

CHAN 2025 an introduction to Felix Mendelssohn



# CHANDOS :: intro

## Classical music is inaccessible and difficult.

It's surprising how many people still believe the above statement to be true, so this new series from Chandos is not only welcome, it's also very necessary.

I was lucky enough to stumble upon the wonderful world of the classics when I was a child, and I've often contemplated how much poorer my life would have been had I not done so. As you have taken the first step by buying this CD, I guarantee that you will share the delights of this epic journey of discovery. Each CD in the series features the orchestral music of a specific composer, with a selection of his 'greatest hits' played by top quality performers. It will give you a good flavour of the composer's style, but you won't find any nasty surprises – all the music is instantly accessible and appealing. The discs are beautifully presented, and very good value for money, too.

I sincerely hope this CD marks the start of your own lifelong passion for classical music.

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#### Felix Mendelssohn (1809 – 1847)

1	The Hebrides, Op. 26* Overture Allegro moderato – Animato	10:19
	Piano Concerto No. 1 in G minor, Op. 25 <sup>†</sup>	20:25
2	I Molto allegro con fuoco –	7:31
3	II Andante	6:39
4	III Presto - Molto allegro e vivace - Tempo I	6:11
5	Wedding March <sup>‡</sup> from incidental music to A Midsummer Night's Dream, Op. 61	4:57
6	Capriccio brillant, Op. 22†	11:28

Andante - Allegro con fuoco









On his famous tour of Scotland in 1829 in company with Karl

#### piano concerto no. 1

Mendelssohn demonstrated precocious youthful gifts, alike as composer, pianist and conductor, which were carefully fostered by his wealthy, cultivated parents, not least at the illustriously attended music parties held in their home in Berlin on Sunday mornings, at which he could try out his every new composition. His juvenilia included no fewer than five concertos for one or two pianos, for violin, and for violin and piano. But it was not until he was twenty-

Klingemann. Felix Mendelssohn arrived in Oban on 7 August and crossed over to the Isle of Mull. In a letter to his parents that evening he noted down in some detail the opening twenty-one bars of what was to become the Overture The Hebrides, Op. 26. Although the work is also known by the title 'Fingal's Cave' it was the general view of the Hebrides that provided Mendelssohn with his initial musical inspiration, as he did not take the boat trip to the celebrated cave on Staffa until the next day. The whole work evolved guite slowly, a first version being completed in Italy in December 1830. This was then revised considerably before the premiere in London in April 1832, further smaller changes following before publication. With his uncanny evocation of wide open space, the surge of the waves, soaring seabirds, and perhaps even the chug of the steamer, all accomplished by means of ingenious transformations of the mysterious opening theme, subtle modulations and delicate touches of orchestral colour, Mendelssohn produced a masterpiece that caused even Wagner to acknowledge him as 'a first-class landscape painter'.

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Mendelssohn





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29:43

10:36

6:50

6:28

5.47

Total time 76:51

Symphony No. 4 in A major.

Scottish National Orchestra\*

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra‡

London Mozart Players†

Philharmonia Orchestra§

Howard Shelley conductor/soloist†

Sir Alexander Gibson

Sir Charles Groves‡

Walter Weller§

Thomas Bowes leader

Op. 90 'Italian'§

II Andante con moto

9 III Con moto moderato

10 IV Saltarello, Presto

7 | Allegro vivace

two that he produced a work in this genre which he deemed

worthy of presenting to the world at large, the Piano Concerto in G minor, Op. 25. It was sparked off by a charming young pianist from Munich, Delphine von Schauroth, with whom he had 'flirted dreadfully' (as he wrote to his family) in 1830 at the start of a 'grand tour' considered vital for his wider education. Though dedicating it to her after its hasty completion in the early autumn of 1831, he himself gave the premiere on 17 October at a big charity concert in Munich attended by the King and Queen of Bavaria.

I was very warmly applauded over and over again. The orchestra accompanied me well, and the whole thing went like mad.

This was how he described the general response to a work which, even if more virtuosic than profound, yet overflows with youthful élan as well as providing an early example of his life-long quest for structural unity and continuity.

The Molto allegro con fuoco first movement dispenses with the extended orchestral exposition of classical concerto sonata form. Soloist and orchestra are thrown at once into a turbulent G minor subject calling to mind the guestion asked of Mendelssohn by his old teacher Carl Zelter when, as a boy of twelve, he improvised for the seventy-two year old Goethe: 'What goblins and dragons have you been dreaming about to drive you along so wildly?' The lyrical second subject, veering unexpectedly from B flat into D flat major, restores tranquillity. The big surprise comes at the end when, after a drastically compressed development and recapitulation, a tucket from horns and trumpets and a winsome little rejoinder from the soloist carry the music, without a break, into E major for the Andante, a warm-hearted, tenderly scored, ternary-shaped 'Song without Words'. The dream is shattered when the tucket returns in E minor as a bridge to the G major finale, Presto, a scintillating free rondo with passing references to material of the first movement near the end to clinch the concerto's overall unity. Mendelssohn himself liked to play this movement 'as fast as possible, provided that the notes can be heard'.

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### wedding march

Mendelssohn was born in 1809 into a highly cultured family of bankers in Hamburg. The parents encouraged the development of their children's tastes and abilities in all the arts. Mendelssohn became an accomplished painter, composed music from a very early age and guickly acquired a reputation as a pianist. He and his siblings read voraciously, including the plays of Shakespeare, reissued in 1825 in the meticulous translation by Ludwig Tieck and August Wilhelm von Schlegel. Mendelssohn was so captivated by A Midsummer Night's Dream that he composed his famous Overture to the play the next year, at the age of only seventeen. Many years later the Prussian king Friedrich Wilhelm IV took action to revitalise the cultural life of the country's capital and his initiative included the revival of Greek tragedy. He asked Mendelssohn, now the conductor of the Gewandhaus Orchestra in Leipzig, to compose incidental music to a number of the plays, which were performed at the Neues Palais in Potsdam.

The success of Mendelssohn's contributions led to the commission, in 1843, for music to accompany a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Returning to his earlier Overture, Mendelssohn composed a further twelve numbers and a finale (Op. 61), developing in many of the movements material which he had already introduced in the earlier work. The first performance of Shakespeare's play with Mendelssohn's music took place on 14 October. Mendelssohn was not especially pleased with the staging, which had been entrusted to the seventy-year-old Tieck whom the King held in particular esteem, and was visibly

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irritated when tea was being noisily served in the royal box as he was conducting the orchestra. But throughout the nineteenth century Mendelssohn's music was a normal accompaniment to productions of the play, and the Wedding March, composed as an intermezzo between Acts IV and V and among the most popular of Mendelssohn's many enduring works, remains a favoured processional, in a version for organ, at weddings around the world.

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#### capriccio brillant

No country was guicker to take Mendelssohn to its heart than England, where after a brilliant debut as conductor of several teenage works in 1829, he returned just three years later, at the age of twenty-three, to introduce his G minor Concerto to London at a concert of the Philharmonic Society that May as well as giving the premiere of the first of his three single-movement works for piano and orchestra, the Capriccio brillant, Op. 22. Formally this work consists of a slow introduction in B major followed by an allegro in the tonic minor, a plan similarly adopted in several works for solo piano, including his well-known Rondo capriccioso, Op. 14 in E major/minor. The rich cantabile of the Andante is upheld by a delicate pizzicato accompaniment possibly inspired by Weber. For the main Allegro con fuoco Mendelssohn chooses not rondo form, as was often his wont. but classical sonata form, allowing himself the licence of an unashamedly hearty, march-like second subject in the relative major key of D. In the brief ensuing development he artfully combines both first and second subjects. After a condensed recapitulation (in which the second subject is brought back by the soloist with magical delicacy in B major) a substantial, brilliantly surging coda drives the work to a forceful finish in B minor.

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## symphony no. 4 'italian'

The 'Italian' Symphony was composed in a shorter time than the so-called 'Scottish' (begun as early as 1829 but not completed until 1842), though it had a strange subsequent history. Mendelssohn started work on it in Rome in the early part of 1831, writing home in February that 'it will be the jolliest piece I have yet composed'. Although he made good progress, there was still work to be done on it on his return to Berlin in 1832. When in November of that year Mendelssohn received a commission from the Philharmonic Society in London for three works, including a symphony, he chose to finish off the 'Italian' (rather than the more obviously appropriate 'Scottish'), and it received its premiere, with the composer conducting, at the Hanover Square Rooms on 13 May 1833. He felt, however, that it needed changes, and despite revising it over the following years, he was still dissatisfied with it at the time of his death. While English audiences occasionally heard it again under other conductors during the composer's lifetime, Mendelssohn astonishingly let it remain unheard in Germany, and it was first performed there only posthumously, in 1849, and published in 1851.

Throughout his life Mendelssohn was a keen landscape artist, and he recorded many scenes of both Scotland and Italy in his sketchbooks. His Third and Fourth Symphonies can in some ways be considered as aural counterparts to the drawings, but Mendelssohn continued to view the symphony as a predominantly abstract genre, in contrast to Berlioz's contemporary pursuit of the programmatic approach. Unlike Beethoven, who in the case of the



'Pastoral' Symphony spells out the work's extra-musical associations, Mendelssohn deliberately refrains from giving any verbal clues, with the exception of the 'Saltarello' marking of the 'Italian' Symphony's finale. He leaves it to the individual listener to conjure up any images or moods that may suggest themselves, and did not even attach the 'Scottish' and 'Italian' labels to the symphonies publicly, though he referred to them by these names in his correspondence. The curious result was that Schumann, in reviewing the 'Scottish' Symphony, was under the impression that it reflected Mendelssohn's stay in Italy!

In complete contrast to the 'Scottish' Symphony, the 'Italian' opens with a burst of vivacious energy, coupled with a scoring that emphasises transparency and lightness of texture. No mists here, but cloudless southern skies, and all the bustle of Italian life carried along in bouncing 6/8 rhythms. The comparatively short slow movement is often said to represent a religious procession which Mendelssohn had witnessed in Naples, hence the nickname 'Pilgrim March' which is sometimes applied to it. Eric Werner, however, has drawn attention to the similarity of the main theme to a song by Mendelssohn's teacher Carl Zelter; Zelter died in 1832 while Mendelssohn was still working on the symphony, and this movement may well be a tribute to his mentor. The third movement, cast in a conventional minuet and trio pattern, is notable for the delectable scoring of the trio, ushered in by horn and bassoon fanfares. The 'Saltarello' finale, openly admitting its national origins, in fact combines characteristics of both the saltarello and the tarantella. Though the movement, unusually, is driven headlong from beginning to end in the minor key, Mendelssohn introduces playful fugal elements into the central section, reminding us of his natural inclination for contrapuntal writing. Evidence of his mastery and freshness here, as throughout the symphony, is so abundant that it will always remain a great puzzle as to why he himself considered it unworthy of performance.

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an introduction to Ludwig van Beethoven

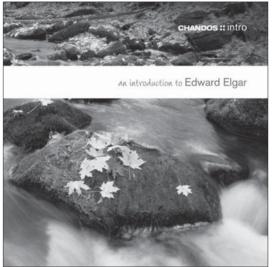
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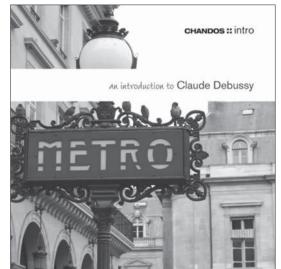
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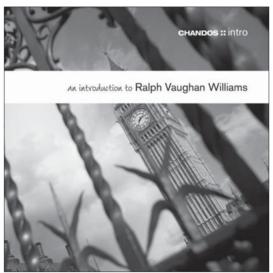


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an introduction to Felix Mendelssohr



# Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

A greater prodigy even than Mozart, the German composer, pianist and conductor Felix Mendelssohn was composing mature works from the age of twelve. Spurred on by his richly cultured upbringing and inspired by art and nature, he wrote music that abounds in melodic freshness and inventive orchestration. The energy, clarity and tunefulness of Symphony, No. 4, the 'Italian' Symphony, have made it his most popular.

The Hebrides, Op. 26	10:19

2 - 4 Piano Concerto No. 1 in G minor, Op. 25

5 Wedding March 4:5

6 Capriccio brillant, Op. 22 11:

7 - 10 Symphony No. 4 in A major, Op. 90 'Italian' 29:43

Total time 76:51

20:25

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