

# MENDELSSOHN'S MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

## TREATMENT

This concert hall adaptation of Mendelssohn's Midsummer takes as its inspiration the composer's challenging task to improve on his hit Overture that made him a wunderkind in 1826, with an hour of incidental music 16 years later in a royal commission. The story of the performance is Mendelssohn using his imagination via Shakespeare to recover a pure, youthful, untainted place of invention and balance - qualities for which his music is often known and cherished.

## FORCES

Orchestra

Women's Chorus

Two sopranos - both speak and are in costume as Titania's fairies

Four actors:

- Mendelssohn: 30's. Comically balletic - vulnerable, lithe, physical, and passionate
- Oberon: male, any age. Masculinely lyrical.
- Titania: female, any age. Fiercely articulate.
- Young Mendelssohn (Boy): 10-14. Innocent.

*Before curtain: A large projection screen over the orchestra with no prestate. Onstage is a facsimilar of Mendelssohn's house - a four poster bed stage right, his desk (which becomes Titania's bower) stage left, and his reading chair, far stage left. All transform as the piece develops into the fairy world.*

*Young Mendelssohn, a boy of about 10, sits alone on the bed in front of a large chess board on a lazy susan. He is playing himself, and rotates the board about once a minute or so to make another move.*

*Mendelssohn leans against his desk thumbing through his Overture.*

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## Scene 1

*The orchestra tunes. Just before they stop, Mendelssohn begins to write a letter at his table. His script is projected on the screen as he writes it. Slowly the sound of pen scratching on parchment takes over the orchestra as they finish tuning. 12 chimes of a clock strike.*

Dear Fanny,

In one of the greatest strokes of irony, I must again revisit The Dream. King Frederik has asked me to finish what I started so long ago. Do you remember? The overture... your favourite.

(And everyone else's...)

Pray for me, sweet sister, in my hour of need, for I must will my youth into the world again

Love, Felix.

**The Conductor enters to applause. Orchestra plays the Overture**

*During the Overture, Mendelssohn reads along to the music.*

*The projection, a creative view of Mendelssohn's desk, littered with various pictures and manuscript pages related to Shakespeare and the Dream, reads:*

Overture (1826)

**Orchestra stops 5 bars from the end.**



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## Scene 2

*The handwritten text henceforth appears without him miming the act of writing.*

To the source.

*He stands up. Takes the Complete Works of William Shakespeare from his piano bench. Shows it to the audience.*

My old dear friend.  
It was my uncle Schlegel's own translation.

*Pause. Looks at the audience.*

You're not impressed.

*Finds the page immediately and reads.*

**MENDELSSOHN:** *(speaking for the first time):*

Now, my fair Hippolyta our nuptial hour draws on apace Four happy days bring in another moon

But oh, methinks how slow this old moon wanes

She lingers my desires like a blah blah blah....

*The projections interrupt him as he breezes past the first several pages. Sound of pages turning quickly.*

No music here... Theseus and Hippolyta, exposition, talk  
talk talk.... Lovers... charming rhyming English  
couplets...

Egeus, that old BLOWHARD...

talk talk talk...

They elope, unite, ah Helena's pitiable monologue, but no  
music there...

*The text now appears in one instant, as opposed to being written by hand.*

But the fairies...

**The flutes play the fermata, 5 bars before the end - the 'first chord'. The Orchestra finishes the Overture here.**

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He looks up. **'Second chord'**

*Fanny and I played fairies. All around our gardens*

He stands up, turns around. **'Third chord'**

*the first fairy scene by heart.*

He skips a bit, looking around the ground. **'Fourth and final chord'**

*The Boy makes a chess move, turns the chess board around, and looks at Mendelssohn.*

### **Orchestra plays No. 1 Scherzo**

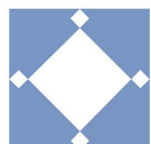
*Mendelssohn bounds to his desk and quickly starts a new full score. Projection shows a video, as if a live feed, starting a new score: "Marchen...land" with audio of the pencil scratching. The last word is added as a whimsical afterthought.*

*The projection shifts to an increasingly magical abstraction of fairy land. Oberon and Titania descend and amuse themselves watching him writing. At the repeat sign, Mendelssohn gets up with this book and wanders freely about the stage, reading. They whisk away the scene around him, placing his desk and chair downstage left, exactly opposite the boy.*

*Toward the end with the solo flutes, Titania sends in the First Fairy from the wings. She flits about him and tries to get his attention but Mendelssohn is lost in his book. Titania meanwhile makes it to the boy. She manages to whisk him back to her perch upstage left, where they sit together.*

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**Scene 3 - Orchestra plays No. 2 L'Istesso Tempo (Attacca)**

**FIRST FAIRY**

How now, spirit! whither wander you?

*Not seeing her, absorbed in the script:*

**MENDELSSOHN**

Over hill, over dale,  
Thorough bush, thorough brier, Over park, over pale,  
Thorough flood, thorough fire,  
I do wander everywhere,  
Swifter than the mooness sphere.

***Orchestra plays measures 4 and 5 while she takes the book out of his hands. Suddenly she speaks to him.***

**FIRST FAIRY**

And I serve the fairy queen,  
To dew her orbs upon the green. The cowslips tall her pensioners be, In their gold coats spots you see.

*The Second Fairy appears.*

**SECOND FAIRY**

Those be rubies, fairy favours,  
In those freckles live their savours.

**FIRST FAIRY**

I must go seek some dewdrops here,

**Orchestra plays measure 7.**

And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear.

**FIRST FAIRY**

Farewell, thou lob of spirits; we'll be gone: Our queen and all our elves come here anon.

**Orchestra plays measure 14.**

*In Mendelssohn's gaze is suddenly Titania with the boy.*

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**FIRST FAIRY**

The king doth keep his revels here tonight: Take heed the queen come not within his sight,  
For Oberon is passing fell and wrath,  
Because that she as her attendant hath  
A lovely boy, stolen from an Indian king;  
She never had so sweet a changeling;  
And jealous Oberon would have the child Knight of his train, to trace the forests wild.

**Orchestra plays Measure 19.**

**MENDELSSOHN**

But she perforce withholds the loved boy,  
Crowns him with flowers and makes him all her joy:

**SECOND FAIRY**

And now they never meet in grove or green, By fountain clear, or spangled starlight sheen,  
But, they do square, that all their elves for fear Creep into acorn-cups and hide them there.

**Orchestra plays Measure 25.**

**FIRST FAIRY**

Either I mistake your shape and making quite,  
Or else you are that shrewd and knavish sprite Call'd Robin Goodfellow. Are not you he  
That frights the maidens of the villagery;  
Those that Hobgoblin call you and sweet Puck, You do their work, and they shall have good  
luck.

**BOTH**

Are not you he?

**Orchestra plays measure 29.**

**MENDELSSOHN**

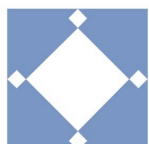
Thou speak'st aright;  
I am that merry wanderer of the night.  
I jest to Oberon and make him smile  
When I a fat and bean-fed horse beguile, Neighing in likeness of a filly foal:  
And sometime lurk I in a gossip's bowl,  
In very likeness of a roasted crab,  
And waxen in my mirth they neeze and swear A merrier hour was never wasted there.  
But, room, fairy! here comes Oberon.

**FIRST FAIRY**

And here my mistress. Would that he were gone!

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**Scene 4 - Orchestra Plays No. 2 Allegro vivace (Fairies' March)**

*Oberon walks to the apron of the stage. The Fairies joins Titania and the boy. Oberon puts Mendelssohn in his corner for the confrontation.*

**OBERON**

Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania.

**TITANIA**

What, jealous Oberon! Fairies, skip hence: I have forsworn his bed and company.

**OBERON**

Tarry, rash wanton: am not I thy lord?

**TITANIA**

Thine are the forgeries of jealousy:  
And never, since the middle summer's spring,  
Met we on hill, in dale, forest or mead,  
To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind,  
But with thy brawls thou hast disturb'd our sport.  
Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain,  
As in revenge, have suck'd up from the sea  
Contagious fogs; which falling in the land  
Have every pelting river made so proud

That they have overborne their continents:

The human mortals want their winter here;  
No night is now with hymn or carol blest:  
Therefore the moon, the governess of floods,  
Pale in her anger, washes all the air,

That rheumatic diseases do abound:  
And thorough this distemperature we see  
The seasons alter: hoary-headed frosts  
Far in the fresh lap of the crimson rose,  
The spring, the summer,  
The childing autumn, angry winter, change  
Their wonted liveries, and the mazed world,  
By their increase, now knows not which is which:

And this same progeny of evils comes  
From our debate, from our dissension;  
We are their parents and original.

**OBERON**

Do you amend it then; it lies in you:  
Why should Titania cross her Oberon?  
I do but beg a little changeling boy,  
To be my henchman.

**TITANIA**

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Set your heart at rest:  
The fairy land buys not the child of me.  
His mother was a votaress of my order:  
And, in the spiced Indian air, by night,  
--her womb then rich with my young squire,-- Full often hath she gossip'd by my side,  
And sat with me on Neptune's yellow sands, Marking the embarked traders on the flood,  
When we have laugh'd to see the sails conceive And grow big-bellied with the wanton wind;  
But she, being mortal, of that boy did die;  
And for her sake do I rear up her boy,  
And for her sake I will not part with him.

**OBERON**

How long within this wood intend you stay?

**TITANIA**

Perchance till after Theseus' wedding-day. If you will patiently dance in our round  
And see our moonlight revels, go with us;  
If not, shun me, and I will spare your haunts.

**OBERON**

Give me that boy, and I will go with thee.

**TITANIA**

Not for thy fairy kingdom. Fairies, away! We shall chide downright, if I longer stay.

**Orchestra plays from Measure 65.**

*Titania and her train exit. Mendelssohn goes to follow them off. Orchestra stops.*

**OBERON**

Well, go thy way: thou shalt not from this grove Till I torment thee for this injury.  
My gentle Puck, come hither.

*Oberon stops him with a bit of magic and thuds him at his feet.*

Thou rememberest  
Since once I sat upon a promontory,  
And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath That  
the rude sea grew civil at her song  
And certain stars shot madly from their spheres, To hear the sea-maid's music.

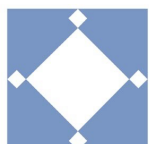
**MENDELSSOHN**

I remember.

**OBERON**

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That very time I saw, but thou couldst not, Flying between the cold moon and the earth,  
Cupid all arm'd: a certain aim he took  
And loosed his love-shaft smartly from his bow, As it should pierce a hundred thousand  
hearts.

And mark'd I where the bolt of Cupid fell:  
It fell upon a little western flower,  
Before milk-white, now purple with love's wound, And maidens call it love-in-idleness.  
Fetch me that flower; the herb I shew'd thee once: The juice of it on sleeping eye-lids laid  
Will make or man or woman madly dote  
Upon the next live creature that it sees.  
Fetch me this herb; and be thou here again  
Ere the leviathan can swim a league.

### **MENDELSSOHN**

I'll put a girdle round about the earth In forty minutes.

**Orchestra plays from Measure 82, stops.**

### **OBERON**

I know a bank where the wild thyme blows, Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows, Quite  
over-canopied with luscious woodbine, With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine: There  
sleeps Titania sometime of the night, Lull'd in these flowers with dances and delight; And  
there the snake throws her enamell'd skin, Weed wide enough to wrap a fairy in:

And with the juice of this I'll streak her eyes,  
And make her full of hateful fantasies.  
Take thou some of it, and seek through this grove: A sweet Athenian lady is in love  
With a disdainful youth: anoint his eyes;  
But do it when the next thing he espies  
May be the lady: thou shalt know the man  
By the Athenian garments he hath on.  
Effect it with some care, that he may prove  
More fond on her than she upon her love:  
And look thou meet me ere the first cock crow.

**Orchestra plays from Measure 88 to the end of the Fairy March.**

*Oberon exits - Mendelssohn return to his desk to write while Titania and her train reenter.*

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**Scene 5 - Orchestra plays No. 3 Song with Chorus, Measures 1-6.**

**TITANIA**

Come, now a roundel and a fairy song; Then, for the third part of a minute, hence;

**Orchestra plays Measures 8-9**

Some to kill cankers in the musk-rose buds, Some war with rere-mice for their leathern wings, To make my small elves coats,

**Orchestra plays Measure 10**

and some keep back The clamorous owl that nightly hoots and wonders

At our quaint spirits.

**Orchestra plays Measure 11**

Sing me now asleep; Then to your offices and let me rest.

**Orchestra plays from Measure 12 - SONG SECOND FAIRY**

*You spotted snakes with double tongue Thorny hedgehogs be not seen  
Newts and blind-worms, do no wrong; Come not near our fairy queen.*

*Newts and blind-worms do no wrong, Come not near our fairy queen,  
Come not near our fairy queen.  
Hence away! Hency away! Hence Away!*

*You spotted snakes with double tongue, Thorny hedgehogs be not seen,  
Hence away! Hence away!*

**CHORUS**

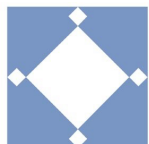
*Philomel, with melody, sing in our sweet la lullaby.*

*La lullaby, lullaby, lullaby*

*Never harm, nor spell nor charm, Come our lovely lady nigh.*

*So, so good night,  
So good night, so good night.  
So good night, so good night with la lullaby, etc.*

Contact [Bill@ConcertTheatreWorks.com](mailto:Bill@ConcertTheatreWorks.com) for the Full Script



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