

# Protecting the good name of Mendelssohn

**'Injurious' rumours leaked on the eve of the composer's 200-year anniversary**

*by Cecilia Jorgensen and Jens A. Jorgensen, founders of Icons of Europe*

Brussels, 17 February 2009. – The association Icons of Europe refutes a recent allegation that Felix Mendelssohn in 1847 should have threatened to commit suicide if the famous Swedish soprano Jenny Lind did not elope with him to America.

On 12 January 2009, the British newspaper *The Independent* reported that Otto Goldschmidt, widower of Jenny Lind, allegedly placed an affidavit in the archive of the Mendelssohn Scholarship Foundation in 1896 with a 100-year embargo. (ref. “Conspiracy of silence: Could the release of secret documents shatter Felix Mendelssohn’s reputation?” by Jessica Duchon).



Felix Mendelssohn  
(1809-1847)

According to the article, a trustee of the Foundation, Prof. Curtis Price, a former principal of the Royal Academy of Music, says that “Goldschmidt declares in this affidavit that he had destroyed a letter that would have been deeply injurious to his wife and Mendelssohn: an 1847 missive from the composer to the soprano declaring passionate love for her, begging her to elope with him to America, and threatening suicide if she refuse.”

It is surprising that Prof. Price is said to be calling for “a full scholarly investigation” of the affidavit, while he at the same time leaks snippets of information on its secret and allegedly ‘deeply injurious’ content.

## **Affidavit not to be trusted**

Meanwhile, Icons of Europe refute the trustworthiness of any affidavit or similar declaration by Otto Goldschmidt on the basis of research conducted since 2003 concerning related issues. It shows that Goldschmidt on several occasions manipulated information in connection with Jenny Lind’s English-language Memoir (published in London in 1891 and “Dedicated by Gracious Permission to Her Majesty The Queen”) of which he was the editor.

For example, in Jenny Lind’s letter of 12 January 1846 to her legal guardian Judge Munthe, the meaning of a paragraph was distorted. In the Memoir, the translation reads: “Felix Mendelssohn comes sometimes to Berlin, and I have often been in his company. He is a *man*, and at the same time he has the most supreme talent.” This hint at an affair is not at all reflected in any part of Jenny Lind’s original letter in Swedish, and the above sentence should read: “Here is a *human being* [Det är en *människa*, sic *Italic*] and also the most superior talent.”

Besides, there are no signs of any passionate feelings towards Jenny Lind in seven long letters Mendelssohn wrote to her in 1845-1847, which are fully reproduced in the Memoir. He liked and admired her, and she was also a welcome guest in his family.

Moreover, Goldschmidt attempted in collusion with Julius Günther, a Swedish tenor to obtain if not create letters to prove that Günther and Jenny Lind had been engaged in early 1848. Goldschmidt and Günther’s correspondence of 14 October 1889 in German on the subject is archived at the Royal Library in Stockholm.

Two archived letters of May 1891 show that even Goldschmidt and Jenny Lind's daughter Jenny Maude corresponded with Günther to solicit letters that could prove such an engagement.

Nevertheless, Jenny Lind's Memoir of 1891 refers to no such letters and only vaguely mentions Julius Günther as her fiancé in 1848.

Later, Jenny Maude declared in an undated handwritten note archived at the Royal Library in Stockholm: "on Dec. 15 [1924 inserted between the lines] I burned, in Ernest's presence the three packets of letters written by J.L. to Günther as lent by him to O.G. for purposes of confirming the engagement. Years 1845-6-7 – all other letters, I have been assured, are destroyed."



Otto Goldschmidt (1829-1907) and his wife Jenny Lind (1820-1887). They married in 1852.

The technique of fabricating false information by declaring that the original evidence has been destroyed may seem convincing at first glance. A librarian took it indeed on face value, because Jenny Maude's declaration is filed under the heading "Evidence of destruction of JENNY LIND letters".

### Why raise suspicion?

Why would Otto Goldschmidt have wanted to sow damaging rumours about his own late wife and Felix Mendelssohn? Did he not simply pursue the wish of his late wife who, from the very beginning, tried to obscure or divert attention from the true identity of her two successive fiancés in 1847-1849 – a Swedish prince and Chopin?

“Could Otto Goldschmidt be seeking to divert attention from the true identity of Jenny Lind's two successive fiancés in 1847-1849 – at the unacceptable cost of discrediting Mendelssohn?”

Ongoing research by Icons of Europe reveals that Jenny Lind already since 1846 used Julius Günther as a cover for a **Swedish prince**, second in line to the Swedish and Norwegian thrones, with whom she broke their secret engagement in early October 1848.

Similarly, it turns out that Jenny Lind's engagement to a certain "Captain Harris of the Indian Army" in the spring of 1849, described at length in her Memoir of 1891, was in reality a cover for **Chopin**. "Harris" is a particularly elaborate after-construction, in which a senior British government advisor was implicated (ref. Icons of Europe's publications in 2003-2005 and later research).

In any event, why has the Mendelssohn Scholarship Foundation not yet investigated the content of the affidavit? Why is it such a big secret so many years later? Why leak it now on the eve of the composer's 200-year anniversary? Why does the Royal Academy of Music (today housing the Foundation) remain silent – after the leak – about the whole subject?

Could their attitude have anything to do with the Goldschmidt family's longstanding and close relations with these institutions as well as with the British and Swedish royal families? Jenny Lind created the Mendelssohn Foundation in 1849, and Otto Goldschmidt became later professor of piano and vice-principal of the Royal Academy of Music. As much as 27 personal letters from Queen Victoria's daughter Princess Christian to Jenny Maude in 1878-1898 are archived at the Royal Library in Stockholm.