

FROM: **AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE**
890 Broadway
New York, New York 10003
(212) 477-3030

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

Born in Hamburg in 1809, Felix Mendelssohn was the grandson of the Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn and the son of a successful banker. He was brought up in an atmosphere of culture and domestic comfort and his mother, a pianist, gave him his first piano lessons. His sister, Fanny, was also a pianist and a composer.

Mendelssohn's remarkable gifts as a composer, conductor, and pianist were encouraged by his teachers including Marie Bigot (in Paris) and Ludwig Berger (piano, in Berlin). At the age of nine, he was performing in public, at age 12 he had written his piano quartet (Op. 1), at 14 he had his own private orchestra, at 16 he had written his octet for strings, and, at 17, the overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

He championed the cause of J.S. Bach by conducting, in 1829, at the age of 20, the first public performance after Bach's death of his St. Matthew Passion. Recollections of his visits to both Scotland and Italy resulted in the Hebrides overture, the Scottish symphony, No. 3 in A minor and Major, and the Italian symphony, No. 4 in A Major and minor. He also visited Paris where he met both Liszt and Chopin, and then returned to Germany where he was appointed musical director at the Dusseldorf.

In 1835, he became conductor of the Gewandhaus concerts in Leipzig. In 1837, he married Cecile Jenrenaud, the descendant of French Huguenot family, and, in 1842, he founded, with Schumann and others, the Leipzig Conservatorium. In 1846, he conducted his oratorio *Elijah* at the Birmingham Festival, one of his greatest triumphs.

Poor health and the death of his sister hastened his death in 1846 at the age of 38.

-30-

2001/2002

FROM: *The New College Encyclopedia of Music* by J. A. Westrup and F. L. Harrison, revised by Conrad Wilson; W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York, 1976