

Processionals

44. Wedding March

(A Midsummer Night's Dream)

Felix Mendelssohn

(1809-1847)

arr. William Melton

Mendelssohn Bartholdy, Jacob Ludwig Felix

(born 3 February 1809 in Hamburg; died 4 November 1847 in Leipzig)

Felix Mendelssohn's father Abraham added Bartholdy to the family name when he moved to Berlin and converted from Judaism to Protestantism. The grandson of the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, Felix was a precocious and diversely talented child: he excelled in music, but also in languages and the visual arts. After a succession of teachers he went to Carl Friedrich Zelter, who became a mentor, easing his charge's entry into the Berlin *Singakademie* and even introducing the boy to the great Goethe (who was as charmed by Mendelssohn as he had been unnerved by Beethoven). Musical annals are full of *Wunderkinder*, but as pianist-scholar Charles Rosen has written, 'Mendelssohn was the greatest child prodigy the history of Western music has ever known. Not even Mozart or Chopin before the age of nineteen could equal the mastery that Mendelssohn already possessed when he was only sixteen'. The mastery did not diminish: tours across Europe were hugely successful, and Mendelssohn's leadership of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra and founding of the Leipzig Conservatory were major contributions to German cultural life. His contemporaries were understandably shocked at his unexpected death at the age of 38, but Mendelssohn's still highly regarded creative output survives him.

Mendelssohn completed his incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Op. 61 in 1842 and the work was premiered in Potsdam on 14 October 1843. The fashion for playing the Wedding March (No. 9) as a recessional at weddings originates from a performance of the piece at the wedding of the Princess Royal to Friedrich III of Prussia in 1858. The mother of the bride, Queen Victoria, was a great admirer of Mendelssohn, and the ten concert tours the composer made to Britain as pianist and conductor from 1829 to 1847 were testimony to his popularity with the British musical public.

Text by William Melton