspired me and improved my ideas.

A special thanks to my family and friends, who have been a steady source of support. To my sister Sooyeon Kim, the most important person in my life, thank you for your love, encouragement, and unwavering belief in me. You have given me the strength to face challenges and stay focused on my goals.

Introduction

In recent years, increasing scholarly interest in female composers has brought renewed attention to Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel (1805–1847), often recognized primarily as the sister of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1809–1847). A highly gifted composer and pianist, she wrote over 400 works despite the societal limitations placed on women in her time. Educated alongside Felix under the guidance of esteemed teachers such as Carl Friedrich Zelter and Ludwig Berger, she developed a profound understanding of both classical and contemporary musical traditions. In particular, she deeply admired the works of Johann Sebastian Bach and Ludwig van Beethoven, whose influence can be traced throughout her compositions. However, as a woman in a male-dominated musical culture, she was discouraged from pursuing a professional musical career, publishing her works, or performing publicly—restrictions she only began to defy in the final years of her life. Although Felix and other family members supported her musical endeavors privately, she struggled against the external pressures that constrained her artistic ambitions throughout her life. Nevertheless, through her *Sonntagsmusiken* (“Sunday musicales”)—a series of private concerts held at the Mendelssohn family home—she created a musical space where she could present her compositions, collaborate with other musicians, and shape her own creative voice.

One of her most significant works, *Das Jahr* (“The Year”), is a cycle of twelve character pieces—one for each month—plus *Nachspiel* (“postlude”), composed in 1841 and revised in 1842 as a Christmas gift for her husband, Wilhelm Hensel. What makes *Das Jahr* particularly remarkable is its integration of music, poetry, and visual art. Each movement is paired with an epigram drawn from contemporary German Romantic poets such as Goethe, Tieck, and Schiller,

while Fanny's husband, the Prussian court painter, contributed watercolor vignettes to accompany the pieces. This fusion of literature, music, and illustration allows *Das Jahr* to be regarded as a *Gesamtkunstwerk* ("total artwork"), making it a uniquely original piano cycle.¹ Scholars have debated whether *Das Jahr* serves as a musical diary, reflecting Hensel's experiences during her long-awaited journey to Italy (1839–40). While some argue that the cycle draws directly from scenes and impressions of the trip, others refute this claim due to a lack of concrete evidence.² Regardless of its possible connection to her Italian travels, *Das Jahr* remains deeply personal, which may explain why Hensel never intended it for publication. Nearly 150 years later, the manuscript was rediscovered and published for the first time in 1989, followed by a facsimile of Hensel's final autograph version in 2000. Due to its relatively recent publication, *Das Jahr* has received limited analytical attention, leaving room for further exploration.

This paper aims to fill that gap by providing a comprehensive examination of *Das Jahr* from an analytical perspective. The first chapter will introduce Fanny's life and trace the influences that shaped her musical language, from her early education to married life to her late decision to publish her works. A chronological overview of her compositions will demonstrate how *Das Jahr* represents both a culmination of her stylistic development and a turning point in her career. Key sources include Angela Mace Christian's "*Hensel [née Mendelssohn (-Bartholdy)], Fanny Cäcilie*" (*Grove Music Online*, 2018), Victoria Sirota's *The Life and Works of Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel* (1981), and Françoise Tillard's *Fanny Mendelssohn*, translated by Camille Naish and edited by Reinhard G. Pauly (2003). The second chapter will offer a detailed analysis of the cycle, exploring its harmonic, structural, and thematic characteristics. Special

¹ Monika Schwarz-Danuser, "Fanny Mendelssohn," *Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Personenteil, vol. 11, ed. Ludwig Finscher, (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2004), col.1538.

² John E. Toews, "Memory and Gender in the Remaking of Fanny Mendelssohn's Musical Identity: The Chorale in *Das Jahr*," *The Musical Quarterly* 77, no. 4 (1993): 727.

attention will be given to how Fanny interweaves motivic ideas across the cycle and how she develops thematic material inspired by Bach and Beethoven, reflecting her deep respect for these composers. Furthermore, this study examines *Das Jahr* as a *Gesamtkunstwerk* by investigating the relationship between the epigrams and the vignettes and the music. Valuable references for this analysis include Marian Wilson Kimber's "*Fanny Hensel's Seasons of Life: Poetic Epigrams, Vignettes, and Meaning in Das Jahr*" (*Journal of Musicological Research* 27, no. 4), Young Shin Lee's "*An Analysis of Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel's Das Jahr: Focusing on the Symbolism Associated with Romantic Literature*" (*Journal of Piano Music* 9), and R. Larry Todd's *Fanny Hensel: The Other Mendelssohn* (2010). Musical examples are taken from Fanny Hensel's *Das Jahr*, H. 385, published by Kassel: Furore Verlag (n.d. [1989]), and available via IMSLP.

Ultimately, this dissertation seeks to deepen our understanding of *Das Jahr* as one of Hensel's most significant works, highlight her distinctive compositional voice, and reassess her contributions to 19th-century piano literature.

Chapter 1: Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel's Life

1. Early Life (1805-1820)

Fanny Hensel, née Mendelssohn Bartholdy, was born on November 14, 1805, in Hamburg, Germany, into a family rich in musical and intellectual traditions. As the eldest of four children of Abraham and Lea Mendelssohn, she was recognized early for her musical potential—her mother famously describing her as having "Bach fugal fingers." In 1811, when Fanny was six, the family relocated to Berlin. Her father, a wealthy banker, converted the family from Judaism to Christianity and adopted the Protestant surname Bartholdy to solidify their social standing in European society. Their wealth and status allowed them to enter elite circles where Jews were rarely accepted. This privileged position enabled Fanny to receive a musical education that was uncommon for most women of her age didn't access to. Her formal training began in 1816 with piano lessons from her mother. Her great-aunts, who were passionate admirers of J.S. Bach, also played a significant role in shaping her musical upbringing. Recognizing the exceptional talents of both Fanny and her younger brother, Felix, their parents arranged for them to study with distinguished teachers. They first took lessons with Franz Lauska, followed by Marie Bigot in Paris in 1816, and later Ludwig Berger in Berlin from 1817 to 1822. Berger, a student of Muzio Clementi, emphasized a light and agile playing style and was one of the first to introduce Fanny to Beethoven's works. By age 13, she had memorized and performed all 24 Preludes from Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*, for most likely her father's birthday. In 1819, she began studying composition and counterpoint with Carl Friedrich Zelter, who profoundly shaped her understanding of classical music. Though not a pianist himself, Zelter influenced both Fanny and Felix, particularly through his involvement in the *Singakademie*, where they were exposed to choral works by J. S. Bach. During the study with

Berger and Zelter, she began to compose, initially focusing on solo piano works before gravitating toward Lieder, a lyrical song with a keyboard accompaniment. This genre was deemed socially appropriate for women, and her father encouraged her to compose in this form. Thirteen of her first 26 Lieder were based on French poetry, particularly that by Jean Pierre Claris de Florian, a favorite of her father - an example of her trying to please her father and be a good daughter. She also wrote a song for her father's birthday. She later shifted toward German texts, including those of Goethe.³

Despite her undeniable talent, Fanny's opportunities were severely restricted by the gender norms of the 19th century. While Felix was encouraged to pursue a professional musical career, she was expected to remain within the domestic sphere. In a letter from 1820, her father made it clear that music could never be more than an "ornament" for her, not the foundation of her life.

*"Music will perhaps become his profession, whilst for you it can and must only be an ornament, never the root of your being and doing."*⁴

As a young child, Fanny wanted to live up to her father's and brother's expectations, as well as the roles of a wife, mother, and upper-class woman. She understood society's restrictions and accepted them as her own, which kept her musical accomplishments largely within the private sphere. In spite of these limitations, she continued to compose and perform within her family's circle, sometimes performing her songs with her sister, Rebecka.

³ Angela Mace Christian. "Hensel [née Mendelssohn (-Bartholdy)], Fanny Cäcilie." *Grove Music Online*, 2018, 4-5.

⁴ S. Hensel, Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, and Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, *The Mendelssohn Family (1729-1847) from Letters and Journals. with Eight Portraits from Drawings by Wilhelm Hensel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 82.

2. Adolescence to Young Woman (1821-1829)

In the early 1820s, as she transitioned from childhood to young adulthood, Fanny began exploring larger musical forms; she composed a *piano sonata in F major (H-U43)*,⁵ a *piano sonata in E major (H-U44)*, and *piano quartet in A-flat major (H-U55)*. Her *Piano Quartet in A b major* reflects her aspiration to match the achievements of Felix who had already completed his first piano quartet—published as *Op. 1* in 1823. Unlike Felix, however, Fanny worked privately on her quartet, and there is no record of her ever performing or publishing the piece.

Although she was exploring larger musical forms, the *Lied* became central to her work, providing insight into her emotions and responses to life events. One example is a song inspired by Wilhelm Hensel, her future husband. In 1821, at the age of 16, she met Wilhelm Hensel, an rising artist in Berlin. While little is known about how their acquaintance developed, by the summer of 1822, Wilhelm was expressing his interest in her. One of Fanny's *Lieder* that sets his text to music is *Lebewohl (H-U48)*, dated June 15, 1822, which Wilhelm had written for her before the Mendelssohn family embarked on an extended trip to Switzerland. During this journey, Fanny longed to visit Italy, inspired by Goethe's *Italienische Reise* (Italian Journey), which both she and Felix had read. Evidence of this desire can be found in her composition *Sehnsucht nach Italien (H-U50)*, written during the Swiss trip. The year 1823 was eventful for Fanny. First, Wilhelm left for a five-year stay in Italy to complete his artistic training, and in his absence, she poured her emotions into music. That year, she composed over 30 *Lieder*, making it her most prolific period, with many pieces reflecting themes of longing, separation, and loss. Second, the Mendelssohn family initiated the tradition of *Sunday musicales*, which would become central to her musical life. The first of these gatherings was held at their home on Neue

⁵ The H number is taken from the catalog compiled by Renate Hellwig-Unruh.

Promenade 7, primarily showcasing the prodigious young Felix. However, Fanny was also a frequent performer and was equally admired by guests. Unlike many young women of her time, who were confined to playing simpler works by composers like Clementi and Kuhlau, she performed virtuosic repertoire, including Beethoven's *Piano Concertos Nos. 1, 4, and 5*, as well as her brother's *Piano Concerto in A minor*; Fanny and Felix often played the orchestra reduction part for each other. During this period, women were not expected to compose their own cadenzas, as such creative expression was considered the domain of male composers.⁶ However, Fanny defied convention by writing her own cadenza for Beethoven's *Concerto No. 1 in C major, Op. 15*. Her cadenza reveals not only her deep understanding of Beethoven's themes, structure, and style but also her own artistic perspective on early 19th-century cadenza writing.⁷ Demonstrating her exceptional technical skills, an *Étude in D minor (H-U103)* from December 1823 reflects the influence of the virtuoso pianists she encountered. Far from being merely a gifted amateur, Fanny Hensel was, at her core, a true creative musician.

In 1824, Fanny composed around 20 Lieder, maintaining a consistent yearly output. During the mid-1820s, she became particularly fascinated with the poetry of Ludwig Tieck and Johann Peter Eckermann, setting 14 of Tieck's and 6 of Eckermann's poems to music. Besides Lied, she also continued to explore various other genres, including piano sonatas, cantatas, string quartets, and orchestral overtures. L.v. Beethoven and J.S. Bach continuously had a big influence on Fanny's music. Her *Sonata o Capriccio* in F minor (H-U113) reflects Beethoven's *Appassionata* Sonata, while her first surviving multi-movement work, the *Piano Sonata in C minor (H-U128)*, comprising three movements, was influenced by Beethoven's *Sonata in D*

⁶ Christian, 7.

⁷ Nicole Grimes and Angela Mace, *Mendelssohn Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2016), 231-41.

major, *Op. 28 (Pastoral)* and *Op. 53 (Waldstein)*. Beyond Beethoven's impact, her *32nd Fugue* and an extensive *Tocatta in C minor (H-U114)* show a strong influence from J.S. Bach. Earlier in 1824, Felix received a renowned copy of J.S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, which became central to the Mendelssohn family's musical study and pursuits for the next five years. In 1825, the family relocated to Leipzigerstrasse 3, which became a vibrant hub of daily life and inspiration for both the Mendelssohn family and their circle of friends. The house, designed in a U-shape with a *Gartenhaus* at the back, served as the main music room for Sunday musicales hosted first by Fanny's parents and later by Fanny herself. The Mendelssohns' social circle expanded and grew even closer. During these gatherings, they met Adolph Bernhard Marx, a devoted Beethoven advocate at a time when Beethoven's late style was still widely unenjoyable. Marx had a profound influence on both Fanny and Felix, who increasingly took Beethoven's late works as a model, an unconventional approach at the time. In 1826, Fanny composed a piano piece in D minor (H-U166) along with several songs set to texts by Johann Heinrich Voss, who had passed away that year, which shows her engagement with contemporary poets remained active and dynamic. Another key event of the year was the publication of her *Lieder* under Felix's name in *Op. 8: Das Heimweh* (No. 2) and *Italien* (No. 3). In 1827, the remaining pieces from this opus were published, including *Suleika und Hatem* (No. 12), a duet. Though Fanny's authorship of these *Lieder* was an open secret due to societal norms, she still took pleasure in seeing her work reach the public. Notably, *Op. 8, No. 3, Italien*—which expressed her longing to visit Italy—was a favorite of Queen Victoria. In fact, when Felix visited Queen Victoria and Prince Albert in 1842, the Queen performed this song while Felix accompanied her. Upon finishing, he had to confess that the composition actually belonged to his sister. In 1827, Felix had enrolled at the University of Berlin (now Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin) and their music

teacher Zelter was dismissed. Despite the unequal opportunities between her and her brother, Fanny continued her compositional pursuits. That same year, as rehearsals for Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* intensified, she deepened engagement with Bach's music, completing a *Piano Book in E minor* that contained two preludes, a fugue, an Allegro di molto, a Largo, a toccata, and a fragment of another fugue, all heavily influenced by Bach. In 1828, Fanny composed the *Easter Sonata*, a work with a fascinating history. For many years, its existence was known only through letters from 1829, and although the manuscript briefly appeared in Paris in 1972, it was rediscovered in 2010.⁸ Another major event in 1828 was the return of Wilhelm Hensel from Italy in October. On January 23, 1829, Fanny and Wilhelm Hensel officially became engaged, and their wedding took place on October 3, 1829, at the Parochialkirche in Berlin. An interesting aspect of their wedding was that Fanny composed her own processional—a triumphant march in F major, which no woman at that time had done before. Felix, who was expected to have sent music for the wedding, had an accident while in London and neither he nor the music arrived. As a result, on the night before the wedding, in the midst of the celebrations, Wilhelm suggested Fanny took it upon herself to compose a new piece for the occasion. Here's the letter Fanny sent to Felix:

*“At 8:00pm, the family gathered for a quite prenuptial celebration. Then, at around 9:00 o'clock, Hensel suggested that I write a piece and I had the nerve to start composing in the presence of all the guests. I finished it at half past midnight. I don't think it's bad. I sent it to the organist this morning and I hope he'll agree to play it. It's starting to get very lively around here now.”*⁹

This event shows her personality, highlighting both her resilience and the central role that music played in her life. It was striking that her music was ultimately performed by a male organist, as

⁸ *Fanny: The Other Mendelssohn*, directed by Sheila Hayman (United Kingdom: Mercury Studios, 2023).

⁹ Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, and Marcia J. Citron, *The Letters of Fanny Hensel to Felix Mendelssohn* (Stuyvesant, N.Y.: Pendragon Press, 1987), 91.

women at the time were generally prohibited from learning the organ.¹⁰ Unlike her father and brother, her husband was a strong advocate for her musical pursuits, encouraging her to continue composing.

Writing her own cadenza for Beethoven's C major piano concerto and composing the organ piece for her wedding may have signified an early step toward breaking through societal constraints. These milestones foreshadowed her eventual success in overcoming the barriers imposed on her, paving the way for her recognition as a distinguished composer.

3. Marriage Life (1830-1838)

Fanny became pregnant within a month of her wedding and gave birth to her only child, Sebastian Ludwig Felix Hensel, on June 17, 1830, naming him after her three favorite composers. Due to complications during pregnancy and postpartum recovery, she was unable to compose or play piano. This was her least productive year with only seven compositions. However, similar to their prior collaboration on *Op. 8.*, three of her Lieder were published under Felix's name in *Op. 9* (nos. 7, 10, and 12). In 1831, she was dissuaded from visiting Italy by her parents who may have been concerned about the weakening of her health after childbirth. Despite this disappointment, she found increasing joy in her marriage. While she composed only seven works that year, she ventured into larger musical forms, launching a *cantata project* and establishing *Sonntagsmusiken*, a prestigious concert series attended by Prussian royalty and notable musicians like Clara Schumann and Franz Liszt. Fanny's resilience in facing

¹⁰ This restriction stemmed from prevailing social norms that deemed playing the instrument—requiring the spreading of one's legs—improper for women. In the early 19th century, women faced significant limitations in their choice of musical instruments. The cello and double bass were considered inappropriate due to the positioning of the instrument between the legs, while woodwinds and brass instruments, such as the flute and clarinet, were deemed too suggestive. Consequently, women were largely restricted to keyboard instruments.

challenges—such as premature birth, a difficult pregnancy, and limited musical productivity—reveals her optimistic personality. In 1831, she composed three cantatas—*Lobgesang* (‘Song of Praise’) (H-U257), *Hiob* (‘Job’) (H-U258), and *Choleramusik* (‘Cholera Cantata’) (H-U260)—each tied to significant personal or societal events. *Lobgesang* was dedicated to her son in gratitude for his survival; *Hiob* was written for her second wedding anniversary and performed soon after; *Choleramusik*, initially intended to mark the end of Berlin’s cholera epidemic, was ultimately performed for her father’s birthday. These works showcased her developing orchestral and choral skills, culminating in the ambitious *Choleramusik*, which featured an eight-part choir and trombones.¹¹ However, after receiving harsh criticism from Felix in December, she never attempted another cantata. In 1832, as she continued exploring orchestral genres, she composed only one Lied, *Wiegenlied* (H-U266), intended as a lullaby for her second child. Tragically, she gave birth to a stillborn daughter in November. Although she shifted away from Lieder, her early composition *Ave Maria* (H-U20) (1820) was published in *The Harmonicon*, vol.10/2 (1832) under her own name for the first time. Despite her generally positive outlook, she struggled to return to composing after the stillbirth. With encouragement from Felix, she resumed hosting *Sonntagsmusiken* in 1833. By 1834, she regularly hosted concerts featuring works by Bach, Handel, Beethoven, and Felix. That year, conductor Julius Amadeus Lecerf invited her to conduct. She also composed her *String Quartet in E ♭* (H-U277), one of her most ambitious chamber works. However, Felix criticized her unconventional approach to form, and while she did not revise the piece, it was never publicly performed. Following this critique, she never attempted another string quartet, losing confidence in her larger-scale compositions and returning to vocal writing in 1835. The sudden death of her father in 1835 deeply affected Fanny, leading her to pause her concert series and personal

¹¹ Christian, 20.

writings. By 1836, she resumed composing and performing, and with growing encouragement, she considered publishing her works. However, Felix disapproved, believing that public composition was unsuitable for a married woman. She ultimately deferred to his opinion, with only one of her piano pieces, *Andante in G (H-U301)*, being published. Given that she never composed another cantata or string quartet after Felix's criticism, it is evident that she highly valued his musical opinions and may have even feared challenging him. However, after the death of their father, both consciously and unconsciously, Fanny experienced a liberation from the obstacles that had previously suppressed her musical ambitions. This shift allowed her to stand up to Felix and begin to assert her own artistic voice.

In early 1837, Fanny published *Die Schiffende* under her own name, marking a turning point in her career. Felix, despite his reservations, congratulated her and even performed it publicly. That year, she composed numerous Lieder, duets, and piano pieces, including *Warum sind denn die Rosen so blaß? (H-U312)*, later part of *Op. 1*. This period signified her growing ambition for publication. In March 1837, Felix married Cécile Jeanrenaud, and around the same time, Fanny suffered another miscarriage, furthering her sense of alienation from her brother. She no longer had early access to his compositions and felt increasingly distanced from his life. Nevertheless, she remained devoted to performing his music, organizing two major performances of *St. Paul* in 1837 and expanding her *Sonntagsmusiken*, hosting renowned figures like violinist Henri Vieuxtemps. By early 1838, Fanny's cultural influence in Berlin had grown. She attended *St. Paul* rehearsals at the Singakademie and, in February, made her first public performance, playing Felix's *Piano Concerto No. 1, Op. 25*. Though her name was omitted from reviews, she was praised as an "excellent dilettante." Despite a successful year, tragedy struck in late 1838 when measles claimed the life of Rebecka's infant son, Felix. She paused her concerts and turned

to composing, creating works like *Notturmo in G minor (H-U337)*, which demonstrated her ambitious thematic development.¹²

To sum up, from the early years of her marriage until 1839, Fanny faced numerous hardships, such as her father's death and miscarriage, but consistently found ways to overcome them through music. She ultimately began publishing, performing publicly, and conducting despite Felix's discouragement. As 1839 approached, she prepared for a long-awaited journey to Italy—a dream she had held since her youth.

4. Trip to Italy and 'Das Jahr' (1839-1841)

In 1839, Fanny finally embarked on a journey that began on August 27, making a stop in Leipzig to visit Felix before traveling through Germany and the Alps, ultimately reaching Milan on September 30. Captivated by Italy's lush landscapes, she soon developed a deep appreciation for its ancient ruins and architecture, particularly in Rome and Venice. Although she had limited access to a piano until arriving in Rome, the journey rekindled her creativity. Inspired by the city's culture and history, she composed *Serenata* in G minor (H-U345), drawing from previous works and her firsthand experiences in Venice. In Rome, where her brother's reputation had preceded her, she became actively involved in the musical scene, frequently performing at the Villa Medici alongside Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres and earning admiration for her musical talents. Young composers, including Charles Gounod, regarded her as an authority on German music, and for the first time, she realized her influence extended beyond Felix. Beyond music, she fully immersed herself in Roman culture, attending social events, witnessing papal ceremonies, and celebrating Carnival. After spending six culturally enriching months in Rome,

¹² Christian, 26.

leaving was difficult. In June 1840, the family extended their travels to Naples, exploring Vesuvius and its surroundings. Their return journey began on August 11, retracing their path through Milan, Switzerland, and Germany before reaching Leipzig in early September, completing a trip that lasted nearly a year. This journey became a pivotal moment in Fanny's life and career. It was one of the happiest event in her life.¹³ During her time in Italy, she completed 24 works—more than twice what she had written the previous year. Many of these compositions later became part of her published collections, underscoring Italy's lasting impact on her musical legacy.

Upon returning to Berlin in September 1840, Fanny Hensel found it difficult to readjust, facing family hardships such as her sister-in-law Albertine losing a baby and her mother breaking her arm. Despite these challenges, she remained engaged in music, purchasing a new Viennese piano, composing multiple pieces, and considering an opera based on *Der Nibelunghort*, although this project never came to fruition. In 1841, she experienced a surge in productivity, composing 16 piano pieces and 9 *Lieder*, including *Das Jahr* (H-U384) and *Reisealbum*, both of which were influenced by her Italian journey. These works were collaborative projects with her husband Wilhelm, who contributed illustrations and texts. *Reisealbum* combined compositions from her travels with Wilhelm's artwork, forming a vivid musical and visual scrapbook of their experiences. She also resumed her *Sonntagsmusiken* gatherings and performed publicly. By 1842, Hensel shifted her focus to hosting and completing *Das Jahr*, a cycle of 13 piano pieces representing each month of the year. Deeply personal and evocative, *Das Jahr* incorporated musical and literary elements that reflected both her experiences in Italy and broader seasonal themes. Though never intended for publication, this

¹³ Victoria Sirota, "The Life and Works of Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel," (Boston University, 1981), 106-7.

cycle was a landmark in her compositional development, showcasing a large-scale, cyclical structure not found in her brother Felix's works in similar genres. Given the works she composed and the musical activities she pursued after her Italian journey—especially in contrast to the relatively unproductive years before the trip—it is undeniable that traveling to Italy played a crucial role in revitalizing Fanny's musical creativity and confidence.

5. Later life and death (1841-1847)

In December 1841, tragedy struck when Fanny's mother passed away due to a fatal stroke, leaving her as the only Mendelssohn sibling still residing in Berlin and responsible for maintaining the family home. Following her mother's passing, Fanny fell into depression and ceased composing for more than a year. Despite her struggles, she remained socially engaged in 1843 and reconnected with composer Charles Gounod in April, who encouraged her to return to composing. Soon after, she wrote a piano piece in G minor. By the end of the year, she attended the premiere of Felix's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and considered a future trip to Rome, which ultimately never happened. By early 1844, she had resumed her *Sonntagsmusiken* and performed Felix's works. In January 1845, she traveled to Italy to assist her pregnant sister. Inspired by the country's rich culture, she did not compose but instead copied Bach's works and her own *Abschied vom Rom*. After an extended stay, she returned to Berlin in August. Financial difficulties and illness initially prevented her from restarting her *Sonntagsmusiken*, but by the spring of 1846, she resumed them in March. She also formed a small choral group that met on Fridays and composed 11 new vocal quartets between May and September. Finally, determined to publish her compositions, she secured offers from Bote & Bock and Schlesinger, fulfilling a long-held ambition that her husband Wilhelm had always supported. Her first publications featured mostly older works, with only *Gartenlieder* (Op. 3) consisting of newly composed

pieces. Throughout the summer, she continued hosting musical gatherings, spending time with family and friends, sailing on Lake Treptow, and resuming her *Sonntagsmusiken* in October. In December, Felix visited, and they performed together before he departed on December 21—the last significant time they spent together. At the start of 1847, financial concerns arose, along with discussions about Sebastian’s future. Although Fanny wished for him to pursue a professional career in painting, he ultimately became a writer. She spent time with Clara Schumann, who visited frequently in March, and worked on her *Piano Trio* (Op. 11), which she premiered in April. Her final diary entry, written on April 26, expressed a loss of creative inspiration.

On May 14, 1847, Fanny suffered a series of strokes. She was at her piano, rehearsing Felix’s *Die erste Walpurgisnacht* for her *Sonntagsmusiken*, when she first felt a loss of sensation in her arms. She attempted to continue but was soon struck again. Losing consciousness, she passed away that night. She died as she had wished—without prolonged suffering, surrounded by her loved ones and her music.¹⁴ She was buried the following day, before Felix even received the news. Devastated, he suffered a breakdown and, five months later, also died of strokes. Her final composition, *Bergeslust*, written the day before her passing, eerily foreshadowed her fate, with its lyrics describing songs ascending “to heaven.” These words were later engraved on her tombstone, a lasting tribute to a brilliant composer whose genius was fully recognized only at the end of her life.

¹⁴ Christian, 37.

Chapter 2: Analysis of *Das Jahr* (The Year)

1. Background

“Oh, you beautiful Italy! How much you have enriched me! What an incomparable treasure do I carry home in my heart! Will my memory stay faithful? Shall I remember as vividly as I felt?”¹⁵

Das Jahr serves as an artistic reflection on her inspiring journey to Italy between 1839 and 1840, which she undertook with her husband, Wilhelm, and their son, Sebastian. A long-awaited journey to Italy—a dream she had held since her youth played a crucial role in revitalizing her creativity—especially in contrast to the relatively unproductive years before the trip. Encounters with artists and composers such as Charles Gounod and Hector Berlioz in Rome helped her regain confidence in her identity as a composer. Her journals and letters from this period document her enthusiasm, inspirations, and artistic exchanges, all of which shaped the music of *Das Jahr*.

Upon returning to Berlin, Fanny composed *Das Jahr* as a way to preserve the essence of her journey. Originally intended as a personal reflection rather than for publication, the work was presented as a Christmas gift to Wilhelm in 1841. The original manuscript was uniquely crafted, written on colored paper with poetic epigrams from German poets and illustrations by Wilhelm, blending music, literature, and visual art. The absence of diary entries between June 2, 1841, and April 12, 1842, suggests that she channeled her reflections into this composition rather than written records. It is a remarkable cycle of thirteen character pieces for solo piano, structured around the twelve months of the year with a concluding postlude. Its 50-minute long large-scale, cyclical structure represents a significant milestone in her compositional development—one that

¹⁵ S. Hensel, *The Mendelssohn Family (1729-1847) from Letters and Journals. with Eight Portraits from Drawings by Wilhelm Hensel*, V2, 144.

notably cyclical structure not found in her brother Felix's works in similar genres. However, Fanny never performed *Das Jahr* publicly and mentioned it only once in a letter to her cousin, August Elsasser, November 11, 1841:

*"Now I'm engaged in another small work that's giving me much fun. Namely a series of 12 piano pieces meant to depict the months of the year. I'll make clean copies and they'll be ornamented with vignettes for the pleasure of others."*¹⁶

Despite being an undeniable masterpiece, Fanny downplayed its significance, describing it in passing as a "little" project undertaken for enjoyment. In private, she devoted herself fully to her work, but in public, she often sought to diminish the power and brilliance of her creativity—perhaps to avoid appearing threatening, alarming, or, most unforgivably in her time, unfeminine.

Nearly 150 years later, the manuscript was rediscovered and published for the first time in 1989, followed by a facsimile of Hensel's final autograph version in 2000. The 1989 publication was based on *Mendelssohn Archiv* Ms. 47, a composing score with revisions and corrections. A decade later, another autograph source surfaced in a private collection before being acquired by the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, and issued in facsimile in 2000. The newly discovered autograph (*Mendelssohn Archiv* Ms. 155) provides a fair copy, bound in green, featuring both art and poetry.¹⁷ *Das Jahr* is now regarded as one of her most significant works and a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, exemplifying her distinctive compositional voice and the fulfillment she found in her Italian sojourn.¹⁸

¹⁶ Quoted and translated in R. Larry Todd, *Fanny Hensel: The Other Mendelssohn* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 275.

¹⁷ Hensel, Fanny. "Das Jahr : 12 Charakterstücke; Pf; H 385." Digitalisierte Sammlungen der Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin. Accessed March 15, 2025. https://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/werkansicht?PPN=PPN825958660&PHYSID=PHYS_0005.

¹⁸ Marian Wilson Kimber, "Fanny Hensel's Seasons of Life: Poetic Epigrams, Vignettes, and Meaning in *Das Jahr*." *The Journal of Musicological Research* 27, no. 4 (2008): 359-61.

2. January

Composition Date	December 11, 1841	
Poet: Ludwig Uhland	Title: Im Herbste (In Autumn), lines 5-8	
Ahnest du, o Seele, wieder Sanfte, süße Frühlingslieder? Sieh umher die falben Bäume! Ach! es waren holde Träume.	Do you foresee, o soul, again gentle sweet spring songs? Look around at the faded trees Ah! Those were sweet dreams.	

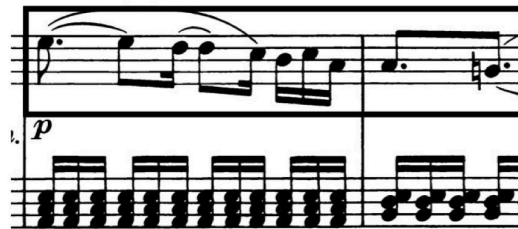
<Table 1. Composition Date and Epigram for January from *Das Jahr*>

The *January* piece, marked *Adagio, quasi una Fantasia* and subtitled "Ein Traum," follows an ABA form but is enriched with flexible and improvisatory fantasia elements throughout each section. The A section spans bars 1 to 23. The main theme of the A section, presented in measures 1-2 with left-hand octaves, is a quotation from J.S. Bach's *Es ist vollbracht* from the *St. John Passion*.

<Example 1.1a. Fanny Hensel, January from *Das Jahr* mm. 1-4>



<Example 1.1b. J.S. Bach's *Es ist vollbracht* from the *St. John Passion*>



<Example 1.1c. L.v. Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 110, 3rd movement mm. 9-10>



<Example 1.1d. L.v. Beethoven's Cello Sonata Op. 69, 1st movement mm. 115-116>



<Example 1.1e. Haydn’s *Die Jahreszeiten*, No. 1, mm. 1-4 (transcribed from Felix Mendelssohn for four hands version)>

This theme had previously been borrowed by Beethoven in the development section of his cello sonata in A major, Op. 69 and the third movement aria of his piano sonata in A-flat major, Op. 110.¹⁹ The left-hand octaves also evoke the wintry overture of Haydn’s *Die Jahreszeiten* (The Seasons), where the initial descending minor tetrachord gradually transitions into the following season, as introduced by the opening chorus, *Landvolk*.²⁰ Interestingly, Felix Mendelssohn transcribed this piece for four hands, most likely playing it with Fanny, suggesting that she is familiar with the work. Thus, the main theme of *January* could be seen as Fanny Mendelssohn’s homage to the revered composers Bach, Haydn, Beethoven, and Felix.

Unlike Bach’s original key of B minor, Fanny begins the theme in E minor with a dynamic marking of *pp*. In measure 3, the melody is interrupted by a B major first inversion triad on the third beat. This interruption may represent the phrase “o Seele” from the epigram attached to *January*—lines 5-8 of Ludwig Uhland’s *Im Herbste* (Table 1). In the poem, “o Seele” is set

¹⁹ Christopher A Reynolds. *Motives for Allusion: Context and Content in Nineteenth-Century Music*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003. 147-51.

²⁰ Wilson Kimber, “Fanny Hensel’s Seasons of Life: Poetic Epigrams, Vignettes, and Meaning in *Das Jahr*,” 372.

apart by commas, and the B major chord could symbolically act as a musical comma, bridging the earthly, grounded melody (representing the physical body) with the ethereal B major chord (symbolizing the soul) (Example 1.1a).

The B major chord serves dual functions: it can be seen as the dominant chord of E minor in relation to the preceding melody or as the tonic chord in B major, aligning with the key signature of *January*. Measures 4-6 mirror the sequence of measures 1-3, with Bach's theme now appearing in G# minor and marked *p*, although the starting note shifts from D# to D natural. It is followed by an interrupted first inversion D# major chord, which functions as the dominant of G# minor or the mediant chord in B major. The dynamic marking change from *pp* to *p* suggests an building-up mood in the repetition. These first six bars are interesting because they highlight one of the Romantic period's musical characteristics: tonal ambiguity. It is challenging to determine the exact key—whether it is E minor, B minor, B major, or G# minor.



<Example 1.2. Fanny Hensel, January from *Das Jahr* mm. 6-10>

From measures 7 to 11, the descending line from the main theme appears in the right hand, while the left hand ascends, creating a contrary motion accompanied by a crescendo and decrescendo. Unlike the earlier themes, this section is filled with harmony, finally establishing a

clear G# minor. The dynamic and harmonic richness here implies a greater build-up compared to the first two phrases. A new motif emerges in measure 10 with a repeated note pattern.

Between the fourth beat of measure 11 and measure 14, the main motif is presented in counterpoint between the right and left hands. From the pickup to measure 15 through measure 16, the left hand sequentially uses the final part of the main theme five times, while the right hand ascends with an inversion of the main theme's descending line. This interplay culminates in a B major first inversion chord, followed by a repeated motif in the left hand's eighth notes. Since it lands on a first inversion, with D# as the bass, it creates a less stable feeling than a tonic resolution, giving the sense of continued movement. The D# shifts down a half step to D natural, then to C#. Measures 17-18 mark the climax of the A section, with the dynamics *f* and *più f* reaching the most dramatic point. The intervallic leaps—a fifth in measure 17 and a diminished seventh in measure 18—create an emotional atmosphere, concluding with a C# minor chord that functions as the dominant of F# minor, forming a half cadence. This cadence suggests that the section doesn't conclude definitively but transitions smoothly into the next section, B. Measures 20-22 serve as a transition to the B section, with the left hand repeating C# while the harmonic rhythm accelerates, introducing a triplet motif that dominates until measure 29.

The image shows a musical score for piano, measures 23-24. The key signature is G# minor (three sharps: F#, C#, G#). Measure 23 begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The right hand features a complex passage with a circled 2 above the first measure, indicating a second ending or a specific fingering. The left hand has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 24 continues the right-hand melody with a first ending marked with a circled 1. The left hand has a triplet of eighth notes. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

<Example 1.3. Fanny Hensel, January from *Das Jahr* mm. 23-4>

The B section spans measures 23-36, with the transition's C# leading into A major, functioning as the mediant note—a common 19th-century modulation technique through a third relation. The first phrase of the B section (measures 23-26, second beat) introduces a sweet A major broken chord theme with a 12/8 feel, marked *p*, describing the "Sanfte, süße Frühlingslieder" (gentle, sweet spring songs) from the epigram. This theme reappears later as the main theme in *May*, subtitled *Frühlingslied*. A sudden shift to F# minor occurs on the third beat of measure 26, continuing until measure 31. The second theme of the B section, marked *mesto* and *p*, conveys a somber mood, possibly reflecting the "falben Bäume" (faded trees) of the epigram. Unlike the sweet spring melody, which spans a broader range from E6 to E4, this faded tree theme features a narrower, stepwise melody, depicting the image of fading. Abruptly,



<Example 1.4. Fanny Hensel, January from *Das Jahr* mm. 32-4>

a dotted rhythm is introduced in measure 32, changing the mood and showcasing the improvisatory style. This dotted rhythm theme is reintroduced in *August*.

The A' section returns in measure 36 with Bach's theme. Unlike the earlier presentation, this time it's rephrased as a broken arpeggio with a tempo marking of *Presto* (measures 38-41). This section's length likely mirrors the original half-note value, which had a fermata. The tempo returns to *Adagio* in measure 42 to present the main theme again, but with a different subsequent chord—F double sharp diminished instead of a D# major triad. The arpeggio pattern from measures 38-41 extends until measure 51, leading to a progression from F double sharp

diminished to C# minor, A augmented, and finally D major, arriving at C# minor. Similar to measure 19, a C# tremolo dominates the left hand from measures 52-55, landing in a C# major broken chord. Although, in the manuscript, the main theme appeared one last time in *Adagio*, it was removed in the published version. It is unclear whether this was Fanny Mendelssohn's intention or an editorial decision. The significance of C# throughout the piece is underscored by its recurrence in the final measures, where the left hand repeats a short-long rhythm (eighth-quarter notes) three times, leading directly into No. 2, marked *attacca*. This rhythm anticipates No. 2's 6/8 time signature.

Reflecting on the subtitle "Ein Traum" (A Dream), the borrowed Bach theme from *St. John Passion* encapsulates the essence of the dream. The concept of a dream here has two contrasting meanings: it can represent a strongly desired goal or aspiration, like a "dream job" or "dream vacation," or it can express a sense of disillusionment—where something once felt real or significant, only to become meaningless or unattainable, leading to disappointment or loss. In this piece, the dream seems to convey the latter, which is why Bach's theme, with its octave intervals, conveys a sense of emptiness. As the piece unfolds, this thematic material symbolizes a journey through a dreamscape, aligning with the contemplative and introspective nature of *January*.



21

<Example 1.5a. Portrait of Fanny Mendelssohn, Wilhelm Hensel>



22

<Example 1.5b. Vignette in January from Das Jahr, Wilhelm Hensel>

²¹ Adopted from Wilhelm Hensel; "Google Does It Again: This Is Not Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel," Marian Wilson Kimber, February 20, 2023, <https://marianwilsonkimber.wordpress.com/2020/12/13/google-does-it-again-this-is-not-fanny-mendelssohn-hensel/>.

²² Adopted from Wilhelm Hensel, *January from Das Jahr*, Mendelssohn Archiv, MA Ms. 155, 1841, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin.

The woman depicted in the vignette for *January* is likely a portrait of Fanny, created by Wilhelm. A comparison with Wilhelm's portrait of the young Fanny (example 1.5a) reveals notable similarities, particularly in the curly hair, the shape of the nose, and the eyebrows. Another reasonable detail is that the woman in the vignette is holding a lute, strongly suggesting that she is a musician. In addition to the possible portrait of Fanny, the presence of an angelic figure or young boy ringing a bell is also significant. This imagery may symbolize their son announcing the beginning of the cycle, inviting the listener to pay close attention as *Das Jahr* unfolds. Notably, there is no depiction of Wilhelm in the vignette, likely implying that he is the one illustrating the scene.

Fanny's choice of the poem "Im Herbst" (In Autumn) to adorn her work *January* evokes a sense of looking back at autumn while anticipating spring. The past, when the trees were leafy and full of life, was joyful, but now, as the trees have faded, a sense of loneliness pervades. The last line of the poem, "Ach! es waren holde Träume" ("Ah! those were sweet dreams"), using the past tense, highlights how beautiful memories have become untouchable dreams. As time passes, this evokes a sense of loss, mirroring how nature's changes prompt human introspection. This shows that Bach's theme is the *Traum* theme. Interestingly, as the subsequent pieces unfold, the meaning of the dream seems to shift towards hope, making it remarkable to explore how this motif evolves throughout *Das Jahr*.

3. February

Composition Date	August 28, 1841	
Poet: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe	Title: Faust, Part II, lines 5065-8	
Denkt nicht ihr seid in deutschen Grenzen Von Teufels- Narren- und Totentänzen, Ein heitres [heiter] Fest erwartet euch.	Don't think that you're in German borders, Of dances of devils, fools and the dead, A cheerful celebration awaits you.	

<Table 2. Composition Date and Epigram for February from *Das Jahr*>

February offers a striking contrast to the reflective and somber *January*. Composed in F# major and marked *Presto*, with a 6/8 time signature, the piece is festive, whimsical, humorous, and full of energy which makes sense why it has a subtitle ‘scherzo.’ The structure is a varied sonata form: exposition-development-recapitulation-coda; the exposition has only one thematic idea and the new theme is introduced in the beginning of the development. The piece begins with a C# octave in the left hand as a pickup, directly connecting to the repeated C# notes that close *January*. This composition way recalls similar transitions in Shostakovich’s *Piano Concerto No. 2*, where the second and third movements flow seamlessly into one another. Given that Shostakovich’s concerto was written in 1957—over a century after *Das Jahr*—Fanny’s approach to linking *January* and *February* demonstrates a pioneering and highly creative compositional skill. Also, this detail underscores Fanny’s careful planning of *Das Jahr* as a cohesive cycle.



<Example 2.1a. Fanny Hensel, *January* (mm. 58-9) and *February* (mm. 1-2)>



<Example 2.1b. Shostakovich, Piano Concerto No. 2, 2nd & 3rd movements>

Although *February* was composed earlier than *January*, the shared material demonstrates her intention to create continuity throughout the set.

The exposition, spanning mm. 1–43, consists of three phrases (mm. 1–12). The main theme begins in m. 1 with a descending consecutive eight notes in the combination of the F# major scale chord tones that resolves onto a C# major triad, producing a light and thin texture due to the close positioning of the hands (right hand has two notes chord and left hand has only one note). Listeners can feel immediately a dancing and a cheerful celebration atmosphere which appear the second and the third lines of the epigram (Von Teufels- Narren- und Totentänzen, Einheitres [heiter] Fest erwartet euch.) In the second phrase (mm. 5–8), the



<Example 2.2. Fanny Hensel, February from *Das Jahr* mm. 4-8>

rhythmic differences take turn; a hemiola rhythm is introduced in m. 5 and m. 7 with left hand's 10th intervals, accented with *marcatissimo* in m. 8 and on measure 6 and 8, the 6/8 rhythm comes back with slur. This rhythmic alternation create a playful interplay, describing the image of carnival. Specifically, these zigzag rhythmic changes could do word painting the first line of the epigram, "Denkt nicht ihr seid in deutschen Grenzen," (Don't think that you're in German borders). The third phrase (mm. 9–12) brings chromatic descending line in the left hand, while the right hand's C# major chords go up. When the phrase repeats in mm. 11-12, the chords gain octaves, heightening intensity and preparing for the next section by having the dominant note of F# major on the last beat of the left hand. The harmonic structure of this opening section is simple, with the tonic (F# major) featured in the first two measures and the dominant (C# major) extended through mm. 3–12. The second part of the exposition (mm. 13–24) mirrors the opening, with the initial material restated from mm. 1–5. Variation begins in m. 19, where the alto voice in the right hand shifts from B to G#, and the left hand bass moves from C# to B, smoothing the voice-leading to D major in m. 21. This modulation, achieved through a third relationship, reflects a technique already seen in *January*. Measures 23–24 introduce new motivic material within the D major dominant chord, where the outer voices (A and G) repeat while the inner voices shift stepwise with neighboring tones. This section resolves to the D major tonic in m. 25, accompanied by an arpeggio motif. As the exposition continues (mm. 25–35), the tonal center shifts through D major, B minor, F# minor and C# major, introducing chromaticism and tritone intervals (mm. 32–35), evoking the devilish imagery alluded to in the *epigram*. A prolonged C# major triad dominates mm. 35–43, marking the end of the exposition.



<Example 2.3. Fanny Hensel, February from *Das Jahr* mm. 33-4>

Fanny achieves a striking effect here by alternating notes between the hands. When ascending, the alternation involves two notes at a time; when descending, the alternation occurs note by note.

The development section (mm. 44–122) begins with an inverted version of mm. 9–12, featuring a chromatic ascending line in the left hand, interrupted by the first inversion of D7 chords. The mood is somewhat terrifying, which could support Marian Wilson Kimber’s argument: Hensel’s inclusion of the *Faust* epigram suggests that her musical carnival is, like Goethe’s allegorical one, the carnival of life. Instead of literally depicting the Italian festivities that she experienced, Hensel’s provision of the epigram opens “February” to a wider range of interpretations stemming from the idea of “carnival.” Wilhelm Hensel’s February vignette somehow reflects the corresponding epigram, such as the masked figures in *February*, which likely represent the pre-Lenten carnival.”²³

²³ Wilson Kimber, “Fanny Hensel’s Seasons of Life: Poetic Epigrams, Vignettes, and Meaning in *Das Jahr*,” 365, 389.

The key signature changes to E minor in m. 48, although the motivic ideas persist, the left hand now employs diatonic motion, while the right hand has dotted quarter-note chords slurred in pairs. The main theme reappears in E minor in



<Example 2.4. Fanny Hensel, February from *Das Jahr* mm. 57-61>



<Example 2.4. Felix Mendelssohn, Presto from *Rondo Capriccioso, Op. 14*>

m. 57, reminiscent of Mendelssohn's *Rondo Capriccioso*.²⁴ Tritone intervals emerge in mm. 61–62 (A# is an enharmonic to B-flat, so A#-E can be a tritone), and the dominant of B minor in m. 64 resolves to a tonic statement in m. 65. Tritones reappear in m. 69 after the restatement of the main theme in B minor, continuing the development. The sequence of mm. 71–77 presents diminished harmonies B#-D#-F#-A and E#-G#-B-D, respectively. From mm. 80–94, material from the main theme builds tension through sequential motion, ascending by half steps every two

²⁴ R. Larry Todd, *Mendelssohn Essays* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 255–6.

measures until stabilizing in E minor at m. 87. A transition to a A# half diminished chord in m. 94 signals a shift, leading to a reversal of roles in mm. 95–110: the right hand now takes on the chromatic octaves, while the left hand plays dotted quarter chords. This section builds toward the recapitulation, prepared by the dominant harmony passage from mm. 111–121.

The recapitulation (mm. 122–154) restates the main theme in F# major. The climax of this piece starts at m. 134, where alternating octaves between the hands introduce a new texture. This grand and rich section weaves together earlier material: the main theme reappears (m. 135, recalling mm. 5–6), the development’s descending lines resurface (mm. 138–139), and motivic ideas from mm. 25–26 return in mm. 146–154.

The image shows a page of musical notation for Fanny Hensel's 'February' from 'Das Jahr', measures 159-172. The score is in F# major and 3/4 time. It features a piano texture with 'poco ritard.' and 'p' dynamics. The left hand has a 'dim.' marking and a 'Ped. gehalten' instruction. The right hand has 'p stacc.' markings. The score ends with 'p stacc. al Fine'. There are three black boxes highlighting specific passages: one in the left hand at measures 159-164, one in the right hand at measures 165-166, and one in the left hand at measures 169-170.

<Example 2.5. Fanny Hensel, February from *Das Jahr* mm. 159-172>

Fanny uses C# octave in the left hand again for the beginning point of the coda (mm.155-end) when she wants to mark a new passage or punctuation. The right hand provides

arpeggiated E# diminished chords, maintaining fluidity. From mm. 159–163, repeated C# octaves echo the transitional material that linked *January* to *February*. The final measures (mm. 164–180) could be performed with a slower tempo and enhanced pedaling for a reflective effect. Indeed, on measure 164, it marked “Ped. gehalten,” interpreting as having a deeper resonating pedaling, which might have influenced by the pedaling in Beethoven’s piano sonatas, such as op. 31 no. 2 1st movement and op. 110. The alternation figure from the end of the exposition reappears in F# major in m. 175, and the piece concludes with an incomplete authentic cadence, showing it’s not perfect closing but March will be coming soon.

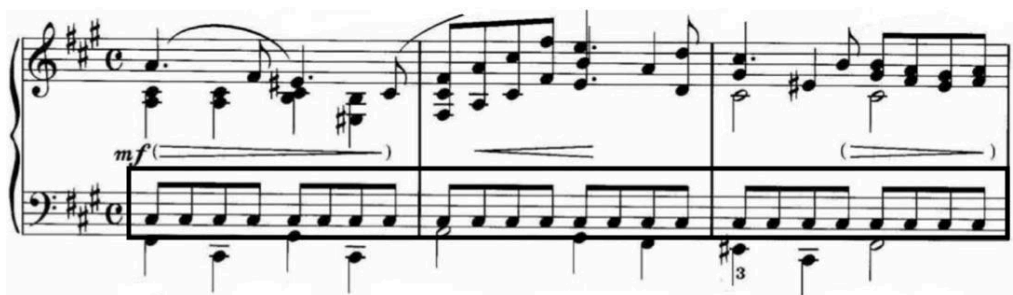
4. March

Composition Date	November 17, 1841	
Poet: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe	Title: Faust, Part I, lines 744-5	
Verkündigt ihr dumpfen Glocken schon Des Osterfestes erste Feierstunde?	Do you muffled bells announce Already the first ceremony of Easter?	

<Table 3. Composition Date and Epigram for March from Das Jahr>

March is a particularly fascinating piece that highlights the relationships between the title, the accompanying epigram, the vignette, and the preceding compositions in the cycle. It also prominently incorporates a Lutheran chorale, enriching its symbolic and musical depth. The repeated note motif on C#, a central motivic idea, first appeared in *January* on D# and transitioned to C# at the end of *January*. In *February*, the repeated notes served as a form of musical punctuation, while in *March*, they permeate the entire piece. The epigram, drawn from Goethe’s *Faust*, associates these repeated notes with the tolling of “muffled bells” (*dumpfen Glocken*), and their presence from the very first measure of *March* in the left hand’s tenor voice subtly evokes the final line of the epigram: “*Des Osterfestes erste Feierstunde?*” (“The first

ceremony of Easter?") and the bell in the vignette.²⁵ The form of the piece is AA'BB'C, with both A and B sections containing variations. The B section introduces the chorale, while the C section revisits the *Traum* theme from *January*, now transformed into a hopeful major key. The tempo marking is *Agitato*, and the key signature is F# minor, the parallel minor of *February's* F# major.



<Example 3.1a. Fanny Hensel, March from *Das Jahr* mm. 1-3>

The A section (mm. 1-14) consists of four voices: soprano, alto, tenor, and bass. The soprano carries the ardent melodic line, the alto and bass provide harmonic support, and the tenor voice plays the repeated C# notes, symbolizing the muffled bells. Two key motivic ideas are present in this section: the dotted quarter note + eighth note rhythm and a soaring broken arpeggio. In the first phrase (mm. 1-4), the melody begins on the third scale degree (A), descends a third to the tonic (F#), and then moves to the leading tone (E#), all underpinned by tonic and dominant harmonies. These three notes (A-F#-E#) echo the closing notes of the *Traum* theme from *January*. The melodic line then rises in an arpeggio and concludes with a stepwise descent. The harmony remains simple—i-V-i-V-vi-V—but an intriguing G major triad appears in m. 4 as a passing tone. When this chord reappears in m. 8, it is marked *p*, signaling a subtle change in tone color. The second phrase (mm. 5-8) develops sequentially, starting with a dotted

²⁵ Wilson Kimber, 386.

quarter + eighth rhythm and descending by a fourth (C#-G#). This motion resolves with an appoggiatura: a C# major chord (dominant) transitions to F# minor (tonic), with the soprano leaping from G# to B before resolving downward to A. The sequence repeats twice, leading to a downward scalar motion that concludes the phrase in m. 8. The third phrase (mm. 9–14) shifts the pacing from four-bar phrases to three-bar phrases. In mm. 9–11, the soaring arpeggio figure from m. 2 returns but takes a different direction: instead of descending after the highest note, F#5, it rises to A5 in m. 11, marking the section's climax. This dramatic moment is fleeting, as a *p* dynamic and chromatic motion introduce a dreamlike quality, hinting at the forthcoming variation in the A' section.



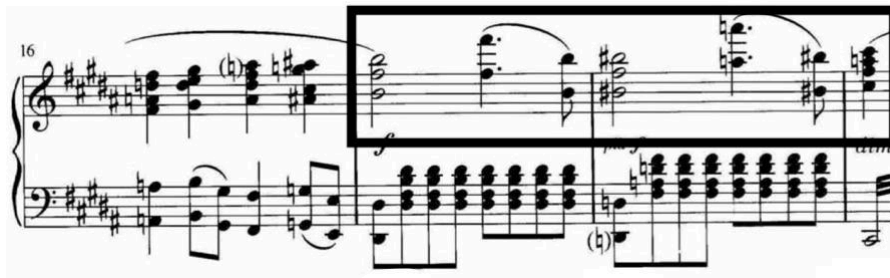
<Example 3.1b. Fanny Hensel, March from *Das Jahr* mm. 15-6>

The A' section (mm. 15-27) closely mirrors the A section but with notable variations. The alto voice now features sixteenth-note figures, doubling the rhythmic motion from earlier eighth notes, creating greater tension and turbulence. The repeated note motif remains in the tenor voice, except in mm. 18–20, where the tenor doubles the alto's sixteenth-note line. This creates a challenge for performers, as voicing the soprano melody becomes more difficult with the doubled inner voices. Subtle differences also appear in m. 21, where *subito p* marks a shift in dynamic. Measures 21–22 and 23–24 pair closely, repeating a new melodic idea that prepares the listener for the next section. In m. 26, the tempo slows to *Adagio*, referencing the climax in

January (mm. 17–18) with its stepwise motion in the alto voice, which resolves into G# minor at m. 27.

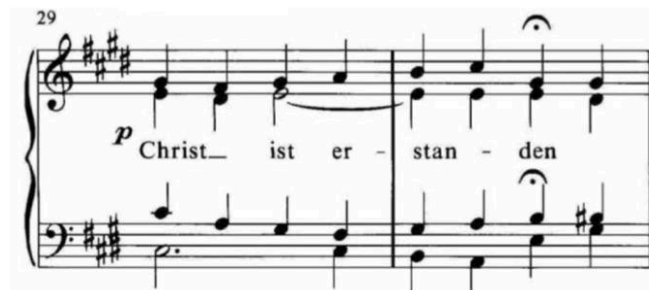


<Example 3.2a. Fanny Hensel, March from *Das Jahr* mm. 25-6>



<Example 3.2b. Fanny Hensel, *January* from *Das Jahr* mm. 16-9>

The B section begins at m. 29, marked *Andante*, and features the Easter chorale “Christ ist erstanden” in a traditional four-part hymn setting. The epigram reinforces this resurrection



<Example 3.3. Fanny Hensel, March from *Das Jahr* mm. 29-30>

theme, mirroring the angel chorus in *Faust* that sings “Christ ist erstanden.” After the hymn’s initial presentation (mm. 29–36), a variation follows. The chorale appears in the right hand as a

full chordal melody, accompanied by ascending and descending sixteenth-note arpeggios. This variation repeats twice (mm. 38–41 and mm. 42–46) with minor harmonic alterations. Measures 51–54 act as a transition to the climactic C section.



<Example 3.4. Fanny Hensel, March from *Das Jahr* mm. 55-6>

The C section, marked *Allegro moderato ma con fuoco*, mm. 55-end, serves as the emotional and structural climax of the piece. The soprano voice introduces the *Traum* theme from *January*, now transformed into F# major, symbolizing hope and desire rather than the earlier melancholic dream. Meanwhile, the left hand recalls the chorale melody, creating a poignant combination of the two most significant motivic ideas.²⁶ This dialogue continues through mm. 55–58 and again in mm. 59–66, where the *Traum* theme alternates with motives from the *Adagio* section. A new melodic phrase emerges in mm. 70–79, consisting of arch-like phrases that ascend and descend, creating a rainbow-like shape. The closing theme begins at the pickup to m. 80, featuring rising octaves that build toward a celebratory conclusion. From mm. 89 to the end, the texture becomes increasingly rich and full, evoking the triumphant joy of Easter. The piece closes in C# major, shifting from the initial key of F# minor to its relative

²⁶ Young-Shin Lee, “An Analysis of Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel’s 『Das Jahr』 -Focusing on the Symbolism Associated with the Romantic Literature-,” *Journal of Piano Music* 9 (2015): 115-16.

major. This transformation, with the addition of sharps, symbolizes renewal and resurrection, perfectly aligning with the Easter theme and concluding the piece on a hopeful and jubilant note.

5. April

Composition Date	October 7, 1841	
Poet: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe	Title: March, line 10	
Der Sonnenblick betrüget Mit mildem falschem Schein.	The sight of the sun deceives With gentle, false light.	

<Table 4. Composition Date and Epigram for April from Das Jahr>

April captures the whimsical and unpredictable character of spring. Wilhelm selected relatively brighter, pastel-colored paper for this spring piece, creating a lighter, more delicate atmosphere. The light in the vignette, shining from northwest to southeast, could symbolize either “*the sight of the sun*” or “*false light*” as referenced in the epigram. Composed in E major, with a 9/8 time signature and the tempo marking *Allegretto*, the piece bears the subtitle *Capriccioso*, signaling its playful and capricious nature. The work alternates between two contrasting sections, A and B, in a form that can be summarized as (AB)(AB’)(AB’'). The A section, written in a lilting siciliana rhythm, evokes the pastoral mood often associated with



<Example 4.1a. Siciliana Rhythm>

Baroque Sicilianas, as seen in Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* No. 7 and Brahms’s *Handel Variations* No. 19. This demonstrates Fanny’s deep understanding of Baroque musical traditions. This lilting rhythm complements the imagery of spring, as new leaves emerge and warmth begins

to replace winter's chill. The B section, by contrast, is dynamic and dramatic, depicting the sudden unpredictability of spring weather, with imagery of snow drawn from Goethe's *März*²⁷, the poem referenced in the epigram accompanying this piece. The opposing characteristics of the A and B sections reflect the themes of the poem, while the subtitle *Capriccioso* underscores the erratic and whimsical nature of spring itself.



<Example 4.1b. Fanny Hensel, April from *Das Jahr* mm. 1-3>

The A section begins in E major, spanning mm. 1–11, and is composed of two phrases. The first phrase (mm. 1–5) is a regular four-bar phrase, while the second phrase (mm. 6–11) extends to five bars. These irregular extensions, particularly in mm. 5, 10, and 11, evoke the hazy warmth of spring. The motive in the A section is simple yet effective: the descending E major broken chord in the opening bars firmly establishes the tonality. This is followed by a dotted rhythm that descends by a half step to A# before rising by a whole step to C#, creating a double neighboring motion around B. This figure repeats in m. 2, where the left hand introduces a descending scale that foreshadows the descending E major scale beginning on G# in m. 3. The scale concludes with B#, creating an unfinished, unresolved feeling that resolves onto a B major broken chord, the dominant of E major. The motive returns in mm. 6–8, but the harmonic direction transitions into an A minor harmonic scale, setting up the contrast of the B section. This

²⁷ Wilson Kimber, 380.

shift highlights spring's dual nature: the warmth and promise of new growth juxtaposed with sudden and unexpected weather changes.

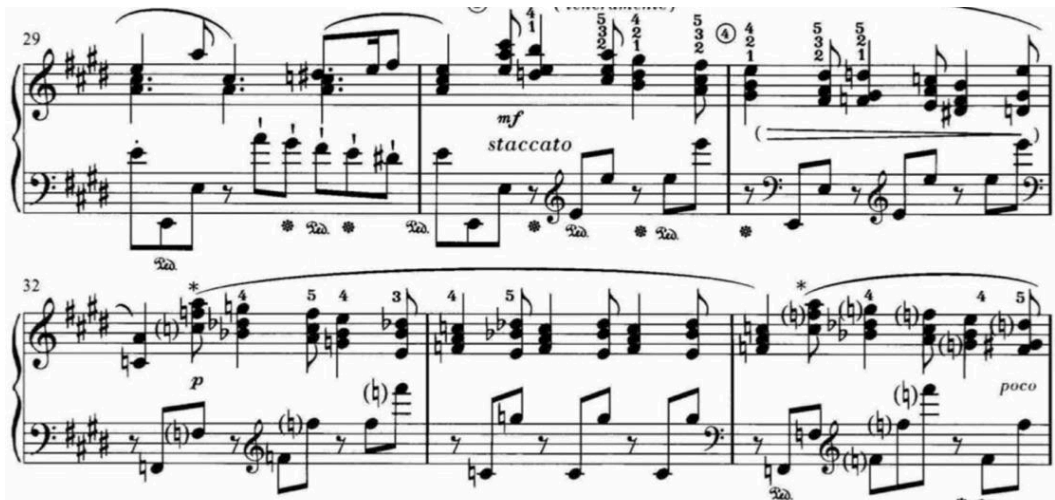


<Example 4.2. Fanny Hensel, March from *Das Jahr* mm. 12-3>

The B section begins at m. 12, marked *Allegro* in A minor, and introduces a completely different character. Unlike the lilting rhythm of the A section, the B section is energetic and turbulent, dominated by cascading sixteenth-note figures and descending lines marked *piano*. These sixteenth notes, which often start on a note, descend by a half step, and return to the original note, evoke the image of snow described in Goethe's poem. The B section consists of four distinct phrases, each lasting four bars. In the first phrase (mm. 12–15), the sixteenth-note figures alternate between the right and left hands. Starting in the second phrase (mm. 16–19), the right hand takes over these figures entirely, while the left hand either joins the right hand or provides descending eighth- or quarter-note figures. From mm. 20–23, the sixteenth-note figures develop into two-voice textures, with the top voice carrying the melodic line. For example, in mm. 20–21, the melody formed by the top notes of each beat is E-G-F#-A-G#-B, which the performer must bring out to highlight the melodic contour amid the busy texture. The final phrase (mm. 24–27) builds tension by maintaining louder dynamics and continuous sixteenth-note movement. The last measure of the B section leaves harmonic ambiguity, with

hints of D major, D minor, and A minor triads, creating uncertainty about the next tonal destination.

The A section returns at m. 28, now in A major. Written in a higher register, this iteration has a more active left hand that incorporates descending figures from the B section, linking the two sections thematically while adding energy. Unlike its first appearance, the A section's theme is presented only once, and the descending scale with its lilting rhythm is extended twice. From mm. 30–37, the left hand introduces a gesture that crosses over the right hand, producing a



<Example 4.3. Fanny Hensel, April from *Das Jahr* mm. 29-34>

bell-like or fairy-like sound effect. This effect may symbolize elves or angels crafting the blossoming trees and flowers of spring. The section concludes with a G major triad, hinting at a transition to C major, though this expectation is subverted in the next section.

The B' section begins at m. 38 with an E minor seventh chord, despite the key signature still indicating E major. The sixteenth-note snow motive returns but is now altered: instead of stepwise motion, the descending figures feature leaps, often by thirds or fourths. This shift

suggests snow that is rising or moving with greater intensity. From mm. 40–47, the left hand introduces a chromatic tremolo figure, ascending from D to D#, and culminating in E in m. 48. This firmly establishes E minor, which dominates the remainder of this section. The sixteenth-note snow motives combine with descending broken chord leaps, continuing through m. 52, with extensions in mm. 49 and 51. A new thematic idea emerges in the alternating two-chord figures that follow the descending broken chords. These alternating chords may symbolize snow dropping and then accumulating. From mm. 53–55, the right hand’s mezzo voice transforms the sixteenth-note motive into an augmented rhythm of eighth notes. In mm. 56–58, the D# diminished triad is repeated, recalling the “muffled bell” motive from earlier pieces. The alternating two-chord motive reappears in mm. 59–65 with slurred and staccato markings, creating a climactic feeling.

The final A” section (mm. 68–75) returns in a higher register, producing a delicate, ethereal music-box effect. The left hand introduces a descending line that continues until middle C, while mm. 74–75 transition to the B” section with a chromatic line in the right hand and a repeated E-D bass in the left hand. The passage ends on a D7 chord, setting up an expectation of G major, but the B” section begins in A minor instead.

The final B” section (mm. 76–end) returns to the snow motive, but the sixteenth notes now include arpeggios, widening the intervals and creating a stormier texture. This storm-like



<Example 4.4 Fanny Hensel, April from *Das Jahr* mm. 86-7>

imagery intensifies in mm. 84–87, evoking a snowstorm. In m. 92, the vii7 chord of E minor resolves unexpectedly to A minor, continuing the piece’s pattern of avoiding conventional resolutions. This unexpected harmonic shift aligns with Goethe’s poem, which speaks of “*The sight of the sun deceives with gentle, false light*”. Fanny musically illustrates this idea by undermining harmonic expectations, replacing dominant chords with less stable harmonies.

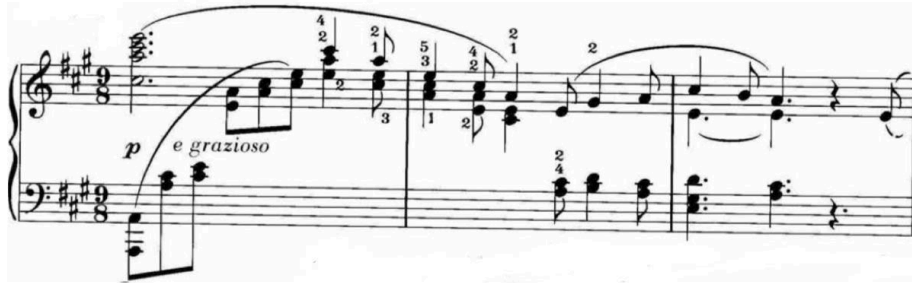
The piece concludes with the capricious energy of the B” section, its contrasts of lilting melodies and stormy textures vividly portraying the unpredictable nature of April. The interplay of whimsical and dramatic elements encapsulates spring’s capriciousness, while the poem’s themes are woven seamlessly into the musical structure. Fanny Mendelssohn’s clever allusions and subtle tonal shifts result in a masterful depiction of April’s beauty and unpredictability.

6. May

Composition Date	October 16, 1841	
Poet: Ludwig Uhland	Title: <i>Frühlingslieder</i> (Spring Songs), 2. <i>Frühlingsglaube</i> (Spring faith), line 10	
Es [Nun] blüht das fernste, tiefste Tal.	Now blooms the farthest, deepest valley.	

<Table 5. Composition Date and Epigram for May from Das Jahr>

May, subtitled *Frühlingslied* (*Spring Song*), is a radiant and energetic piece that captivates the essence of spring’s arrival. Set in A major, marked *Allegro vivace e gioioso*, and written in 9/8 time, it follows a flexible rondo form, reflecting the lively and capricious nature of the season. The principal theme is derived from *January*, specifically from mm. 23–24 (example 1.3), where it symbolized the anticipation of spring. Here, in *May*, that anticipation transforms into joyous celebration.



<Example 5.1. Fanny Hensel, May from *Das Jahr* mm. 1-3>

The piece opens with a broad A major chord, but with a strikingly wide gap of four octaves between the right and left hands. This vast spacing mirrors the imagery in the epigram, *das fernste, tiefste Tal* (“the farthest, deepest valley”).²⁸ As the left hand ascends in thirds, moving closer to the right hand, this gap gradually narrows. When the hands finally meet within an octave, forming a second inversion of the A major triad, they immediately descend together in a lilting rhythm. This motion suggests a sense of arrival, as if spring is emerging from the depths of winter. Upon reaching A major root position in the middle register, the melody delicately rises and falls while the harmony shifts from V to I, creating a gentle resolution. The same motive repeats, but this time the top voice extends an octave higher from E, rather than the previous interval of a sixth. This upward expansion, combined with the expressive marking *con espressivo e poco ritard.*, enhances the feeling of openness, mirroring the blossoming of spring. The passage from mm. 5–11 consists of three short phrases, each beginning with a rolling chord. The first two phrases (mm. 5–8) remain in A major, dynamically shaped with crescendo and diminuendo. The third phrase (mm. 9–11) shifts harmonically, beginning on an A# diminished chord before resolving into a B minor triad (mm. 9–10), then progressing to a D# diminished chord (m. 11), which lands on a solitary E rather than an expected E major or minor chord. This harmonic ambiguity creates a sense of mystery and fluidity, reflecting spring’s unpredictability.

²⁸ Lee, 117.

Unlike the previous phrases, this passage lacks a clear tonal center and dynamic markings, allowing for interpretive freedom. A performer might shape the phrasing with a crescendo and diminuendo in mm. 5–6, increase expressivity in mm. 7–8, and introduce a softer, more ethereal tone for mm. 9–11 to highlight the harmonic ambiguity. At m. 12, the refrain returns, lasting until m. 17.



<Example 5.2. Fanny Hensel, May from *Das Jahr* mm. 1-3>

The final articulation of the refrain lands on a *subito forte* on the first beat of m. 18, marking the beginning of the B section (mm. 18–29). Here, the left hand introduces a rapid, trill-like A-G# sixteenth-note figure, which continues until m. 24, while the first note of each beat descends chromatically. This downward movement in the left hand runs parallel to the melodic line in the right hand, intensifying the section's momentum. The passage from mm. 22–25 serves as a variation of mm. 18–22, reinforcing the phrase structure while increasing energy. The continuous sixteenth-note accompaniment gives this section a driving, active movement, vividly depicting the unfolding bloom of spring.

The C section (mm. 29–36) introduces a striking contrast, shifting to F# minor, the first minor passage in the piece. This shift captures the mercurial nature of spring weather,



<Example 5.4. Fanny Hensel, May from *Das Jahr* mm. 41-4>

motif from *April* (example 4.3), but here, it extends even further, perhaps symbolizing the vast and distant valleys referenced in the epigram.

The principal theme returns in m. 50, marking the beginning of an A section variation. This time, the left hand moves in a rising and falling motion, while the right-hand alto voice fills the texture with consecutive chords. This variation concludes at m. 58, transitioning into a new idea. The first phrase of this new section (mm. 58–62) is immediately repeated in an octave-higher register with doubled octaves (mm. 62–65), creating a more expansive and brilliant sound. This sequence continues and intensifies until m. 71, perfectly illustrating the fullness of spring’s bloom. As the piece nears its conclusion, the refrain returns one final time, but now written an octave higher than before, creating a transparent and shimmering effect. This elevated register enhances the brightness of the ending, evoking a sense of weightlessness and joy, as if nature is bursting into full bloom. The piece closes with a radiant flourish, completing its vivid depiction of spring’s renewal.

Fanny Mendelssohn's *May* encapsulates the spirit of spring with remarkable clarity, balancing the lightness of the season's warmth with moments of fleeting uncertainty. The interplay of expansive and intimate textures, the harmonic shifts between major and minor, and the seamless integration of motivic material from *January* all contribute to the piece's depth and expressive power. The flexible rondo form allows for continuous transformation, mirroring the natural evolution of spring, while the capricious harmonic choices embody the season's unpredictability. This movement stands as a radiant and joyous celebration of spring's arrival, encapsulating its beauty, energy, and ever-changing character.

7. June

Composition Date	October 29, 1841	
Poet: Johann Wolfgang Goethe	Title: <i>Faust</i> , Part I, lines 3883-4	
Hör' ich Rauschen? hör' ich Lieder? Hör' ich holde Liebesklage [?]	Do I hear murmuring, do I hear songs, Do I hear gentle complaints of love [?]	

<Table 6. Composition Date and Epigram for June from *Das Jahr*>

June is a serenade in D minor, imbued with an expressive, nocturne-like character. True to its subtitle, *Serenade*, the accompanying vignette depicts a couple, with a man singing to a woman. The piece opens with a *Largo* introduction (mm. 1–11) in 4/4 time, setting a melancholic yet fluid atmosphere. Though marked *Largo*, the sixteenth-note arpeggio accompaniment in the left hand maintains forward momentum, giving the passage a sense of gentle, continuous motion.



<Example 6.1 Fanny Hensel, June from *Das Jahr* mm. 1-2>

The first phrase (mm. 1–4) unfolds with a predominantly stepwise melody, enriched by passing tones that create a smooth and flowing line. However, in m. 7, where the second phrase begins, the melody ascends to A6, followed by an abrupt leap within the D minor chord tones. This sudden shift intensifies the sense of longing and deepens the overall melancholy mood. The leaping motif repeats three times, with the final iteration introducing an F# accidental, transforming the harmony into a D major triad. To emphasize the color shift from D minor to D



<Example 6.2. Fanny Hensel, June from *Das Jahr* mm. 9-11>

major, Fanny marks this moment with *p*, encouraging the performer to bring out a subtle change in tone. Harmonic analysis of the final three measures of the introduction reveals a progression of V/iv – iv – i⁶⁴ – V, concluding on a half cadence that leaves the phrase unresolved. The D major chord, functioning as the secondary dominant (V/iv) of G minor, briefly shifts the tonal focus before the cadence. This harmonic transition creates anticipation, setting the stage for the

Andante section that follows. At m. 12, the music shifts to 6/8 time, introducing the Andante section with a four-bar prelude (mm. 12–15). The left hand plays D octaves, while the right hand outlines D minor chord tones, reminiscent of Schubert’s *Serenade*. However, unlike Schubert’s static bass line, Fanny’s left hand moves with a dotted rhythm, adding a sense of drama and passion. She also includes the marking *imitando la chitarra* ("like a guitar"), likely instructing the performer to emulate the strumming effect in the right-hand accompaniment.

The main melody enters on the pickup to measure 16 in the tenor voice before moving to the soprano register in measure 18. This choice of tener register for the main melody may be intentionally linked to the vignette, which depicts a man singing to a woman, reinforcing the musical and visual connection within *June*. The first phrase (mm. 16–23) follows a standard eight-bar structure, while the second phrase (mm. 24–34) extends to ten bars, heightening intensity and emotional depth.



<Example 6.3. Fanny Hensel, June from *Das Jahr* mm. 12-15>

Though it begins similarly to the first phrase, the harmonic and melodic shifts from m. 28 onward gradually build tension. The soprano repeatedly sustains D over mm. 30–32, delaying resolution until mm. 33–34, where the phrase finally resolves. From mm. 38–42, the piece develops through a chromatic sequential passage, maintaining continuity with the upcoming phrase (mm. 43–51). In mm. 46–47, the right-hand chromatic descent (G-F#-F-E) is mirrored in

the left hand in mm. 50–51, creating a moment of symmetry and reflection. The arrival of a G7 chord (dominant of C major) in m. 51 prepares for a sudden shift to C major in m. 52, which dramatically transforms the mood. This C major passage (mm. 52–57) is grand and radiant, offering a stark contrast to the darker, introspective opening. Within these measures, Fanny employs third-related harmonic motion to enrich the color palette: C major moves to A major, and D minor transitions to B-flat major, creating a fluid yet harmonically adventurous sequence. The mm. 58–63 passage introduces a striking rhythmic interplay of two-against-three, further expanding the expressive range. This passage modulates through E-flat major, C-flat major, and A-flat minor, adding unexpected harmonic twists. A new sequential progression (mm. 64–75) emerges, built on a harmonic chain of F7, F#7, and CM7, ultimately leading back to the C major melody from m. 56. This time, the bass begins on C rather than E, reinforcing the harmonic stability. The phrase reaches its peak at F6, after which the left-hand accompaniment recedes, leaving the right hand to take over in an expressive monologue (mm. 76–87). The phrase unfolds with lyrical beauty, fading into introspection before resolving. At m. 88, the main melody



<Example 6.3. Fanny Hensel, June from *Das Jahr* mm. 9-11>

returns, now in the tenor voice, accompanied by sweeping sixteenth-note arpeggios in the right hand. These arpeggios ascend and descend across four octaves, generating a dramatic motion that could evoke the line from the poem: "*Hör' ich holde Liebesklage?*" ("Do I hear gentle

plaints of love?"). The fluid rise and fall of the accompaniment mirrors the unpredictable nature of love, where emotions fluctuate between soaring heights and deep introspection. Interestingly, in mm.



<Example 6.2. Fanny Hensel, June from *Das Jahr* mm. 88-9>

104–107, the tenor voice bears a striking resemblance to the main theme of the second movement of Felix Mendelssohn’s Piano Concerto No. 2 in D minor written in 1837. Whether this similarity is coincidental or an intentional homage remains uncertain, but it undeniably underscores the close musical kinship between Fanny and Felix. Following this expressive outpouring, the piece transitions into a chorale-like passage (mm. 119–122), where the main melody is presented one final time, imbued with a sense of solemnity and closure. The final measures (mm. 123–end) recall the serene accompaniment of mm. 12–15, now devoid of a melodic line. This symmetry between the opening and closing creates a perfect frame for the serenade, emphasizing its reflective and nocturnal character.

<Example 6.3a. Fanny Hensel, June from *Das Jahr* mm. 104-7>

<Example 6.2. Felix Mendelssohn, Piano Concerto No. 2 in D minor mm. 17-22>

Fanny Mendelssohn's *June* seamlessly weaves elements of serenade, nocturne, and song without words into a unified composition. The juxtaposition of minor and major tonalities, the interplay between fluid chromaticism and sweeping gestures, and the intimate references to the guitar-like accompaniment and lyrical themes all contribute to its unique character. The structure's symmetry—returning to the opening material at the end—enhances the sense of completeness, making *June* not only a beautifully crafted serenade but also a deeply poignant meditation on love, longing, and introspection.

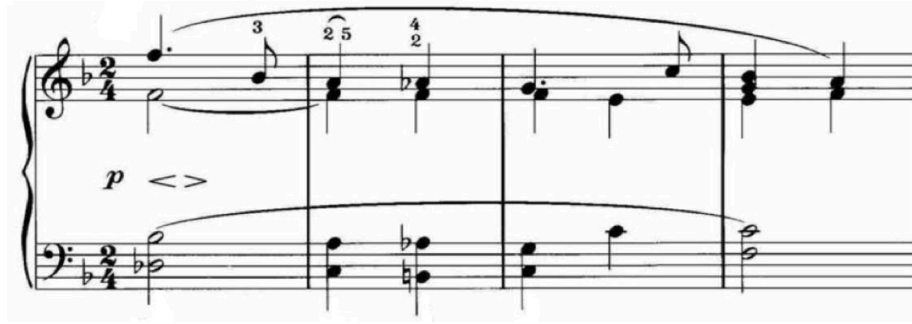
8. July

Composition Date	November 9, 1841	
Poet: Friedrich Schiller	Title: <i>Der Abend. Nach einem Gemälde, lines 1-2</i> (The Evening. After a Painting)	
. . . die Fluren dürsten Nach erquickendem Tau, der Mensch verschmachtet.	. . . the fields thirst For refreshing dew, Man languishes [dies of thirst].	

<Table 7. Composition Date and Epigram for July from Das Jahr>

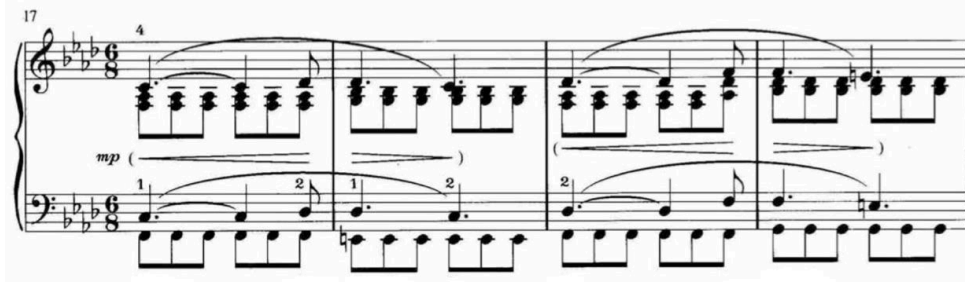
July is a deeply expressive piece that evokes a profound sense of emptiness and longing, likely reflecting Fanny’s own emotions during June and July as she journeyed home from Rome, filled with sadness and regret.²⁹ Set in D minor, with a 2/4 time signature, and marked *Larghetto*, the piece follows an ABA form, where the A section is structured in a chorale style, while the contrasting B section introduces a change in meter (6/8) and key (F minor). Throughout the piece, Fanny employs harmonic ambiguity, sparse textures, and subtle motivic transformations to evoke a sense of desolation and thirst. This mirrors the imagery in the epigram: “*The fields thirst, longing for refreshing dew, mankind languishes.*” as well as the vignette, which depicts a weary woman kneeling on yellow-colored paper, suggesting intense heat. Additionally, the absence of a background in the vignette may correspond to the piece’s sparse texture and harmonic openness, further enhancing the feeling of emptiness and exhaustion.

²⁹ Sarah Rothenberg, “‘Thus Far, but No Farther’: Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel’s Unfinished Journey,” *The Musical Quarterly* 77, no. 4 (1993): 705.



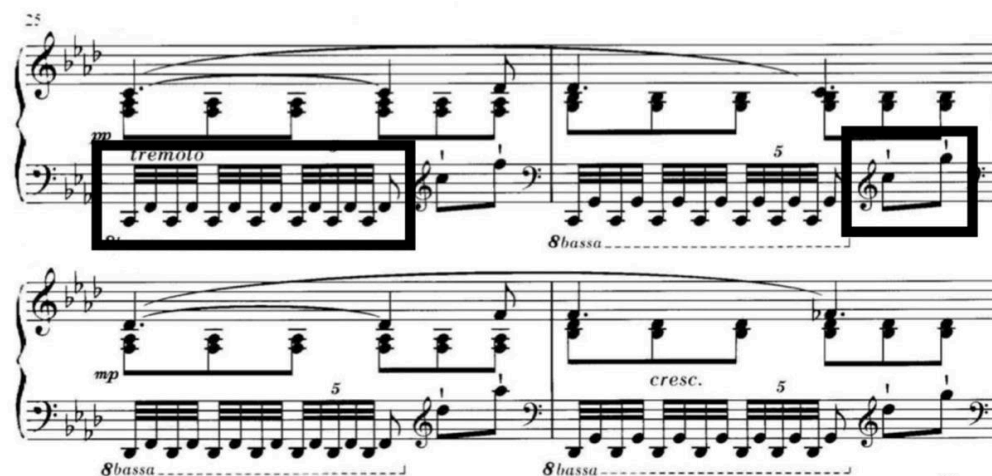
<Example 7.1. Fanny Hensel, July from *Das Jahr* mm. 1-4>

The A section begins with a four-voice chorale texture, where the soprano, alto, tenor, and bass interact in a hymn-like setting. The first chord, an iv^6 (B-flat minor in first inversion), is an unusual opening choice, far removed from the expected F major tonic triad. This immediate instability creates a sense of vacancy and longing. The soprano melody begins with a downward leap from F5 to B-flat4, followed by a descending chromatic line, contributing to the melody's detached and hollow quality. The tonal center remains ambiguous, and even though the phrase concludes with an imperfect authentic cadence (IAC), it does not establish a strong resolution. This opening phrase repeats in mm. 5–6 and again in mm. 7–8, reinforcing the sense of unresolved yearning. In mm. 7–8, a subtle color shift occurs with the introduction of an A-flat major first-inversion chord, marked *pp*, lending the passage a delicate and almost ghostly quality. The phrase then moves through ascending and descending gestures in D minor, eventually returning to the opening iv^6 chord in F major. The section concludes with a perfect authentic cadence (PAC) in F major (mm. 15–16), offering a rare moment of harmonic stability. At m. 17, the B section begins, shifting to 6/8 time and modulating to F minor, the parallel minor of F major. This section, spanning mm. 17–36, is divided into two parts: mm. 17–24, and its variation in mm. 25–36. The texture remains in four voices, but now the soprano and tenor

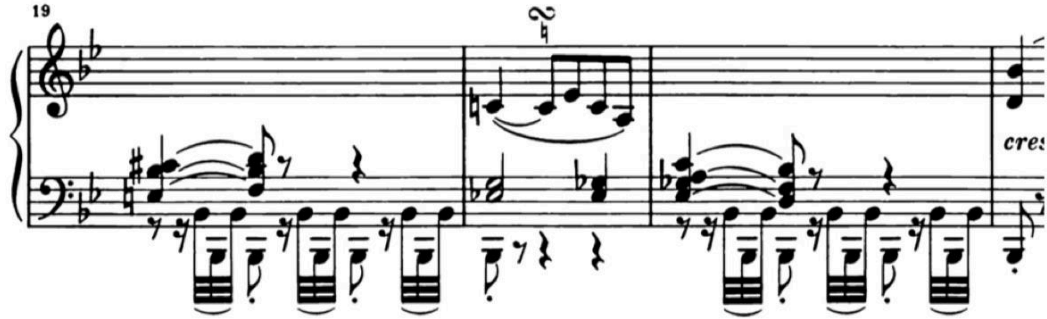


<Example 7.2. Fanny Hensel, July from *Das Jahr* mm. 17-20>

primarily carry the melody, while the alto and bass provide continuous accompaniment. The mezzo and bass lines feature steady eighth-note movement, recalling the muffled bell motive from *March*. The phrase structure follows a short-short-long pattern: mm. 17–18, 19–20, and 21–24, contributing to a sense of quiet persistence. In mm. 25–36, the variation introduces a striking accompaniment pattern. The left hand plays rapid thirty-second-note tremolos in the low register, followed by eighth notes in the treble clef that cross over the right hand. This cross-hand motion adds a shimmering, almost ethereal effect, which Fanny may have intended to depict the "refreshing dew" mentioned in the poem. The final four measures of the B section,



<Example 7.3a. Fanny Hensel, July from *Das Jahr* mm. 25-8>



<Example 7.3b. L.v. Beethoven, Piano Sonata Op. 31 No. 2 “Tempest,”

2nd movement mm. 19-22>

where the left hand continues its tremolo with rests on the downbeats, bear a resemblance to the left-hand accompaniment in the second movement of Beethoven’s *Tempest* Sonata, further deepening the sense of mystery and longing. The B section concludes on a C major chord (dominant of F minor), making it easier to return to F major for the reprise of the A section. At m. 37, the A' section begins as a variation of the original A section. The most noticeable change is in the tenor voice, which now features stepwise sixteenth-note motion, filling the harmonic space and adding subtle inner movement. From m. 47 onward, these sixteenth notes transition into repeated Gs, emphasizing the dominant of F major (V). This dominant emphasis extends beyond the tenor line: the soprano voice also begins each two-bar phrase on G, and the interval between G and the following note progressively widens. The first G resolves to C, the second to B, and the third to an octave-lower G, reinforcing a sense of growing emptiness. The final G is repeated continuously until m. 55, prolonging the anticipation. From mm. 55 to the end, the music subtly recalls elements of the B section, particularly in the left-hand repeated accompaniment. The right hand plays rolling chords, but lacks a defined melodic line until m. 65. Finally, in mm. 66–69, the same melody from mm. 9–12 reappears, bringing a sense of return and familiarity. In m. 70, the principal motive reemerges for the final time, providing a moment

of closure. Throughout the coda section (mm. 55–end), the left hand rests on the downbeats, creating a fragmented and hesitant effect, symbolizing absence and longing. In the last four measures, the rests extend to both the first and second beats, and eventually, the length of the rests increases from eighth rests to quarter rests. This gradual elongation of silence perfectly captures the essence of the poem’s imagery: the dryness and desperation of a landscape thirsting for rain. It vividly portrays the desolation of July, a month often associated with drought, where the fields yearn for relief but remain parched.

July is a masterful expression of emptiness and quiet suffering, with its hollow chorale textures, sparse harmonic grounding, and subtle rhythmic hesitations all reinforcing the theme of longing. The movement between major and minor, the shifting meters, and the delicate interplay between voices create an evocative landscape of desolation. The final measures, where silence and absence become the dominant forces, leave the listener with a profound sense of stillness—perfectly embodying the silent yearning described in the poem.

9. August

Composition Date	November 27, 1841	
Poet: Friedrich Schiller	Title: <i>Das Lied von der Gloke</i> (The Songs of the Bell), lines 285-7	
. . Bunt von Farben Auf den Garben Liegt der Kranz.	Bright with color On the sheaves Lies the wreath	

<Table 8. Composition Date and Epigram for August from Das Jahr>

Fanny composed *August* on November 27, 1841, setting it to an excerpt from lines 285–287 of Schiller’s *Das Lied von der Glocke* (*The Song of the Bell*). The movement is

structured in three distinct sections, each with its own tempo, meter, and key: an Allegro in D major (3/4 time), a *Tempo di Marcia* in D major (4/4 time), and an Allegro assai in G major (6/8 time). The shift between these contrasting sections suggests a progression from the bell-casting process to its celebratory ringing,³⁰ aligning with the poem's theme of craftsmanship and triumph and the figure in the right corner of the vignette who is depicted ringing the cornett.



<Example 8.1. Fanny Hensel, August from *Das Jahr* mm. 1-4>

The piece opens with an Allegro section (mm. 1–15) in D major, which begins with a motive derived from *January* (mm. 32–34). Throughout this introduction, the center note is A, the dominant of D major, reinforcing a sense of anticipation. Unlike the muffled bell motive from *March*, which conveyed a somber tone, the bell-like figure in *August* is characterized by a dotted rhythm, possibly symbolizing the casting process of the bell. The first two measures establish this motif: A4 is played with a dotted rhythm, followed by an octave leap to A5, held as a half note with a fermata. The phrase is first presented *forte*, then immediately repeated *piano* as an echo effect. At m. 3, the same motive expands into a descending broken chord that ascends stepwise, creating a questioning effect. In m. 5, immediately after the right hand states this phrase, the left hand imitates it on D, reinforcing the harmonic structure. The right hand then restates mm. 1–4 in mm. 7–9, reinforcing the introductory character. From mm. 10–15, the dotted rhythm is played alternately between both hands, eventually aligning in unison. This

³⁰ Wilson Kimber, 390.

passage does not contain a distinct melodic line but serves as a bridge leading into the next section.

The B section (*Tempo di Marcia*, mm. 16–55) introduces a march-like theme in D major, with a simple harmonic progression and rustic texture. The structure follows an a(a)a'ba' pattern, where mm. 16–23 and mm. 24–31 are identical (a(a)), followed by mm. 32–38 (a'), mm. 40–48 (b, the episode), and mm. 49–55 (a' again). The principal rhythmic motive consists of a dotted note followed by two eighth notes, resembling the finale of Schumann's *Symphonic Etudes*. The four-bar phrasing is straightforward, with mm. 16–19 centered on the tonic (I) and mm. 20–23 moving to the dominant (V). A harmonic shift occurs in mm. 36–39, where the music briefly tonicizes F# minor, introducing a third-related key area. This prepares the episode (mm. 40–48), which features a lyrical, slurred melody accompanied by a standard accompaniment figure. The melodic line is smooth and stepwise, unfolding over a pedal point A, the dominant of D major. In m. 48, chromatic chords create harmonic tension before resolving back to the a' section (mm. 49–55), completing the march.



<Example 8.2a. Fanny Hensel, August from *Das Jahr* mm. 49-50>



<Example 8.2b. Robert Schumann, Finale from *Symphonic Etudes* mm. 1-2>

The final section, marked *Allegro assai*, introduces a new time signature (6/8) and key (G major). Structurally, it follows an Introduction–A–A’–B–A form. The introduction (mm. 56–65) features rapid right-hand arpeggios outlining a D major 7th chord and an E diminished chord, played over a D pedal in the left hand. This passage builds excitement before launching into the



<Example 8.3. Fanny Hensel, August from *Das Jahr* mm. 66-9>

main A section (mm. 66–81). The A section (mm. 66–81) is based on simple four-bar phrases, where mm. 66–69 and mm. 70–73 are identical, and a longer phrase extends from mm. 74–81. The right hand plays sixteenth-note downward broken chords, with the first note of each beat accented to highlight the melodic line. The melody follows a stepwise motion, and whenever a leap occurs, it signals the start of a new phrase. For example, in m. 73, the main voice moves

from E to D, but in m. 74, the phrase begins an interval of a sixth higher (B). Another phrase shift occurs in m. 78, where a B in the previous phrase leaps to G, marking a new melodic entry.

The A' section (mm. 82–97) closely resembles the A section but with slight modifications. One key difference is in the left-hand accompaniment: instead of maintaining a quarter-note/eighth-note pattern, the left hand takes over the right hand's arpeggio figure on beats three and six. This results in a lighter texture, which performers can emphasize by using less pedal and a more delicate touch. From mm. 90–97, a transition occurs, starting with a B-flat major chord followed by a B diminished chord, setting up harmonic movement toward the B section.



<Example 8.4. Fanny Hensel, August from *Das Jahr* mm. 97-101>

The B section (mm. 98–131) introduces a majestic and optimistic character, borrowing the *Traum* theme from *January* but in a major key. This transformation aligns with the poem's epigram: "Bright with color on the sheaves lies the wreath." The warm, celebratory nature of this passage symbolizes completion and triumph, reinforcing the theme of the bell's final casting and ceremonial ringing. Finally, the A section returns in m. 132, carrying the piece toward a jubilant conclusion. The right-hand arpeggios continue throughout the closing measures, creating an increasingly festive and full atmosphere. This final section exudes a joyful and triumphant

character, culminating in a grand celebration of the bell’s completion, much like the poem describes.

August is a vivid and structurally sophisticated movement, reflecting both the physical labor of bell casting and the joy of its completion. The contrast between the rhythmic introduction, march-like middle section, and exuberant finale effectively mirrors the transformation of raw materials into a resonant and triumphant bell. By incorporating motivic references from *January* and *March* and employing rhythmic and harmonic contrasts, Fanny creates a composition that is both narrative and musically compelling. The movement’s increasing energy and celebratory ending encapsulate the essence of Schiller’s poem, marking *August* as one of the most vibrant and triumphant pieces in *Das Jahr*.

10. September

Composition Date	November 15, 1841	
Poet: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe	Title: <i>An den Mond</i> (To the Moon), lines 13-4	
Fließe, fließe, lieber Fluß, Nimmer werd’ ich froh.	Flow, flow dear river, Never will I be happy.	

<Table 9. Composition Date and Epigram for September from *Das Jahr*>

September holds a unique place in her body of work, as it was one of the few pieces published during her lifetime. It appeared in 1846 as *Op. 2, No. 2* in *Lieder für Pianoforte (Songs for Piano)*, published by Bote & Bock in Berlin. Subtitled *Am Fluß (By the River)*,³¹ this piece exemplifies Fanny’s ability to write in a lyrical, song-like style, making it fitting for inclusion in a collection of *Lieder* for piano. In *Das Jahr*, *September* is paired with Goethe’s poem *An den Mond* (To the Moon), a text that evokes themes of longing and melancholy, which Fanny

³¹ Lee, 120.

expresses beautifully through the music’s flowing arpeggios and plaintive melodies. The piece is set in B minor, with a 6/8 time signature and marked *Andante con moto*, maintaining a gentle but persistent motion throughout. Structurally, it follows an ABA form, with the A section’s return modified. The right hand continuously plays sixteenth-note triplets in arpeggiated patterns, creating a rippling effect that mimics the flow of a river. This undulating texture remains unbroken, reinforcing the feeling of constant movement and quiet sorrow. The blue-colored paper itself suggests the presence of a river, reinforcing the imagery of flowing water. The figure in the vignette, seated by the river,³² evokes *The Thinker* by Auguste Rodin and symbolizes melancholy, aligning with the text “*Nimmer werd’ ich froh*” (“Never will I be happy”).



<Example 9.1. Fanny Hensel, September from *Das Jahr* mm. 1-2>

The first four measures function as an introduction, establishing the flowing right-hand arpeggios, while the left hand provides harmonic support. Unlike other movements in *Das Jahr*, where the tonality is often ambiguous at the outset, *September* begins clearly in B minor, grounding the listener immediately. At m. 5, the main melody enters in the alto voice, introducing a descending B minor scale. This phrase repeats in mm. 5–8, reinforcing its prominence. However, from the pickup to m. 9 through m. 12, the melody changes direction, ascending chromatically toward B before descending stepwise to F#. The phrase from mm.

³² Wilson Kimber, 365.

13–16 recalls the opening melody (mm. 5–8), but it now leads toward the secondary dominant (V7 of F# minor), setting up a modulation.

The B section (mm. 17–46) shifts momentarily into F# minor (mm. 17–22). This section introduces a new rhythmic figure in the melody, moving in consecutive eighth notes rather than the previous quarter-eighth pattern, creating a sense of increased motion. A sequential passage follows from mm. 23–28, moving through B7, C#7, and D#7, building harmonic tension. In mm. 29–32, a new sequence unfolds: the left hand remains fixed on G#, while the right-hand melody descends (B#–B–A#–G#), eventually leading into C# major (mm. 33–34). This unexpected shift is then enharmonically reinterpreted as D-flat major (mm. 35–36), maintaining harmonic fluidity. At m. 33, the consecutive eighth-note motive returns, now varied through inversion.

<Example 9.2. Fanny Hensel, September from *Das Jahr* mm. 33-4>

passage is particularly striking because the right-hand accompaniment mirrors the left-hand melody note-for-note but at double the speed in sixteenth notes. This marks the first instance of a major-key melody in the piece, offering a brief sense of warmth and relief. However, in m. 36, despite the melody remaining unchanged, the harmony shifts back to imply a minor key, creating a moment of fleeting happiness that is quickly overshadowed. This fleeting happiness leads into the climactic passage beginning in m. 37, where the melody arrives in B-flat minor. The left hand

foreshadows the right-hand melody, first playing it in the treble clef, after which the right hand takes over, extending the phrase upward by introducing octave leaps to heighten the drama. From mm. 37–39, the left and right hands engage in a contrapuntal exchange, passing the melody back and forth. After this interplay, the right-hand melody continues to expand, reaching its peak before descending in arpeggios over a B-flat pedal point (mm. 40–43), gradually diminishing in volume. At m. 44, the arpeggios reverse direction, ascending toward G5, marking the final note of this section. With a poco ritardando, the B section concludes as G5 moves chromatically downward to F#5, signaling the return of the A section in B minor. The main motive returns in m. 47, but with two notable changes. First, from mm. 53–59, the melody shifts into the soprano voice, giving it a more prominent and expressive quality. Second, from mm. 56–57, the accompaniment introduces a chromatic ascending line, subtly intensifying the passage. In mm. 60–63, the chromatic motion continues, leading into the final postlude (mm. 64–71), which mirrors the four-measure introduction from the beginning of the piece. However, this time, the final three measures (mm. 69–71) strip away the flowing arpeggios, leaving only chords after the ascending arpeggio in m. 68. This shift in texture signals the end of the journey, evoking a sense of resignation.

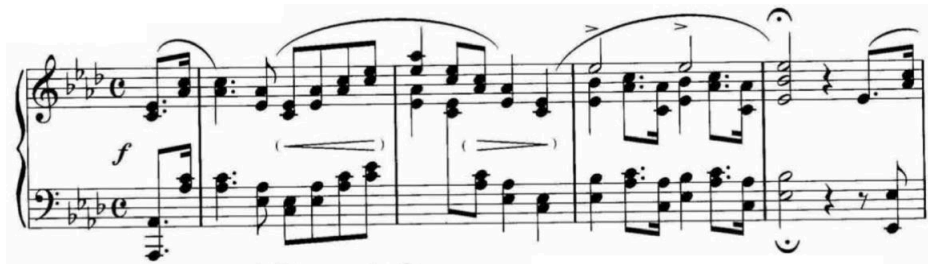
September beautifully conveys a sense of continuous sorrow, reinforced by the flowing arpeggios in the right hand that never cease until the final measures. The melancholic setting and song-like melody make it one of the most vocal pieces in *Das Jahr*, which explains why it was published in the collection *Songs for Piano*. The work's subtle harmonic shifts, climactic build, and return to its wistful opening theme all contribute to its sense of unresolved sadness, perfectly capturing the essence of Goethe's poem and the quiet, wistful beauty of autumn's arrival.

11. October

Composition Date	December 1, 1841	
Poet: Joseph von Eichendorff	Title: <i>Die Spielleute</i> (The Minstrels), lines 11-2	
Im Wald, im grünen Walde Das [Da] ist ein lust'ger Schall!	In the forest, in the green forest, That [there] is a cheerful sound!	

<Table 10. Composition Date and Epigram for October from *Das Jahr*>

October is a vibrant and festive work, written in A-flat major, with a 4/4 time signature and marked *Allegro con spirituo*. Structurally, it follows an ABABC form, with each section contributing to the piece's energetic and celebratory character. In stark contrast to *September*, which conveys melancholy and the fading beauty of autumn, *October* is filled with hunting calls, folk-like rhythms, and the lively atmosphere of harvest celebrations. In the vignette, stags and a hunter blowing his horn visually represent "*Lust'ger Schall*" ("cheerful sound") within "*im grünen Walde*" ("in the green forest.")³³ The piece's joyful and rhythmic drive reflects the spirit of autumn festivals, bringing to life an image of communities gathering to rejoice in the season's bounty.



<Example 10.1. Fanny Hensel, *October* from *Das Jahr* mm. 1-4>

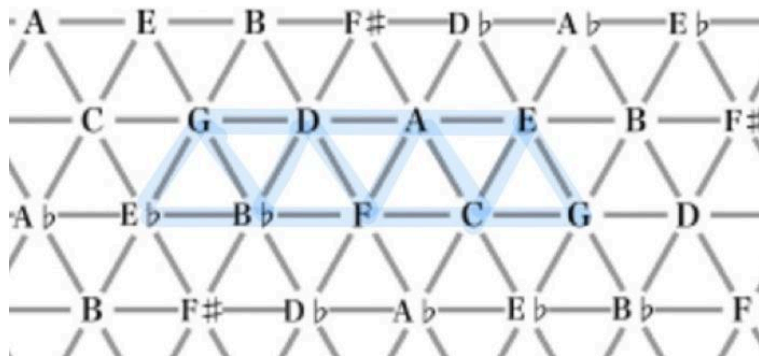
The A section (mm. 1–16) begins with a bold A-flat major chord and a dotted rhythm, immediately establishing a sense of exuberance. The right and left hands double each other until

³³ Wilson Kimber, 365.

m. 4, reinforcing the music's strength. From mm. 5–8, the right hand repeats the first four bars exactly, while the left hand introduces moving octaves, ascending in an A-flat major scale before descending in an arpeggio. This added motion enhances the feeling of excitement and builds anticipation. Fanny employs third-related harmonies in mm. 9–12, using E-flat major, G-flat major, and E-flat minor to increase harmonic color and variety. This harmonic sequence intensifies the festive mood, culminating in a dominant seventh chord (E-flat7) in m. 13, preparing for resolution back to A-flat major. The section concludes with consecutive dotted chords descending (mm. 14–16), wrapping up the first thematic statement. A variation of the A section (mm. 17–22) follows, with the main melody repeating but leading into a modified cadence. The altered phrase ending in m. 22 becomes a key motivic element, driving the next section forward. From mm. 23–30, this new phrase is developed further, leading to a modulation toward G major in mm. 29–30, which then moves toward C major (m. 31), setting the stage for the next section.

The B section (mm. 31–72) introduces a new motivic idea with sixteenth-note figures and shifts to a 6/8 time signature, adding a light, dance-like feel. The transition from mm. 31–40

<Example 10.2a. Fanny Hensel, October from *Das Jahr* mm. 30-44>



<Example 10.2b. RL cycle of Fanny Hensel's October from *Das Jahr* mm. 30-44>

takes the listener through a series of third-related keys, passing through C major, A minor, F major, D minor, B-flat major, G minor, and finally reaching E-flat major (m. 41). This harmonic

progression exemplifies the RL cycle (Neo-Riemannian Theory), where harmonies are linked by their relative, leading-tone, and parallel relationships. At m. 41, the key signature returns to A-flat major, with the E-flat major chord functioning as the dominant. This passage (mm. 41–46) borrows material from mm. 23–25, but the dotted rhythm is replaced with quarter and eighth notes, aligning with the new 6/8 time signature. From the pickup to m. 48 through m. 54, the motive from mm. 31–34 is varied, developing the material with fresh harmonic shifts. A second variation of the B section appears in mm. 55–64, following the same harmonic progressions as mm. 41–54, but this time the left hand plays broken chords, adding greater fluidity and motion. From mm. 65–72, a bridge passage emerges, leading back to the A section. This transition begins in the lower register with a *piano* marking, then gradually ascends with a crescendo, building intensity before the peak resolves into a descending line. This descending passage



<Example 10.3a. Fanny Hensel, October from *Das Jahr* mm. 69-72>



<Example 10.3b. Felix Mendelssohn, Rondo Capriccioso ending>

closely resembles a figure from Felix Mendelssohn's *Rondo Capriccioso*, further linking Fanny's compositional style to her brother's virtuosic pianism.

The return of the A section (mm. 73–88) restores the 4/4 time signature and A-flat major tonality, but the main motivic idea is now shortened. This condensed return maintains the liveliness of the original statement while propelling the piece toward its climax. The B section returns once more (mm. 89–118), but with notable harmonic differences. Whereas the first B section (mm. 31–72) relied on third relations, this second iteration emphasizes chromatic harmonic movement (mm. 102–110), increasing tension and color.

The final section (mm. 119–end), which functions as a coda or C section, reintroduces 4/4 time and is marked *poco più presto*, intensifying the momentum toward the conclusion. Though the piece maintains a rich and full texture throughout, this final section is the most exuberant and densely orchestrated, evoking the climax of a festival or a harvest celebration. The thickness of the harmonies and the rhythmic drive suggest the imagery of people singing, dancing, and rejoicing together. In mm. 129–130 and mm. 145–146, the left hand introduces a tremolo figure, reminiscent of the tremolo effects found in *April*. The main theme returns for the last time in mm. 133–134, followed by an extension of the A-flat major chord, reinforcing the tonal stability. From mm. 139–144, the coda's main melody (first heard in mm. 119–127) is restated, before the final passage (mm. 145–end).

October is a celebratory and energetic work, effectively capturing the musical essence of autumn as a time of abundance and joy. The contrast between melancholic *September* and exuberant *October* highlights Fanny's ability to depict different facets of the same season—from the reflective, fading beauty of autumn leaves to the lively, communal festivities of harvest time.

The interplay of dotted rhythms, folk-like themes, harmonic richness, and shifting meters contributes to the piece's infectious energy, making it one of the most spirited movements in *Das Jahr*.

12. November

Composition Date	December 4, 1841
Poet: Ludwig Tieck	Title: <i>Trauer</i> (Grief), lines 1-4, 11-12
Wie rauschen die Bäume so winterlich schon; Es fliehen die Träume der Liebe [des Lebens] davon! Ein Klagelied schallt Durch Dämm' rung [Hügel] und Wald.	How the trees rustle, So wintry already; The dreams of love [life] flee from there! A song of complaint sounds through twilight [hill] and forest.

<Table 11. Composition Date and Epigram for November from *Das Jahr*>

November is one of the most striking examples of how *Das Jahr* functions as a Gesamtkunstwerk, a total work of art that integrates multiple artistic forms into a unified whole. In this piece, Fanny masterfully combines literature, music, and visual art to create a profound meditation on the themes of death, remembrance, and the fading of life. The epigram, a poem by Ludwig Tieck, metaphorically represents winter as death, a fitting association for November, the month that signals the beginning of winter's cold and darkness. This theme is reinforced by the vignette, which depicts a priest standing beside a tombstone with a shovel, evoking the liturgical significance of All Saints' Day and the act of mourning the dead. Additionally, the manuscript is copied on dark brown paper, which is the darkest among the selected papers, further enhancing the somber tone.³⁴ Musically, *November* is deeply connected to earlier movements, reusing and

³⁴ Wilson Kimber, 391.

transforming motivic material to unify the cycle and underscore the cyclical nature of time, memory, and loss.



<Example 11.1. Fanny Hensel, November from *Das Jahr* mm. 1-4>

The piece opens with a slow, mournful *Mesto* section (mm. 1–25) in F minor, 4/4 time, evoking the character of a requiem or funeral hymn. Full, hymn-like chords create a solemn and reverent atmosphere, punctuated by a two-note repeated figure. This texture recalls the punctuation motive from *January*, where a sustained chord marks each phrase. However, unlike *January*, where the motive remains static, in *November*, the second note moves a half-step downward, producing a sighing effect that conveys a sense of grief and resignation. The first



<Example 11.2. Fanny Hensel, November from *Das Jahr* mm. 9-16>

eight-bar phrase ends with a perfect cadence in F minor, providing a moment of resolution before m. 9, where the hymn motive reappears in D-flat major, shifting the tonal center. As the music unfolds, the sighing motive becomes more prominent, no longer serving as punctuation but instead forming the primary melodic material. From mm. 10–12, it is stated four times—twice on G-flat and twice on A-flat, with the second iteration in each pair sounding an octave lower, creating an effect of distant echoes or fading voices. This passage leads into mm. 12–18, where the left hand introduces the muffled bell motive, a somber, tolling figure reminiscent of March, while the right hand presents an inverted form of the sigh motive. The sighing figures continue through mm. 19–25, gradually increasing in volume and intensity, preparing for a dramatic shift in character. At m. 26, the *Allegro molto agitato* section (mm. 26–33) bursts in with sweeping, fortissimo arpeggios of diminished seventh chords, which fall and rise over six octaves. This virtuosic passage is a hallmark of Fanny’s structural transitions, mirroring similar moments in later in mm. 146-152, January (mm. 38–41), June (mm. 117–118), and September (mm. 67–69).

In each of these instances, arpeggiated runs signal major sectional changes or prepare for dramatic climaxes.

Allegro molto agitato

mf accel. () ff simile

25

27

7

f quasi recitando 3 3

This musical score shows measures 25 through 28 of Fanny Hensel's 'November' from *Das Jahr*. The tempo is 'Allegro molto agitato'. Measure 25 begins with a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic and an acceleration (accel.) marking. The right hand features a series of arpeggiated chords, while the left hand plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment. At measure 26, the dynamics shift to fortissimo (ff) and the instruction 'simile' is given. Measure 27 contains a prominent arpeggiated run in the right hand, marked with a '7' and a slur. Measure 28 concludes with a forte (f) dynamic and the instruction 'quasi recitando', featuring triplet patterns in both hands.

<Example 11.2a. Fanny Hensel, November from *Das Jahr* mm. 25-8>

146

148

Adagio (♩.ca. 40)

lamentoso (h) dimin.

This musical score shows measures 146 through 152 of Fanny Hensel's 'November' from *Das Jahr*. The tempo is 'Adagio' with a quarter note equal to approximately 40 beats per minute. Measure 146 features a long, sweeping arpeggiated run in the right hand, marked with a '7' and a slur. The left hand provides a simple accompaniment. At measure 148, the mood is marked 'lamentoso' (lamentoso) and the dynamic is 'dimin.' (diminuendo). The score includes several slurs and dynamic markings throughout the passage.

<Example 11.2b. Fanny Hensel, November from *Das Jahr* mm. 146-152>



<Example 11.2c. Fanny Hensel, January from *Das Jahr* mm. 37-44>



<Example 11.2d. Fanny Hensel, June from *Das Jahr* mm. 118-9>

In *November*, the cascading arpeggios function as a transition to the central *Allegro molto* section, beginning at m. 34.

The *Allegro molto* section, which spans mm. 34–147, forms the emotional and structural core of the piece, following an ABA form in 6/8 time. The A section (mm. 34–71) strongly resembles the *Allegro assai* section from *August* (mm. 66–89) as well as the left-hand figuration in *September*'s introduction (mm. 1–4). The phrase structure is divided into eight-bar segments, with mm. 34–41 and mm. 42–49 presenting a rising motion, while mm. 50–57 feature a falling phrase, adding contrast. In mm. 58–71, the phrasing becomes increasingly compressed and

urgent. Within the top voice, Fanny employs a subtle six-beat grouping that adds expressive nuance. The first six beats convey hesitation, moving downward by a third (G-flat to E-flat),

The image shows a musical score for Fanny Hensel's 'November' from 'Das Jahr', measures 32-8. The score is in 6/8 time, marked 'Allegro molto' with a tempo of approximately 100. It features a piano (p) dynamic and an 'appassionato' marking. The right hand has a melodic line with a six-beat grouping, and the left hand has a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth-note chords. The key signature has three flats (B-flat major/C minor).

<Example 11.3. Fanny Hensel, November from *Das Jahr* mm. 32-8>

while the next six beats counter this hesitation, rising by a fourth (G-flat to C), as if questioning the previous phrase. This alternation repeats twice before the starting note shifts to B-flat, creating a sequential motion that intensifies toward the transition into the B section. The final statement of this pattern introduces a twelve-beat grouping, with the melody descending E-flat–D-flat–C-flat, leading into a climactic ascent to G-flat before cascading downward in arpeggios, setting up the contrasting B section (mm. 72–109).

The B section introduces a moment of respite, as the relentless sixteenth-note arpeggios of the right hand stop, replaced by repeated eighth-note chords that create a broader, more solemn character. This shift is structurally similar to the B section of *August's Allegro assai* (mm. 98–131). The left hand carries the melody until m. 83, after which the right hand takes over (mm. 84–97), presenting the *dream motive* from *January* and *March*. This dotted quarter-note melody,

accompanied by repeated eighth notes, directly echoes *March*, further reinforcing the sense of cyclical return. A brief interruption (mm. 98–101) signals the return of the A section (mm. 110–147), where the main theme reappears with slight variations. Notably, in mm. 146–147, the final rising arpeggio recalls the sweeping figures from mm. 27–28, bringing the

<Example 11.2a. Fanny Hensel, November from *Das Jahr* mm. 82-90>

movement full circle. At m. 148, the tempo shifts to *Adagio* (mm. 148–154), introducing the coda. Here, the sighing motive from the introduction returns, emphasizing a final moment of grief and reflection. Another brief interruption (mm. 155–158) introduces an *Allegro come prima*, leading to a final dramatic descent into arpeggiated diminished chords. The closing passage (mm. 163–170) alternates between F major and B-flat minor triads, creating a stark contrast before finally arriving at F minor, where both hands play a unison F minor scale in octaves, concluding the piece with a forceful, decisive cadence.

Throughout *November*, the sixteenth-note passages act as representations of lightning and storms, embodying the poem’s line: “*Ein Klagelied schallt / Durch Dämm’rung [Hügel] und Wald*” (*A song of complaint sounds through twilight [hill] and forest*). Additionally, the return of

the *dream motive* in the B section reflects the ephemeral nature of hope, echoing the poem’s closing sentiment: “*Es fliehen die Träume der Liebe [des Lebens] davon!*” (*The dreams of love [life] flee from there!*). By recycling motivic material from earlier movements, *November* does not exist in isolation but rather serves as a culmination of *Das Jahr* as a whole, reinforcing its cohesion and cyclical structure. The careful interplay of literary themes, visual elements, and musical motifs makes *November* a prime example of Fanny Mendelssohn’s ability to create a truly unified artistic vision—her own *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

13. December

Composition Date	December 16-23, 1841	
Chorale	Title: <i>Vom Himmel hoch</i>	
Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her.	From heaven on high I come here.	

<Table 12. Composition Date and Epigram for December from *Das Jahr*>

December serves as the culmination of *Das Jahr*, yet rather than concluding the cycle with a sense of finality, it conveys a sense of continuity, mirroring the cyclical nature of time itself. Unlike the other months, *December* does not feature an excerpted poem. Instead, it prominently quotes the Christmas chorale “Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her” (“From Heaven Above to Earth I Come”), reinforcing the sacred and celebratory spirit of the season. The vignette depicts a woman who is holding a baby, symbolizing the birth of Christ. Structurally, the piece is divided into two large sections (AB), each evoking a distinct seasonal image: the A section portrays a winter landscape, evoking snow and frost, while the B section focuses on the chorale melody, embracing a more spiritual and celestial atmosphere.



<Example 12.1a. Fanny Hensel, December from *Das Jahr* mm. 1-2>



<Example 12.1b. Fanny Hensel, April from *Das Jahr* mm. 12-3>

The A section opens with a delicate, shimmering texture, as thirds and the “snow” motive, first introduced in *April’s* Allegro section, establish a scene of falling snow. This undulating sixteenth-note figure continues until m. 16, maintaining a sense of fluid motion. A contrasting motive—a series of consecutive eighth notes marked *marcatissimo*—emerges in mm. 7–8, adding rhythmic drive that propels the music forward. This passage leads into the next section (mm. 17–24), where the momentum momentarily subsides before transitioning back into the snow motive at m. 29. At mm. 25–28, Fanny introduces broken arpeggios with slurs, altering the sound color and texture to create a more lyrical atmosphere. This brief moment of expressivity serves as a contrast before the return of the snow motive (mm. 29–35). Following this, an alternating rhythmic figure between the right and left hands appears in mm. 36–43, echoing a similar passage from February (m. 134). In mm. 43–51, the primary motive shifts to

dotted rhythms, and the closer positioning of the hands results in a lighter texture. The dynamic markings—*pp*, *p*, *mp*—reinforce the delicacy and softness required in this passage, requiring the performer to play with a touch of weightlessness. A legato section follows in mm. 52–63, characterized by ascending eighth-note arpeggios, introducing a sudden moment of lyricism and warmth. This passage gradually builds toward an expansive sequence that peaks at m. 57, followed by a long, rising and falling arpeggio from mm. 58–61. Under a G7 chord (mm. 62–63), a modified C major scale emerges, starting on G and ascending stepwise toward a high C, preparing for the transition into the B section (mm. 64–end). With this shift to C major and 6/8 time, the atmosphere becomes pure, warm, and sacred, evoking the arrival of the celestial.

The image displays a musical score for Fanny Hensel's 'December' from 'Das Jahr', measures 62-70. The score is in 6/8 time and marked 'Andante'. It shows a transition from a complex arpeggiated passage (mm. 62-63) to a more lyrical section (mm. 64-70). The right hand features ascending eighth-note arpeggios and a modified C major scale. The left hand provides harmonic support with chords and a gentle, rolling C major chord in the B section. Dynamics include 'molto ritard. e dim.' and 'pp'.

<Example 12.2. Fanny Hensel, December from *Das Jahr* mm. 62-70>

The B section begins at m. 64, with a gentle, rolling C major chord in the left hand, establishing a calm, reverent setting for the chorale melody. Meanwhile, the right hand plays a broken C major chord that moves in an undulating motion, similar to the arpeggiated figures heard earlier. These opening measures (mm. 64–70) serve as an introduction to the chorale. At

m. 71, the sacred melody of "Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her" is presented, and notably, the words of the chorale are inscribed beneath the right-hand chords, reinforcing the hymn's

<Example 12.2. Fanny Hensel, December from *Das Jahr* mm. 71-75>

<Example 12.2. Fanny Hensel, December from *Das Jahr* mm. 84-88>

spiritual significance. A change in character occurs at m. 82, where the tempo marking shifts to *più mosso* in 6/8, increasing the sense of motion and energy. Here, the left hand introduces a motive derived from the right hand's introduction (mm. 64–66), now functioning as an accompaniment for a variation of the chorale (mm. 84–99). This passage subtly intertwines the snow imagery of the A section with the celestial lightness of the B section, merging the earthly and the divine. A familiar transition returns in mm. 100–102, where the C major scale from mm. 62–63 is restated, now featuring an F# as a passing tone between F and G. This prepares the final passage, marked *Andante come prima*, a reflective return to earlier material. In mm. 103–end,

the C major triad is reiterated, gradually ascending toward the higher registers of the piano while the dynamic level grows increasingly softer. This final ascent seems to symbolize an angel ascending toward the heavens, an image reminiscent of Beethoven's last piano sonata, Op. 111, whose second movement also concludes in C major. However, unlike Beethoven, who

Andante come prima

<Example 12.3a. Fanny Hensel, December from *Das Jahr* mm. 101-9>

<Example 12.3b. L.v. Beethoven, Piano Sonata Op. 111, 2nd movement mm. 174-7>

maintains an open-ended sense of transcendence, Fanny chooses a simpler, more intimate resolution, allowing the final C major arpeggiation to dissolve into a quiet stillness.

Rather than concluding with a grand or dramatic closure, *December* ends softly and introspectively, mirroring the way the year naturally transitions into another cycle. As time does not simply end but continues forward, Fanny's decision to avoid a final climactic resolution aligns with the organic structure of life itself. This is further reinforced by the presence of the *Nachspiel*, an epilogue that extends beyond *December*, signaling the beginning of another year. In this way, *Das Jahr* does not seek a definitive conclusion but rather embraces the perpetual passage of time, leaving listeners with a sense of quiet continuity and renewal.

14. *Nachspiel*

The final piece of *Das Jahr*, *Nachspiel*, composed in December 15th, 1841, serves as a quiet postlude rather than a dramatic conclusion, reinforcing the idea that time is cyclical rather than finite. Unlike the other months, *Nachspiel* features no vignette or epigram, but instead incorporates the chorale melody "Das alte Jahr vergangen ist" ("The Old Year Has Passed"),



<Example 13.1. J.S. Bach, Das alte Jahr vergangen ist, BWV 288>

famously set by Bach as BWV 288. This choice of chorale underscores the reflection on the passing year while simultaneously expressing gratitude and renewal, themes central to *Das Jahr* as a whole.

Visually, *Nachspiel* is closely linked to *December*, as both are copied onto the same color paper, suggesting that Fanny conceived them as connected. The placement of a postlude after *December* signals that *Das Jahr* does not conclude with a final dramatic gesture, but instead follows the natural course of an actual year—one that seamlessly transitions into the next. This structural decision elevates *Das Jahr* beyond the representation of a single year, instead suggesting the perpetual passage of time and the continuous cycle of life itself.



<Example 13.2a. Fanny Hensel, *Nachspiel* from *Das Jahr* mm. 1-3>



<Example 13.2b. J.S. Bach, *St. Matthew Passion* BWV 244, mm. 1-4>

Structurally, *Nachspiel* is a brief yet profound postlude of just 21 measures, following a simple yet elegant form. It opens with a two-bar introduction (mm. 1–2) in A minor, the relative minor of C major, linking it harmonically to *December*, which ended in C major. This opening motif is derived from the opening of Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion*.³⁵ The soprano introduces a dotted-quarter note figure followed by two sixteenth notes, a motive that repeats three times, each time ascending. This figure interweaves with the chorale melody, subtly appearing throughout the piece. Meanwhile, the alto, tenor, and bass voices enter on off-beats, moving chromatically, creating a sense of gentle instability. Following the introduction, the first line of the chorale emerges softly in m. 3, with dynamic marking *p* and the chorale text notated



<Example 13.3. Fanny Hensel, December from *Das Jahr* mm. 3-4>

beneath the melody, mirroring similar settings in March and December. At m. 5, where the original chorale has a fermata, Fanny inserts a brief interlude, employing the ascending motive from the introduction over a D minor chord. The chorale resumes on the second beat of m. 6, marked once again *p*, maintaining a sense of quiet reflection. Another insertion occurs at m. 8, where a fermata would traditionally appear in the original chorale. This time, instead of maintaining an offbeat bass, the bass is placed firmly on the downbeat, providing greater

³⁵ Marianne Kielian-Gilbert, “Inventing a Melody with Harmony,” *Journal of Music Theory* 50, no. 1 (2006): 79-82.

harmonic stability under the A minor chord. While the bass remains steadier, the alto and tenor voices introduce quicker eighth-note motion, subtly intensifying the texture. At m. 9, the chorale melody returns, leading to a cadence in D minor on the third beat of m. 11, where another insertion follows. From m. 12 to m. 16, the chorale proceeds without interruption, now mirroring the phrasing of the original hymn more closely. Fermatas reappear, reinforcing the contemplative and hymn-like nature of this passage. In mm. 15–16, the final phrase of the chorale is enriched by eighth-note motion in the alto and tenor voices, adding warmth and fluidity.

The postlude begins in m. 17, returning to the introductory material. This time, the left-hand bass remains on A throughout the entire five-measure conclusion, functioning as a pedal point, while the inner voices subtly shift, outlining harmonic progressions that gradually resolve. The piece concludes in A major, employing a Picardy third, a technique frequently used by Bach to transform minor-key endings into luminous, major-key resolutions. This final harmonic gesture offers a sense of hope and renewal, suggesting that although the old year has ended, a new one begins, continuing the cycle of time.

By choosing *Nachspiel* as the epilogue to *Das Jahr*, Fanny Mendelssohn avoids a grand, final closure, opting instead for a moment of quiet transcendence. The use of Bach's chorale, a cyclical harmonic structure, and a text expressing gratitude for protection through the past year, all reinforce the idea that time does not truly end but flows forward into another cycle. Rather than depicting a single year as a closed entity, *Das Jahr* expands its scope, embracing the continuity of all the years of life and their interconnectedness.

Chapter 3. Conclusion

In Chapter 1, this study examines the life of Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel. Although she received a high level of musical education, societal norms prevented her from pursuing music as a professional career. However, as a gifted composer and musician, she continually turned to music—both performing and composing—as a source of resilience. Whenever she faced personal hardships, such as the death of her father or her miscarriage, she found strength through her music. Despite restrictions on publishing and public performances, Hensel shared her music through private concerts and, later in life, began publishing under her own name, defying societal expectations. Nothing could suppress her passion for music.

Italy had long been an artistic ideal for Fanny, and her journey there became one of the happiest periods of her life. At a time when her musical aspirations were constrained by family and societal expectations, this trip revitalized her creativity. She composed twice more than the years before this journey. Encounters with composers such as Charles Gounod and Hector Berlioz in Rome helped her regain confidence in her identity as a composer. Her journals and letters from this period document her enthusiasm, inspirations, and artistic exchanges, all of which played a crucial role in shaping *Das Jahr*.

Chapter 2 of this study analyzes *Das Jahr* (The Year), a cycle of thirteen piano pieces—one for each month of the year, plus a postlude—composed in 1841. What makes *Das Jahr* particularly remarkable is its integration of music, poetry, and visual art; each movement is paired with an epigram drawn from contemporary German Romantic poets such as Goethe, Tieck, and Schiller, while Fanny's husband, the Prussian court painter, contributed vignettes to accompany the pieces. This fusion of literature, music, and illustration allows *Das Jahr* to be

regarded as a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (“total artwork”), making it a original piano cycle. *Das Jahr* showcases Hensel’s creativity, technical skill, and use of recurring musical ideas influenced by Bach and Beethoven. In particular, the *Traum* (“dream”) theme from Bach’s *Es ist vollbracht* from *St. John Passion*, which appears at the very beginning of *January*, reemerges throughout the cycle, connecting each piece. Alongside the dream theme, other motivic ideas such as a muffled bell and snow motifs constantly recur throughout the whole piece linking the pieces together. For Fanny, whose life was shaped by the constraints of her time and society, her journey to Italy marked a turning point where she broke free from these restrictions and embraced new possibilities. Although *Das Jahr* was never published in her lifetime, its large-scale, cyclical structure marks a significant milestone in her compositional development—one that notably differs from similar works by her brother, Felix Mendelssohn. The cycle integrates both autobiographical and seasonal elements, demonstrating Fanny’s ability to translate personal experience into music.

Several solo piano works have been composed to musically depict the twelve months of the year, including *Das Jahr* by Fanny Hensel, *Les Mois* by Charles-Valentin Alkan, *The Seasons* by Pyotr Tchaikovsky, and *A Calendar Set* and *Calendar Collection* by Judith Lang Zaimont. Among these, *Das Jahr* stands out as the earliest known example of a musical calendar in solo piano literature. While Alkan and Tchaikovsky did not structure their works cyclically, *Das Jahr* features recurring motifs that unify the entire set. A similar approach appears in Zaimont’s *A Calendar Set* and *Calendar Collection*, written between 1972 and 1978. Considering this timeline, *Das Jahr* highlights Fanny’ innovative and forward-thinking compositional vision, showcasing her as a pioneering composer.

Yet, despite its significance, this remarkable cycle remains rarely performed in concert programs. I hope this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel's impact on 19th-century piano literature and highlights *Das Jahr* as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, inspiring greater appreciation, performance, and enjoyment of this work today.

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