

Mendelssohn, The Nazis and Me

by Geoffrey Clarfield (May 2012)

In the 1950s and early 1960s as a student of classical singing at the Royal Conservatory in Toronto I was exposed to the full range of European Art music, from Bach to Rachmaninoff. There I learnt that Bach, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Brahms and Bruckner had all come from Germany but so did my pediatrician for that matter, a German Jewish refugee from Hamburg,

Only when I was fifteen and I read a history of the Jews, did I finalize discover that the great German composer, Felix Mendelssohn, was the grandson of the greatest Jewish philosopher of the enlightenment, Moses Mendelsohn. This did not surprise me as I had grown up in a community with a number of schoolmates with the name Mandlsohn or Mendelssohn or variations thereof.