



Felix Mendelssohn

BORN 1809, Hamburg, Germany. **DIED** 1847, Leipzig, Germany

HIGHLIGHTS

1. Mendelssohn was born in Hamburg, Germany, on February 3, 1809.
2. By age 9, he had written nine fugues, five symphonies for strings, two operas, and assorted smaller pieces.
3. His *Octet in E flat for Strings*, written at 16, surpasses anything written by other child prodigies at the same age, including Mozart and Schubert.
4. Like Mozart, he could listen to a piece of music only once and remember every note, and he also composed all his works in his head and then jotted them down fully formed.
5. Unlike many of his colleagues, Mendelssohn never suffered from the creative tortures of composing, from financial woes, or from a lack of popularity.

BACKGROUND & TIMES

1. Mendelssohn was practically raised on the knee of the great German poet Goethe.

MAJOR WORKS

SYMPHONIES

No. 1 in D (Italian Symphony); *No. 2 in B*; *No. 3 in A Minor*; *No. 4 in A*; *No. 5 in D Minor*.

ORCHESTRAL MUSIC

Concerto No. 1 in G Minor for Piano and Orchestra; *No. 2 in D Minor for Piano and Orchestra*; *Violin Concerto in E Minor*; *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage Overture*; *Hebrides Overture*; *A Midsummer's Night's Dream (Overture and Incidental Music)*.

CHAMBER MUSIC

Octet in E-flat for Strings; *Piano Trio No. 1 in D Minor*; *String Quartet in F Minor*.

OTHER INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

Sonatas for Organ; *Songs without Words for Piano*; *Sonata No. 2 for Cello and Piano*.

2. He was born to wealthy and influential parents and was surrounded by the cultural and intellectual elite of Germany.
3. Mendelssohn was well loved in England and became one of Queen Victoria's favorites.
4. He was always willing to help promote the works of others, whether it was the long-deceased Bach or such contemporaries as Berlioz and Schumann.
5. The emotional trauma suffered by Mendelssohn at learning of the death of his beloved sister, Fanny, at age 42, left him irreparably changed.

INNOVATIONS IN STYLE

1. Mendelssohn's *Octet in E-flat* helped define his trademark style: tender, light and airy.
2. Mendelssohn's music combines the sentimentality of Romanticism with the economy of the Classical period.
3. Pieces like Mendelssohn's *Violin Concerto in E-flat for Strings* are known for their combination of

imagination balanced by reason, and emotion tempered by intellect.

4. Wagner called him a "landscape painter" because of his abilities to paint a picture with music.
5. Critics argue that Mendelssohn never suffered a spiritual and musical transformation like so many of his colleagues, and therefore his music lacks the depth and stylistic growth that emerges from such challenges.

UNIQUE INFLUENCE

1. His "exit music" and the "Wedding March" in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are some of the most familiar and enduring pieces of classical music.
2. Mendelssohn is credited for bringing Bach out of obscurity and placing him into his current position of prominence.
3. Mendelssohn was an immensely gifted man who excelled not just at composing but at the piano, organ, violin, and at conducting. He was also a dedicated educator and leader among other composers of his time.