

# Felix Mendelssohn

February 3, 1809 – November 4, 1847

Felix Mendelssohn was a German composer, pianist, and organist during the early Romantic period. He is known for his musical contributions to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, many symphonies, and "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing!"

Mendelssohn was born into a well-known Jewish family, his grandfather being a famous philosopher. He and his older sister, Fanny, exemplified strong musical talents from an early age.

In 1811, his family moved to Berlin to escape any possible backlash from the Mendelssohns' banking role in the breaking of Napoleon's Continental System blockade.

He began piano lessons at the age of six with his mother, moving on to be tutored by Marie Bigot in Paris the next year. In 1819, he began studying counterpoint and composition with Carl Friedrich Zelter. This made a major impact on Mendelssohn's career, his later works reflecting Zelter's conservative and Bach-influenced pieces. In 1821, Zelter introduced Felix to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who kept in contact with the child and also influenced much of Mendelssohn's work. Mendelssohn would go on to set many of Goethe's poems to music.

By the age of nine, Mendelssohn had already made his public concert debut. In the next few years, he wrote twelve-string symphonies and multiple chamber works. His first work was published when he was thirteen. At fifteen, he wrote his first symphony for a full orchestra. In 1826, he wrote one of his best-known early pieces, his overture to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. His success in writing the piece and its effect on musical Romanticism came partly from his broad education in the arts. Mendelssohn also studied art, philosophy, language, and literature. From 1826-1829, he attended lectures at the Humboldt University of Berlin.

In 1829, Mendelssohn arranged and conducted a successful performance of Bach's work in Berlin. This was a major event in the revival of Bach's music throughout Europe and earned Mendelssohn much positive attention at the age of 20. He spent the next few years traveling and piecing together his famous Scottish and Italian symphonies. In 1832, his mentor Zelter died.

Mendelssohn had anticipated succeeding him as the conductor of the Singakademie but was defeated by Carl Friedrich Rungenhagen. Instead, he was appointed musical director of Düsseldorf the following year. He began to divide his time between Düsseldorf and Britain, putting on many concerts and participating in many other musical engagements in Britain. On multiple occasions, he met and played for Queen Victoria.

In 1835, he was offered a position as director of the Gewandhaus Orchestra. He worked to revive the town's musical life by focusing on not only the orchestra but also the opera house, choir, and other musical institutions. In 1843, he founded a music school, the Leipzig Conservatory. He persuaded many prominent musicians, such as Robert Schumann, Ferdinand David, and Moritz Hauptmann, to join as staff members. Within this period, he married Cecile Charlotte Sophie Jeanrenaud. They had five children together. In 1844, he met Swedish soprano Jenny Lind, whom he became very close with and even began writing an opera for, but never finished.

After a long tour of England that left him exhausted and ill, Mendelssohn died. Many believe that his death may have been due to overworking and distress. His musical talents are still remembered today, especially his contributions to composing within the Romantic period.

# Classical Pieces

Week 1 - A Midsummer Night's Dream Overture

Week 2 - Songs Without Words

Week 3 - Octet in E-flat Major

Week 4 - Symphony No. 3 - The Scottish

Week 5 - The Hebrides Overture

Week 6 - Violin Concerto in E Minor

# Composer Study

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date of Birth:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Place of Birth:** \_\_\_\_\_

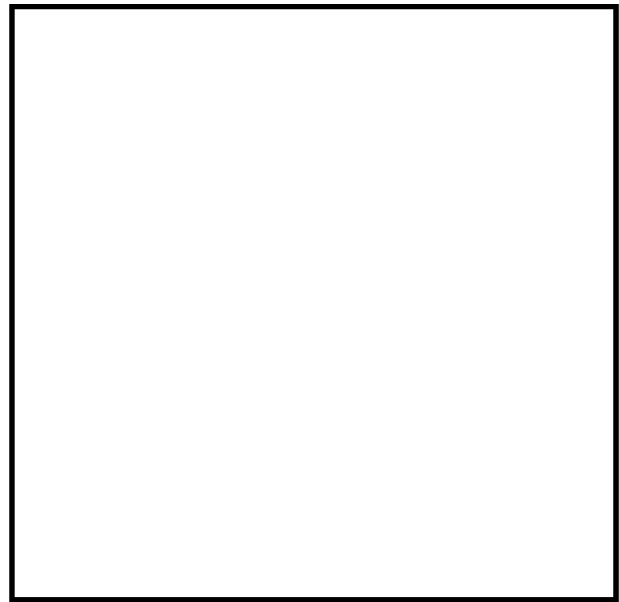
**Composer Fun Facts:**

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**Instruments Used:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Famous Compositions:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Further Study:**

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