

1845



By
Robert Whitehouse Eshbach

Editorial content copyright
© Robert W. Eshbach, 2026

Regent & Nott

MUSICOLOGY

1845



Wilhelm Figdor to Julius and Fanny Joachim¹

Vienna, 2 Dec. 1844

Dear brother-in-law and sister,

It gives me great pleasure to be the bearer of pleasant news from your dear Jos. But at the same time you realize how necessary and useful it is for him, from time to time to receive admonitions and inducements from afar, and especially from his homeland and from his parents. It is up to you to impress upon him that he must aspire to achieve independence and to make a name for himself. He can only do this through composition — and this is not possible without effort and perseverance. Fanny certainly does not ask more of him than he can achieve, and she knows full well how much of his negligence is due to his tender years. Also, she has not complained, except that he needs to be pushed. We all know this, and the more he is courted by foreigners, the more tireless his relatives must be in saying to him that his successes so far have owed more to his youth and the fortunate external circumstances here, and that without composition, which demonstrates his diligence, he will have achieved nothing, and when he is older, and stands there merely as a violin player, he will be nothing. You must demand, with the authority that only parents possess, that he complete the work that he has begun. I also write to him often and do what I can to push him on to greater effort. We are all well, and hope to hear the same of you and your children, to whom I send many greetings.

*Farewell,
Your
Wilhelm*

¹ British Library: Joachim Correspondence, bequest of Agnes Keep, Add. MS 42718, p. 200.



Joseph Joachim
Berlin, January 13, 1845
Crayon Drawing by Wilhelm Girtner²

What is to accrue from the manhood of such a boy as Joseph Joachim, who, at the age of fourteen, performed during our last London musical season such pieces as Beethoven's Concerto, Mendelssohn's *Ottetto*, Beethoven's Sonata, dedicated to Kreutzer, &c. &c., all of them requiring finished style and great powers of physical endurance, it may be for some future amateur to discover. The whole relation would seem fabulous, were it not told of a boy wonderfully endowed, both intellectually and corporeally. That this early development of the musical nature is, however, a work that incurs risk, and should be prosecuted with caution, we have lately had a melancholy instance in the death of one of the Eichorns,³ at the age of twenty-two — formerly in the tenderest infancy of a *Wunderkind*, and then, with his little brother, astonishing Spohr and other good judges of the difficulties of the violin with feats that were deemed prodigious. Such is too often the fate of talent — it ripens into the great artist, or becomes an early sacrifice to death.⁴

— *Foreign Quarterly Review*, January, 1845

² From *The Musical Times*, Vol. 48, No. 775 (Sept. 1, 1907): 579.

³ The brothers Ernst and Eduard Eichhorn, born April 30th, 1822, and Oct. 17th, 1823, respectively, were celebrated violin prodigies. Ernst died on June 16th, 1844.

⁴ Quoted in *Dwight's Journal of Music*.

On Thursday the 16th of January, Joseph reprised the Beethoven concerto, this time with the Gewandhaus orchestra. The reviewer for *Signale für die Musikalische Welt* echoed sentiments that seemed to be on everyone's mind: "Given the great proficiency, the immaculate, secure and powerful tone, the artistic intelligence with which this magnificent work was performed, at the same time considering the cadenzas which he composed himself and introduced [into the concerto], we ask with amazement: what remains for the man to accomplish, who is capable of such things as a boy?"⁵

Joseph's rapid musical growth was apparent to all. The following Wednesday, the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* reported:

Of great interest was the playing of the young, 15-year-old Joseph Joachim. The local public knows already from earlier appearances the beautiful, full tone, which he knows how to elicit from the violin, as well as his great dexterity and security, and has always applauded and encouraged these virtues, the more remarkable in one so young. What Mr. Joachim offered us this time, however, was doubly surprising, for he not only gave evidence of the significant advance he has made in technical skill, but he also showed that he is already mature enough to grasp the intellectual and spiritual meaning of a work of the highest artistic importance. The manner in which he performed the difficult and brilliant concerto of Beethoven leaves no doubt as to his true vocation for the musical profession, and now sets him above the mere virtuosi in the ranks of artists. In this connection, we take notice of the two free cadenzas, which he introduced into the first and last movements of the concerto, ingeniously and interestingly made up of the principal themes of the work. Mr. Joachim's playing is so true and secure, his tone so large and resonant, and always so pure in intonation, even in the highest and most difficult passages, the execution so natural and yet so independent, that only by looking at his juvenile form can one convince oneself of his youthful age. May the young man who last year celebrated triumphs in England long preserve his childlike, modest nature, and neither through the great praise which his accomplishments have always found, this time not excepted, nor through the opinion that he may have already arrived at the peak of perfection, lead him astray and keep him from untiringly striving forward. He has a great and honored future before him and will certainly be numbered amongst the great artists.⁶

⁵ *Signale für die Musikalische Welt*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (January, 1845): 26.

⁶ *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (January 22, 1845), p. 62. Also quoted in John Alexander Fuller Maitland, *Joseph Joachim* (London and New York: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1905), 9–11. Original German: "AMZ, January 1845," josephjoachim.com.

Reading Joseph's letter to his family, however, one would hardly guess that he had done anything remarkable:

Joseph Joachim to his parents⁷

Leipzig, 17 January 1845

Dearest parents,

It will surprise you to know that I played the Beethoven concerto publicly in a Gewandhaus concert yesterday, and I am endlessly happy to be able to say to you that, thank God, it turned out well. You will receive a personal report of it from Mr. Singer from Pesth, who was at the concert. He arrived from Paris, where he left his son behind, and departed this morning from here on his way home. He regretted very much that he had consigned his son to Paris, because music is said to be very much in decline there, and the artists dreadfully rigid. Additionally, the living is very expensive. And the poor Mundi⁸ is left completely on his own there. How much must I thank dear God that he has supported me so well! Dear Herrman has lain in bed for two weeks with a bad foot, suffering from severe pain, and it will likely be another two weeks before he recovers. I, too, was somewhat unwell, but am again as healthy as a fish in water and didn't feel anything other from the disease than that I couldn't eat anything. — I will study the violin concerto of Mendelssohn that will appear soon; I have already heard it and find it wonderful; the Rondo especially is very effective. My studies go well. You have probably seen my letter to Rechnitz. I kiss all my dear siblings and nephews most affectionately.

*Your
adoring son
Joseph.*

Dear Herrman [sic] sends his regards, as does dear Fanny.

Joseph would be the second person, after David, to play Mendelssohn's violin concerto in public; as this letter indicates, he began work on it virtually simultaneously with David, and

⁷ British Library: Joachim Correspondence, bequest of Agnes Keep, Add. MS 42718, pp. 5-6.

⁸ Edmund Singer attended the Paris Conservatoire until 1846, when, at age 15, he won a position as concertmaster of the Budapest Stadttheater. In 1854, Singer succeeded Joachim as concertmaster in Weimar, a position he held until 1861 when he became concertmaster and professor of violin in Stuttgart. Singer played a fine "silver-toned" Maggini violin that he purchased from his former violin teacher, Ridley Kohné. While in Weimar, he studied composition with Raff. Many of Singer's violin editions, arrangements and cadenzas are still in print.

before David had given the premiere performance.⁹ Since Mendelssohn was away in Frankfurt for the better part of 1845, it is likely that Joseph first learned it under David's guidance.

On Sunday, January 25, Joachim joined David and six others in a performance of Mendelssohn's Octet at the Gewandhaus. In the same concert, David played the Bach Chaconne, and the David Quartet (David, Klengel, Hunger and Wittman) performed Beethoven's Quartet in C Minor, Op. 18, No. 4. *Signale für die Musikalische Welt* reported on David's performance of the Chaconne:¹⁰

In the performance of Seb. Bach's *Ciaconne* for violin solo, which we had a prior opportunity to hear at a soirée at Robert and Clara Schumann's, Herr Concertmaster David unfolded, with enormous technical skill, the power of his large tone,¹¹ which surpasses that of all virtuosi known to us, and the deep artistic insight with which he penetrates the spirit of every composition, and whose every poetic climax he makes lively to the mind's eye. Precisely this composition offers a multitude of opportunities to admire his talent. He is the first to have provided us with the key to understanding it; indeed, perhaps the only one who knows how to use it so. No wonder, that the enthusiastic gathering thanked him with stormy applause.

On March 13, Joseph heard David give the first performance of Mendelssohn's as yet unpublished violin concerto. ("You see, dear David," Schumann said afterward with a friendly smile, "that is the violin concerto that you always wanted to compose!")¹² The reviews in the papers immediately recognized the concerto as an important contribution to the violin literature. The *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* called it a "dignified" and "attractive" work, and praised especially the outer movements:

[...] the one distinguished itself through its worthy unity, richness of melody and brilliant bravoura, while the other, with its lightly hopping and teasing principal idea, gives a picture of frolicking cheerfulness. [...] Despite all its beauties, the middle movement left us somewhat colder; the reason for this might perhaps lie partly in the fact that its melodies are given almost exclusively to the higher and highest tones of the violin, which, due to their

⁹ The manuscript, which passed from Ferdinand David through Ernst von Mendelssohn Bartholdy, is now in the Jagiellonian Library in Krakow, Poland, where it was sent for safe keeping during the Second World War. It is dated 16 September 1844. The concerto had not yet been performed publicly; David gave the premiere at a Gewandhaus concert on March 13, 1845, Niels Gade conducting.

¹⁰ *Signale für die Musikalische Welt*, Vol. 3, No. 5 (January, 1845), p. 33.

¹¹ In his career, David owned two important violins: the Lark Stradivari of 1694, and a 1742 Guarneri del Gesù, played for many years by Jascha Heifetz.

¹² Carl Reinecke, *Und manche liebe Schatten steigen auf: Gedenklblätter an berühmte Musiker* (Leipzig: Gebrüder Reinecke, 1900), 151–52.

greater sharpness and lack of fullness, seemed less conducive to songful performance, and therefore speak less directly to the mood of the hearer. Herr Concertmeister David — through his musical *Bildung*, more competent than most to enter into the profundities of Mendelssohn's composition — performed this most difficult, but thankful, piece of music with his usual capable understanding and perfection, and — joyfully greeted by the audience on his appearance — he received in full measure, at the conclusion of each movement, the well-received recognition for his excellent achievement.¹³

In May, Joseph went on holiday with the Wittgensteins. Along the way, he had his first experience of Hanover and its music director Heinrich Marschner. Both would re-enter his life in 1853, when, as a young man, he would be called to Hanover as the concertmaster of the Royal Theatre. On May 15, he wrote to his parents: “We plan to be away from Leipzig for 10 days in all, and to return via the Harz (where it is very beautiful), which pleases me very much. I have been alone here for several days, because Hermann and Fanny are visiting the former's sister, who lives in Rinteln, a $\frac{3}{4}$ day's journey from here, and that didn't interest me much. I stayed here, rather, and await their return tomorrow. Though not large, Hanover is a pretty town, with very beautiful walks, but not many things to see, and I would perhaps have been bored had I not made a quite interesting acquaintance, namely that of Kapellmeister Marschner, the composer of the *Vampire*, etc., to whom I had a letter of introduction from Hauptmann, and who received me very warmly, and who has a most agreeable family; I have not yet played anything for him. — Yesterday I went to the opera, which is mediocre right down to the orchestra. Auber's *Des Teufels Antheil* seemed to me to be very shallow; also, I would not have gone if Marschner had not taken me along for free. —”¹⁴

¹³ *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, Vol. 47, No. 12 (March 19, 1845), p. 204.

¹⁴ Johannes Joachim and Andreas Moser, eds., *Briefe von und an Joseph Joachim*, vol. 1, 1842–1857 (Berlin: J. Bard, 1911), 4.



**Mendelssohn's Apartment Building in the Königstrasse,
currently Goldschmidtstrasse 12, Leipzig.
The Mendelssohn family occupied the second floor.**

Mendelssohn returned to Leipzig in August, prepared to resume his duties at the Gewandhaus and the conservatory after an extended sojourn in Frankfurt. On September 4, he and his young family moved into what would be his final residence: a newly-built apartment just outside the city center in the Königsstrasse. Mendelssohn's return was of inestimable value to Joseph — a reinvigoration of his musical life. Around this time, Fanny Wittgenstein wrote:¹⁵

There is no quartet gathering at David's where Joseph does not also play. Once, Mendels. accompanied him home on foot, and, taking leave, gave him a kiss. A few days ago, Mendels. decided to have him come to him, to play tête-à-tête; he played his own concerto and the new one by Mendel. a. indeed so to [Mendelssohn's] satisfaction that he exclaimed over and over again "very beautiful" (*"sehr schön"*). Mends. praise was best to be seen in the joy and bliss on Joseph's face. Such a demonstration of approval from such a distinguished man encourages Jos. a great deal and spurs him on to greater effort.¹⁶

© Robert W. Eshbach, 2026.

¹⁵Though this letter is undated, and its recipient is unknown, it probably dates from around this time and was probably written to Wilhelm Figdor. The document, in the British Library, is a contemporary transcription.

¹⁶British Library: Joachim Correspondence, bequest of Agnes Keep, Add. MS 42718, p. 221.