

Mendelssohn Family – Collection of letters 1863-1913

to the friend of the family Ernst Rudorff

from the estate of Ernst Rudorff (1840-1916), Berlin

83 letters (including 1 postcard, 3 business cards, 1 with musical quotation, and a short notice) from 16 members of 3 generations of the Mendelssohn family, including 2 children of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy (Paul, Lili), 1 grandson (Albrecht), his sister in law (Albertine), his nephew (Ernst) and the families of his two cousins Georg and Franz Mendelssohn.

Together with 4 letters by Otto Schneider, co-founder and leading member of the Berliner Philharmonisches Orchester, and his wife for financial support by Robert von Mendelssohn recommended by Rudorff; and an expertise by Rudorff proving the authenticity of 4 Mendelssohn songs published by Aibl 1882, together with a copy of Hermann Levi about the same songs doubting their authenticity in harsh words.

The archive is completely transcribed (German) and organized following the Mendelssohn family tree.

The archive is offered complete as collection until June 30th 2024.

Price on request.

Background story

The family of Ernst Rudorff, composer, pianist and professor of the Berlin Koenigliche akademische Hochschule fuer Musik (founded 1869) had a long time close connection with the Mendelssohn family: Rudorff's mother Betty, active member of the Berliner Singakademie, was a sweetheart of the young Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy; his grandfather Carl Philipp Heinrich Pistor hired young Felix to organize his large collection of music autographs.

For Ernst Rudorff, his own close relationship with the Mendelssohn family began already in early childhood, being educated in private lessons together with Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy's second son Paul (1841-1880) and nephew Ernst Lejeune Dirichlet (1840-1868).

Rudorff is often invited in the various Mendelssohn families for parties, dinners and private music performances, and consulted as a piano expert for purchases and lessons.

He has a very close relation to the family of Franz Mendelssohn (1829-1889), the son of Felix' uncle Alexander and develops a lifelong friendship with their son Robert (1857-1917), illustrated in Robert's 22 letters between 1871-1913 with private invitations, congratulations and condolences, but also with touch on essential questions of Berlin's musical life: the private "Musical Society", founded by his friends Robert von Mendelssohn, Robert von Keudell and von Hobrecht in 1890 after Rudorff's resignation as head of the Stern'sche Gesangverein, and led by Rudorff until 1893; his prompt, unbureaucratic support - through Rudorff's intercession - for Otto Schneider (1851-1890), the ailing board member of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra; the close relation of both Rudorff and Mendelssohn with Joseph Joachim, their deep grief at his illness and death in 1907 and the effort for appropriate honor (printings, Hildebrandt monument 1913).

The scholarship with which Robert's brother Franz von Mendelssohn (1865-1935) – on Rudorff's recommendation - enabled the later conductor Carl Schuricht (1880-1967) to study music in Berlin is the subject of 6 letters (1901-1906).

Another special relationship developed from 1880 onwards with the youngest daughter of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy Lili (1845-1910), married to the Leipzig lawyer Adolf Wach since 1870 (10 letters from Lili Wach, 3 letters from her husband Adolf Wach and 3 letters from her son-in-law Albrecht Mendelssohn Bartholdy). Lili Wach takes care of her father's musical legacy and suffers from its fading importance at the end of the 19th century. Rudorff helps her to clarify the question of authenticity of songs first printed by Aibl in 1882 (MWV collective print 60), sends her his programs to various Mendelssohn celebrations and dedicates 3 songs to her in 1904. A long letter from Lili Wach from Switzerland in 1895 shows the close relationship between the two families, and also names a previously unknown granddaughter of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy – unknown at least for the Wikipedia family tree: her eldest daughter Elisabeth Anna Cécile Wach (1874-1953), who married the Bernese patrician Ernst Rudolf Friedrich von Steiger (1865-1933) in 1894, in the Swiss genealogies mentioned only as the daughter of Lili and Adolf Wach, without any reference to Mendelssohn, too.

List of letters:

The collection consists of the letters of the following family members, sorted according to the Mendelssohn family tree [number of letters in square brackets]:

1.x = tree of Joseph Mendelssohn (1770–1848)

uncle of Fanny and Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy

3.x = tree of Abraham Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1776-1835),

father of Fanny und Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy

- 1.1 Georg Benjamin Mendelssohn (1794–1874) [3],
married with: Rosamunde Mendelssohn (1804–1883) [6]
- 1.1.1 Betzy Thormann (1830-1906), Adoptivtochter [2]
- 1.2 Alexander Mendelssohn (1798-1871) [3]
married with: Marianne Mendelssohn (1799-1880) [1]
- 1.2.5 Franz (von) Mendelssohn (sen., 1829-1889) [7]
married with: Enole Mendelssohn (1829-1889) [2]
- 1.2.5.1 Robert von Mendelssohn (1857-1917) [22]
married with: Giulietta Mendelssohn geb. Gordigiani (1871-1957) [1]
- 1.2.5.2 Franz von Mendelssohn (jun., 1865-1935) [6]
- 3.2.3 Paul Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1841–1880) [3]
- 3.2.5 Lili Wach, geb. Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1845-1910) [10]
married with: Adolf Wach (1843-1926) [3]
- 3.2.1.2 – 3.2.5.3 Albrecht Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1874-1936) [3]
married his cousin Dora Wach, (daughter of Lili and Adolf Wach)
thereby nephew and son-in-law of Lili Wach
- 3.4 Albertine Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1814-1879) [4]
- 3.4.3 Ernst von Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1865-1935) [3]