



Felix Mendelssohn

(1809-1847)

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- ▶ Felix Mendelssohn, like Mozart, was a child prodigy, performing as a pianist from the age of 9, and writing some of his finest compositions as a teenager
 - ▶ String Octet (age 16)
 - ▶ Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (age 17)
- ▶ Unlike many of his contemporaries, his music still retained many conservative classical qualities—we might even characterize Mendelssohn as a “Classic-Romantic”
 - ▶ It was Mendelssohn that reawakened an interest in the music of J.S. Bach, conducting a performance of his *St. Matthew Passion* in 1829
- ▶ Mendelssohn's works include symphonies, overtures, oratorios, concertos, piano works and chamber music

Songs without Words

- ▶ Mendelssohn invented the genre “Song without Words”—it is a character piece for piano that sounds like a song, with a lyrical melody that has no words
 - ▶ A few people added words to them later, but they do not need any words to be effective
- ▶ These pieces were very popular and successful—they were often played by young ladies in the parlor to show off their “fine breeding”
- ▶ The pieces sometimes have prelude, interlude, and postlude sections for the “accompanist” which are clearly distinguishable from the music for the “singer”

Overture to A Midsummer Night's Dream

- ▶ Felix's family was devoted to Shakespeare, so naturally he wrote an concert overture for *Midsummer Night's Dream*
- ▶ Different characters and places in the play are vividly depicted in the overture
 - ▶ The soft opening chords evoke the mysterious magic woods
 - ▶ Fast-moving high-register strings suggest the flittering fairies
 - ▶ Lush, gentle winds and strings represent the lovers
 - ▶ Vigorous descending ninth leaps represent the braying of an ass
- ▶ What type of formal plan does Mendelssohn use to organize his literary ideas?
 - ▶ **SONATA FORM!**