

Felix Mendelssohn

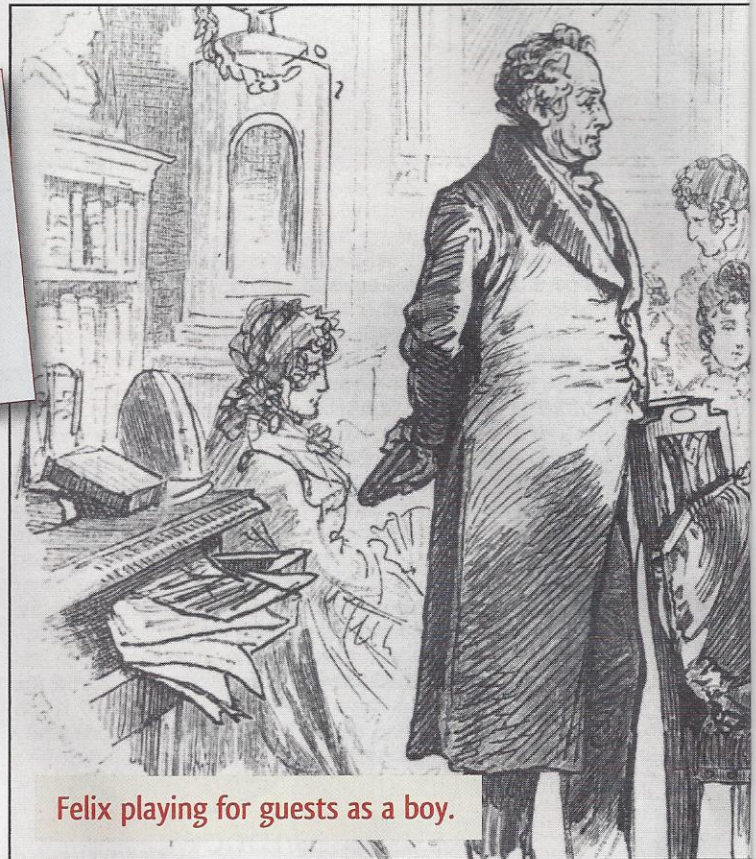
1809-1847

Felix Mendelssohn was a very talented musician – perhaps as great as Mozart. Like Mozart, he was a child prodigy and amazed people with his piano playing. He lived in Germany during the Romantic period and wrote many wonderful compositions.

Felix Mendelssohn was born into a rich family in Berlin, Germany. His father was a banker and his mother was a musician. He had one brother and two sisters. The Mendelssohn children were expected to study very hard every day with private tutors who came to their house. They learned about philosophy, art, languages, math, literature, drawing, and of course music. They learned to play the piano and the violin. It was clear from an early age that Felix and his sister Fanny were especially talented at music.

On Sundays the Mendelssohns invited famous writers, artists and musicians to their house. They held concerts and plays and discussed art and literature. Felix began performing at these gatherings on the piano when he was about 9 years old. He also would conduct a small orchestra. When he was 10, he began composing and had written over 60 pieces a year later. His first published composition was a piano quartet that was printed when he was 13.

The Mendelssohn house was a very important part of the German artistic community. As a boy, Felix met some of the most famous musicians in Germany. This helped him become a better musician.



Felix playing for guests as a boy.

Travelling

As an adult, Mendelssohn spent many years in Leipzig, Germany where he conducted the city's orchestra and started a music school. He also loved to travel and see new places. Often he composed works about the places he went. He went to Italy, Scotland, England, Austria, Switzerland, and France. These places inspired his beautiful *Hebrides Overture* (see page 14), and the Italian and Scottish symphonies.

During his trips he met important musicians (Chopin, Liszt, and Paganini) and even the king and queen of England. He was very popular in England and visited it often. He married a singer and had five children, but had poor health and died when he was only 38 from a stroke.

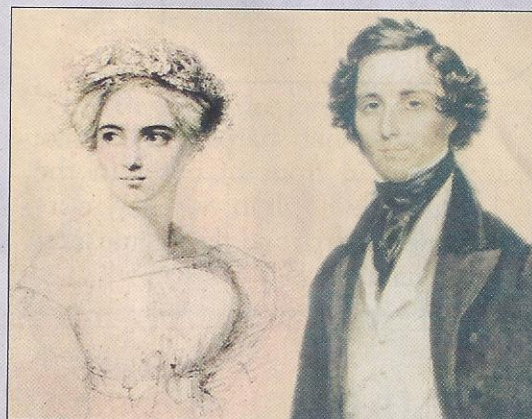
Mendelssohn was also a very good artist and loved to paint pictures of places he visited. He painted this picture in 1847 in Switzerland.



His Music

Mendelssohn wrote expressive, descriptive works that are usually full of energy with elegant, light melodies. He composed symphonies, concertos, sonatas, chamber music, and choral works. He also was a very talented pianist and wrote many compositions for piano. His most famous piano works are a series of short pieces which he called *Songs Without Words*. They have descriptive titles that suggest a picture, such as "The Hunting Song."

His most famous work is based on Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He wrote the *Overture* for it when he was 17. Later he wrote more music for the play, including a wedding march that is still used at weddings all over the world.



Felix was very close to his older sister Fanny. She was also a very talented musician. She played the piano and composed.

During her lifetime, many people did not think women should be composers or professional musicians. Fanny composed a few pieces under her brother's name.

Felix greatly respected her musical talent and often asked her opinion before showing his new pieces to anyone else. If she had been born in a different time period, she might have been a famous composer too.

Felix was very upset when she died from a stroke. He died a few months later of the same thing.

Felix Mendelssohn



Important Facts to Know About Felix Mendelssohn

Born: 1809 in Germany

Died: 1847

Period of Music: Romantic

Instruments He Played: Piano, organ

Major Compositions:

PIANO: *Songs Without Words*; Piano Concerto in G Minor, Op. 25

ORCHESTRA: Violin Concerto in E Minor, Op. 64

ORATORIO: *Elijah*, Op. 70; *St. Paul*, Op. 36

Interesting Facts: A performance of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* conducted by Mendelssohn started a revival of interest in the works of Johann Sebastian Bach. He was also a talented artist who painted beautiful watercolor paintings.



Track 5

Suggested Listening: *Song without Words* (Tarantella), Op. 102, No. 3

The story of Felix Mendelssohn

(1809–1847)

Felix Mendelssohn was born in Hamburg, Germany in 1809, but was whisked away with his older sister Fanny by his parents as they fled Napoleon's conquering troops. They ended up in Berlin, Germany where the family's wealth allowed Felix all the benefits of the intellectual and artistic city. His parents were his first teachers: his father taught him arithmetic and French while his mother taught him German, literature and the fine arts, including piano. Later, like his sister, he studied theory, violin, organ, language and painting with the finest teachers in Berlin.

When Mendelssohn was twelve, his composition teacher, Carl Friedrich Zelter, took him to Weimar to meet the great German writer, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Although Goethe was already in his 70s, he was greatly impressed by Felix and wanted to hear him play every day. Felix wrote his parents that he played Bach fugues and improvisations every afternoon for two hours. On another day the Grand Duke and Duchess came to visit and he played from eleven in the morning until ten in the evening with only two hours interruption.



Cécile Jeanrenaud

EDUARD MAGNUS

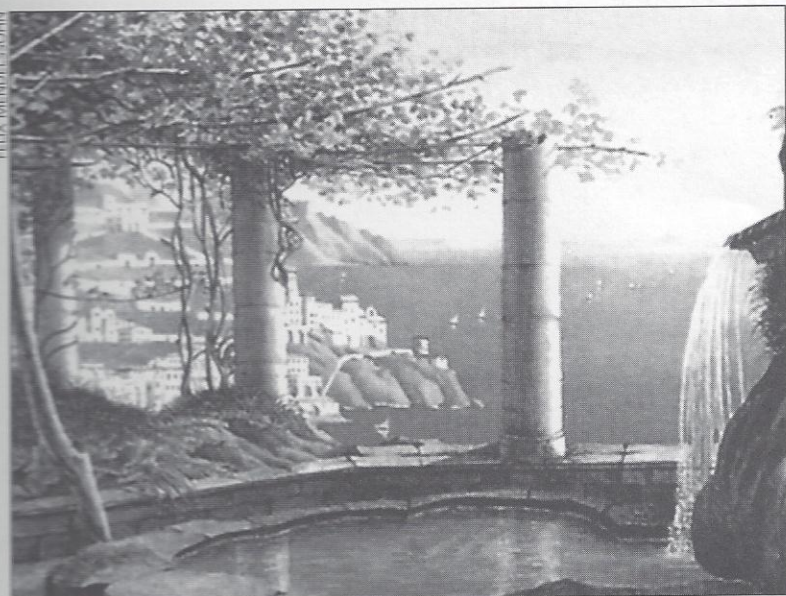
When he was 17, he composed a highly successful and remarkable overture to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He wrote a number of works called "concert overtures." These are separate complete pieces, not introductions to operas or oratorios as had been done before by composers of this time. He is given credit for introducing and developing this form of music.

A performance of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, which he conducted when he was only 19, opened his eyes to the wealth of Bach's music that had been neglected for half a century. He dedicated himself to the task of reviving the memory of Bach, forming a Bach Society, and supervising a complete edition of his works. He put a work by Bach on his programs whenever possible. Mendelssohn's revival of Bach's music in itself was a great contribution to music, but he also created many beautiful compositions of his own.

In 1837 Mendelssohn married Cécile Jeanrenaud. They had a happy marriage with five children.

Mendelssohn's music was popular in England and he often traveled there. He became a friend of Queen Victoria and her husband, Prince Albert. While in England in 1846, he composed *Elijah*, his best-known oratorio, and his much-loved Violin Concerto in E Minor, Op. 64. He had more influence on English music than any other composer since Handel.

Severely overworked, Mendelssohn returned to Germany in 1847 after he learned of his sister Fanny's death. He was shocked and shattered, and after a series of strokes, he died a few months later.



This watercolor, Bay of Amalfi, was painted by Felix around 1830.

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

Songs Without Words

Over a period of twenty years, Mendelssohn wrote a number of short, expressive lyrical pieces for the piano. They were published in eight books, six pieces in each book. The first book was so successful that Mendelssohn composed five more books. Two additional books were published after his death.

Mendelssohn dedicated many of these pieces to his friends. He often enclosed them in a letter or a birthday card. His sister Fanny wrote to a family friend that Felix had sent her a piece for her album, a "song without words." This may be the first time that these pieces were called "Songs Without Words."

These lovely pieces can be classified into four different types:

1. **Solo Song.** The melody flows almost continuously above an accompaniment.

Example: *Spring Song*, Op. 62, No. 6



2. **Accompanied Duet.** In this example there is a soprano and alto duet to a softly rocking left-hand accompaniment.

Example: *Venetian Boat Song*, Op. 19, No. 6, beginning with measure 7



3. **Choral.** Usually there is four-part harmony, as illustrated in this example.

Example: *Consolation*, Op. 30, No. 3, beginning with measure 3



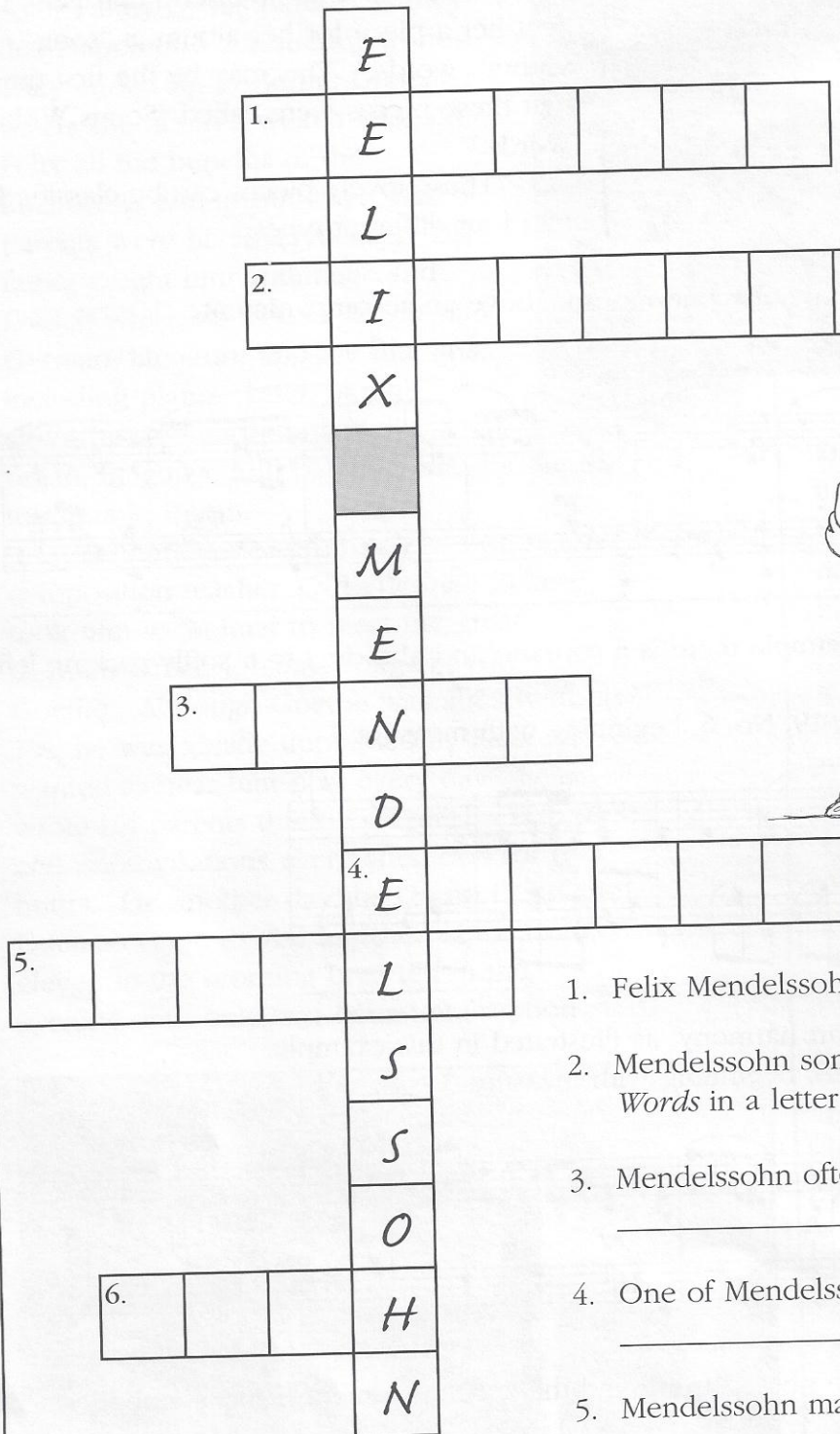
4. **Instrumental.** The melodies are not as strong and the accompaniment is more complicated and interesting.

Example: *Tarantella*, Op. 102, No. 3

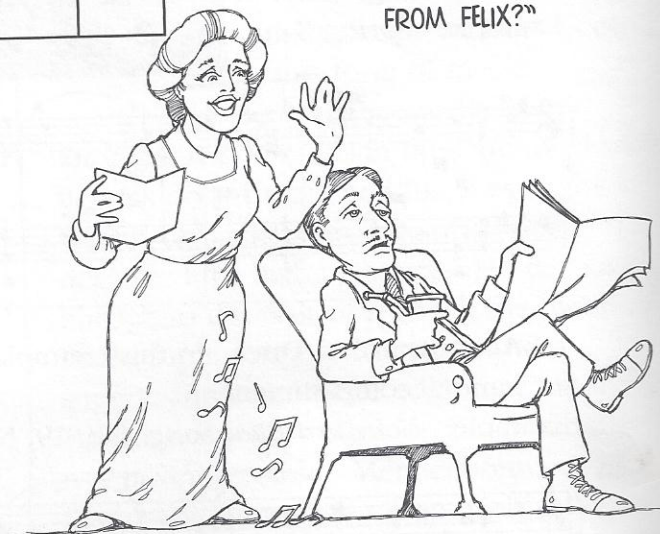


Felix Mendelssohn Crossword

Complete the sentences below. Write the answers in the blanks of the puzzle.

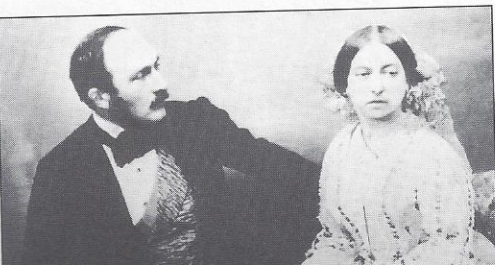


"WHAT'S THAT, DEAR?
ANOTHER BIRTHDAY CARD
FROM FELIX?"



1. Felix Mendelssohn was born in _____.
2. Mendelssohn sometimes enclosed one of his *Songs Without Words* in a letter or _____ card to his friends.
3. Mendelssohn often consulted his older sister, _____, on his compositions.
4. One of Mendelssohn's most famous oratorios is _____.
5. Mendelssohn married _____ Jenrenaud in 1837.
6. Mendelssohn dedicated himself to reviving the works of the great Baroque composer, _____.

ROGER FENTON



Prince Albert and Queen

Music History
Mendelssohn

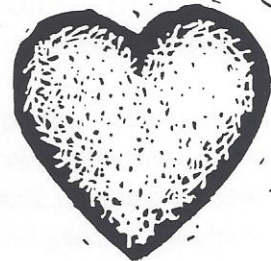


A proper perfectionist. That's what you might have called Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy. A son of a wealthy banker family, Mendelssohn was brought up in high society with the best teachers and musical instruction. He was extremely talented as a young man—some historians think he was second only to Mozart as a child prodigy.

In his musical studies, Mendelssohn received traditional training, learning music from Classical composers. But his greatest love was for J.S. Bach. In fact, Mendelssohn was greatly responsible for bringing Bach's music back into popularity during the Romantic Period. He became such a great expert and supporter of Bach, one Romantic musician said, "There is no God but Bach, and Mendelssohn is his prophet."

Perhaps as a result of Mendelssohn's background and appreciation for Classic and Baroque music, he never broke the rules in composing as most other Romantic composers did. He used traditional forms and gave his music "proper" names. His melodies and styles were so lovely and exact, they've even been called flawless. But Mendelssohn never really let his hair down as was common during this period. His musical is not as passionate or emotional. And he never rebelled from the Classical rules or feelings.

Mendelssohn was a very well-respected musical expert and became very famous all across Europe. He wrote several kinds of music including symphonies, oratorios and many piano works. Like many composers of the day, he died at a young age in 1847—he was only 38.



J.S. Bach

1. What are some words that describe Mendelssohn? _____
 2. What composer was he a great fan of? _____
 3. What was Mendelssohn's background like? _____
 4. How was Mendelssohn's music different from many Romantic composers'? _____
-

Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy

1809-1847

February 3



Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy

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BARTHOLDY
GERMANY

X Y B A R T H O L D Y V T S I N A G R O
Y H H D G Y T O T A L M U S I C I A N A
C T G R W M Y W N E L I J A H D L M X S
T L G B A C H S M U S I C N G N P B E I
P A C L V I B C O N D U C T O R E W O R
L E I P Z I G C O N S E R V A T O R Y O
O W D S L S T R E C N O C Y A D N U S T
A N A T U R A L M U S I C I A N V U R A
H S I W E J C P C I L O H A K R O W R C
T B I B H C R A M G N I D D E W Q W P U
D V I R T U O S O P I A N I S T O S L D
M A W S Y N N A F I N G A L S C A V E E
I T A L I A N S Y M P H O N Y T F O G V
N I G E R M A N Y S R O T U T C I S U M

COMPOSER
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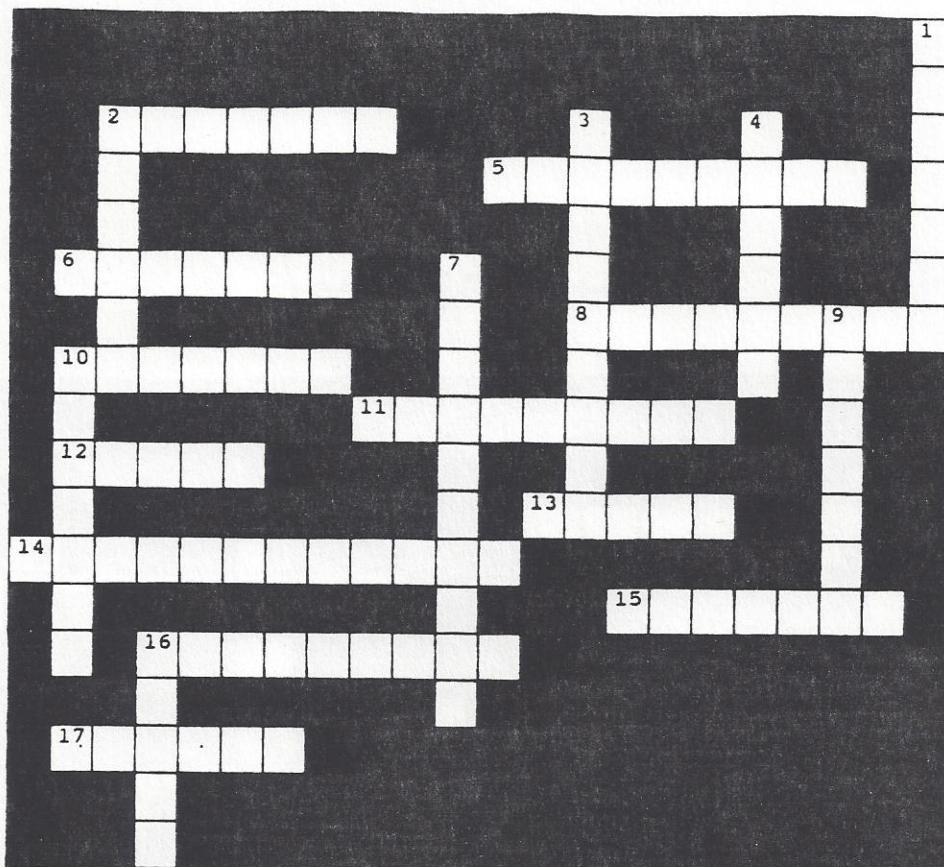


FELIX MENDELSSOHN BARTHOLDY

1809-1847

February 3

FANNY
PASSION
CECILE
MIDSUMMER
WITHOUT
OVERWORKED
BARTHOLDY
MOSES
SISTER
ELIJAH
FINGAL'S
ORCHESTRA
ITALIAN
TOTAL
CONCERT
WEALTHY
CONSERVATORY
CHRISTIAN
EDUCATION
WEDDING



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ACROSS

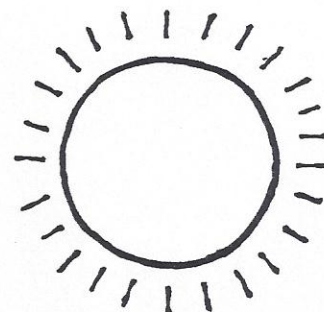
2. Every Sunday musicians, artists and writers were invited to the Mendelssohn home for a ____.
5. Felix added his mother's Christian maiden name ____ to his last name to show that he had accepted Christianity.
6. The overture ____ Cave was inspired by a visit to Scotland.
8. When he was young, Felix received an excellent ____ in music, mathematics, history, literature, art and languages (Latin, Greek, German, French, English and Italian).
10. Felix was born into a ____ banking family in Germany.
11. At this time, it was especially difficult to be Jewish in Germany. So Felix's father had his family become ____ because he saw conversion as "the admission ticket to European culture."
12. Mendelssohn is considered a "____ musician." Not only did Felix excel as a composer, but he played the piano and organ well, was in demand as a conductor, was an excellent teacher and he was even a talented artist.
13. Because women were not supposed to have careers at that time, ____ allowed Felix to publish some of her music under his name.
14. In 1843, Mendelssohn established the ____ of Music in Leipzig.
15. Some people are surprised that Mendelssohn composed the famous exit ____ March and the Christmas song Hark! the Herald Angels Sing.
16. Felix wrote an overture based on a Shakespeare play called ____ Night's Dream.
17. His ____ Fanny was also a talented musician.

DOWN

1. Mendelssohn conducted a performance of J.S. Bach's St. Matthew _____. This was the first performance of this work since Bach's death and it started a revival of interest in Bach's music.
2. In 1837 he married ____ Jeanrenaud.
3. By age 11, Felix was composing a lot of music, so his father would hire an ____ for him to conduct so he could try out his pieces.
4. He composed two oratorios: St. Paul and ____.
7. Probably because he always ____ himself, Felix died at the age of 38.
9. Felix wrote five symphonies. Two of them are nicknamed the Scotch and the ____.
10. His famous Spring Song is from a collection of short piano pieces called "Songs ____ Words."
16. Felix's grandfather was the famous philosopher ____ Mendelssohn.

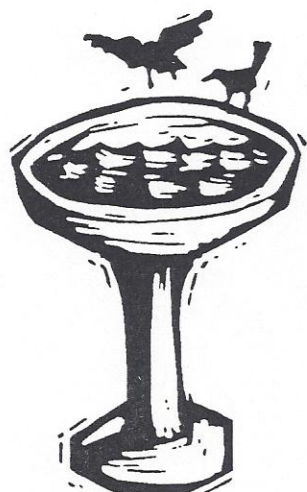
Romantic Music Recognition
Spring Song
BY FELIX MENDELSSOHN-BARTHOLDY

Mendelssohn was a perfectionist when it came to composing. His melodies are lovely and the harmonies precise and exacting. This song does a perfect job itself of describing a season of the year.



Take -- this song out- side where things are warm and green — You'll

hear a per- fect me- lo- dy that Men- del- ssohn calls The Spring.



Listening Corner

You'll find links on our website, www.peforkids.com.

Mendelssohn's music, although written during the Romantic period, was always elegant and balanced rather like the music of the Classical period. It sounded polished and never too emotional or sad. It painted pictures and evoked images, but always in perfect forms and never too impulsively. Listen to beautiful melodies, subtle harmonies, balanced phrasing, and light, playful passages in the following selections.

Songs Without Words for Piano Solo

There are many sets: Op. 19, 30, 38, 53, 62, 67, 85, and 102 with six pieces in each set. The most famous ones include "Duetto," "Volkslied," "Spinnerlied," and "Frühlingslied" (Spring Song)

Variations sérieuses in D minor for Piano, Op. 54

Violin Concerto in E minor, Op. 64

Rondo capriccioso in E major, Op. 14 for piano

Unscramble and Solve

Unscramble each word and write it on the lines to the right. Then take the letters with a number underneath them and write them in order at the bottom. (Put the letter above 1 first, 2 second, etc.)

FALH TNOE

10 — — — — 3 — — — 2

SSOFMORITI

— 9 — — — — 8 — — — 1 —

SEECNOCDR

— — 5 — — — — 11 4 —

SABS LFEC

— — 7 — — — — 6 — — —

Solution: — — — — — — — — — —

P
U
Z
Z
L
E

April Birthdays

Some important birthdays to keep in mind during the month of April:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 4 - Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)
Russian composer and pianist | 13 - First performance of Handel's <i>Messiah</i> , 1742 |
| 5 - Herbert von Karajan (1908-1989)
Austrian conductor | 16 - Henry Mancini (1924-1994)
American film composer, conductor |
| 6 - André Previn (b. 1929) German/
American conductor, pianist, and
composer | 18 - Leopold Stokowski (1882-1977)
English/American conductor |
| 7 - Holiday (1915-1959) American jazz
singer | 22 - Yehudi Menuhin (1916-1999)
American violinist |
| 9 - Paul Robeson (1898-1976) American
bass singer and actor | 23 - Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953)
Russian composer |
| 11 - Alberto Ginastera (1916-1983)
Argentine composer | 25 - Ella Fitzgerald (1918-1996)
American jazz singer |
| 12 - Lily Pons (1898-1976)
French/American soprano | 29 - Duke Ellington (1899-1974)
American jazz pianist and
composer |

Quiz

- Felix Mendelssohn's sister was a talented musician too.
a. true b. false
- Felix Mendelssohn travelled around Europe. List 3 countries he visited.
a. _____
b. _____
c. _____
- The English horn is a _____ instrument.
a. woodwind
b. brass
c. brass and woodwind
d. neither
- A sharp sign raises a note 1 step.
a. true b. false
- A chromatic scale has _____ notes.
a. 8
b. 10
c. 12
d. 15
- Glenn Gould was born in _____.
a. Russia
b. Poland
c. the United States
d. Canada
- Name a famous piece that uses the English horn.
