



Felix Mendelssohn

Symphony No. 1

Jakob Ludwig Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy (3 February 1809 – 4 November 1847), born and widely known as Felix Mendelssohn, was a German composer, pianist, organist and conductor of the early Romantic period. Mendelssohn's compositions include symphonies, concertos, piano music, organ music and chamber music. His best-known works include the overture and incidental music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the *Italian Symphony*, the *Scottish Symphony*, the oratorio *St. Paul*, the oratorio *Elijah*, the overture *The Hebrides*, the mature *Violin Concerto* and the *String Octet*. The melody for the Christmas carol "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" is also his. Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words* are his most famous solo piano compositions.

A grandson of the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, Felix Mendelssohn was born into a prominent Jewish family. He was brought up without religion until the age of seven, when he was baptised as a Reformed Christian. Felix was recognised early as a musical prodigy, but his parents were cautious and did not seek to capitalise on his talent.

Mendelssohn enjoyed early success in Germany, and revived interest in the music of Johann Sebastian Bach, notably with his performance of the *St Matthew Passion* in 1829. He became well received in his travels throughout Europe as a composer, conductor and soloist; his ten visits to Britain – during which many of his major works were premiered – form an important part of his adult career. His essentially conservative musical tastes set him apart from more adventurous musical contemporaries such as Franz Liszt, Richard Wagner, Charles-Valentin Alkan and Hector Berlioz. The Leipzig Conservatory, which he founded, became a bastion of this anti-radical outlook. After a long period of relative denigration due to changing musical tastes and antisemitism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, his creative originality has been re-evaluated. He is now among the most popular composers of the Romantic era

Although the autographed score was published in 1831, Mendelssohn completed his **Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 11** on 31 March 1824, when the composer was only 15 years old. Originally titled *Symphony 13*, it seemed that he originally intended this work to be a part of his *String Symphonies*, before changing the work to a full orchestra. The work was premiered at a private gathering on 14 November 1824 to honor his sister Fanny Mendelssohn's 19th birthday. Its public premiere would not occur for another two years when on the first of February 1827, the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, performing under the leadership of its then-Kapellmeister Johann Philipp Christian Schulz, would perform the work. The symphony was dedicated to the Philharmonic Society, who performed the London premiere on May 25, 1829, with Mendelssohn conducting. However, for this performance Mendelssohn orchestrated the scherzo from his *Octet Op. 20* as an alternative third movement for the symphony. The London première was reviewed in *The Harmonicon*: "though only about one or two-and-twenty years of age, he has already produced several works of magnitude, which, if at all to be compared with the present, ought, without such additional claim, to rank him among the first composers of the age.... Fertility of invention and novelty of effect, are what first strike the hearers of M. Mendelssohn's symphony; but at the same time, the melodiousness of its subjects, the vigour with which these are supported, the gracefulness of the slow movement, the playfulness of some parts, and the energy of others, are all felt.... The author conducted it in person, and it was received with acclamations."

The symphony consists of four movements: a bursting with energy *Allegro di molto* first movement in c minor, before a gentle sonata form *Andante* in E-flat major. The third movement is a *Menuetto* in C minor, however when compared to the standard minuet & trio form, it is slightly different as there is an extra link to the main minuet after the binary form trio section. Finally, the fourth movement *Allegro con fuoco* opens with a primary theme which bears a striking resemblance to the final movement of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Symphony No. 40*.