

Understanding Classical Music Group

At the May meeting the group reviewed the life and works of the composer Felix Mendelssohn using DVDs from the U3A Resource Centre.

Felix Mendelssohn was born in 1809 into a Jewish German family, the second of four children. He was particularly close to his elder sister, Fanny, who also became an accomplished musician. At the beginning of the 19th century German Jews were treated with suspicion and racially abused. Felix's father converted the family to the protestant Christian faith and added 'Bartholdy' to the family surname hoping that eventually the Mendelssohn part would be dropped. However the family found it difficult to become accepted in Christian circles and the family remained isolated preferring to live as a family unit. . Felix composed music from an early age basing his compositions on the works of past masters; these works were often performed at private concerts at the home of his parents. At 17 years of age Felix drew inspiration from Shakespeare's 'Midsummer Night's Dream' producing incidental music to accompany the play. The composition was a great success.

The period after his marriage in 1837 was a very busy period in his life; composing, conducting and performing, he rapidly gained virtuoso status. In 1843 he founded the Leipzig Conservatory.

Despite his affection for his sister Fanny, Felix refused to allow her compositions to be published, though he relented after Fanny self-published. Fanny died suddenly in 1847 and Felix's despair at the loss of his beloved sister resulted in his last masterpiece – Requiem for Fanny. Thereafter Felix descended into a deep depression and died 6 months after the death of his sister.

After his death his compositions were condemned by Wagner in a wave of antisemitism. In 1936 as antisemitism swept across Germany his manuscripts were burned.

The second half of the meeting was devoted to Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto in E minor. Although the idea of composing a violin concerto was first conceived in 1838 it would a further six years before the work was completed. The narrator explained the background to the concerto and then described in detail the construction of the each of the three movements.

Our next meeting will be on **Friday 28th June** 10.00am at **STARTFORTH_SCHOOL** when the subjects will be The French Horn and A Capella music.

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