



Felix Mendelssohn (3 February 1809 – 4 November 1847) was a German composer, pianist, organist and conductor of the early Romantic period. A grandson of Moses Mendelssohn, grew up in an affluent culture-loving Jewish family which on its conversion to the Lutheran faith added Bartholdy to the family name. He was a child prodigy as a pianist and became a pupil of Goethe's friend Zelter; by the time of his death, aged 38, he was recognized as one of Germany's foremost composers. He matured early, writing his octet at 16 and the *Midsummer Night's Dream* overture at 17. Later instrumental works include 5 symphonies, 3 concertos, organ sonatas, piano pieces (*Lieder ohne Worte*), chamber and church music, and incidental music to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Racine's *Athalie* and the *Antigone* and *Oedipus at Colonus* of Sophocles to commissions from Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia. His first oratorio, *St. Paul* (1836), proved successful in England, and *Elijah* (1846) received its premiere at the Birmingham Festival with the composer conducting.

He paid ten visits to Britain: the 'Hebrides' overture *Fingal's Cave* was inspired by his Scottish tour during the first in 1829. The tone-poem *Die schöne Melusine* has links with Grillparzer and is based on the medieval legend (see *Schöne Melusine*). He met Goethe several times between 1817 and 1830 and a warm relationship developed despite a 60-year age difference; his overture *Meeresstille und glückliche Fahrt* is a musical paraphrase of Goethe's similarly named lyrics, and his dramatic cantata *Die erste Walpurgisnacht* is based on the text of *Faust*.

Mendelssohn helped his pupils unstintingly and devoted himself to promoting the work of other composers, including F. Schubert and especially J.S. Bach, for the revival of whose music he was chiefly responsible; his performance of the *St Matthew Passion* in Berlin in 1829 was a landmark in musical history. In 1835 he followed in Bach's footsteps to Leipzig, becoming musical director of the *Gewandhaus* orchestra and soon establishing its international reputation; he founded the Leipzig Conservatory, the first of its kind in Germany, in 1843. Proscribed by the National Socialist regime, his works have returned to favour since the war. Their melodic fluency and delicate textures have sometimes led to his being dismissed as lightweight, a judgement which overlooks both his classical attention to form and detail and the Romantic energy of his inspiration.

The **Symphony No. 4 in A major, Op. 90**, commonly known as the *Italian* was finished in Berlin, 13 March 1833, in response to an invitation for a symphony from the London (now Royal) Philharmonic Society; he conducted the first performance himself in London on 13 May 1833, at a London Philharmonic Society concert. The symphony's success, and Mendelssohn's popularity, influenced the course of British music for the rest of the century. However, Mendelssohn remained unsatisfied with the composition, which cost him, he said, some of the bitterest moments of his career; he revised it in 1837 and even planned to write alternate versions of the second, third, and fourth movements. He never published the symphony, which only appeared in print in 1851, after his death. The piece is scored for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani and strings. It is in four movements: *Allegro vivace*, *Andante con moto*, *Con moto moderato*, and *Saltarello: Presto*. The joyful first movement, in sonata form, is followed by an impression in D minor of a religious procession the composer witnessed in Naples. The third movement is a minuet in which French Horns are introduced in the trio, while the final movement (which is in the minor key throughout) incorporates dance figurations from the Roman saltarello and the Neapolitan tarantella. It is among the first large multi-movement works to begin in a major key and end in the tonic minor, another example being Brahms's first piano trio.