

Violin Concerto in E Minor, Op. 64 (1844)
Felix Mendelssohn (1809 – 1847)

Mendelssohn was born into an affluent Hamburg family that provided him with culture and music in his childhood. His father was a keen businessman and a successful banker. His mother, Leah, a banker's daughter, was an accomplished singer, pianist, linguist, and artist.

By 1837, Mendelssohn was happily married, and by 1844, he and his wife had four children. In 1838 he conceived the idea of writing a violin concerto for his great friend Ferdinand David (1810 –1873), concertmaster of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra for 37 years. With Mendelssohn at the piano, David and Mendelssohn often performed chamber music together, and they shared many of the orchestra's administrative duties. Mendelssohn began work on this Concerto in 1838, but it was not completed until 1844, and it premièred in Leipzig on March 13, 1845 with Ferdinand David as soloist and Niels Gade as conductor. The work was an immediate success and has been popular ever since.

Mendelssohn dispenses with the long, traditional orchestral introduction. The work begins with the strings, supported by clarinets, bassoons, and timpani doubling the pizzicato bass, and after a bar and a half, the soloist enters with the main subject, one of Mendelssohn's happiest lyrical ideas. The mood is initially dreamy but a passionate climax is reached before the theme passes to the orchestra. The second subject is heard first in clarinet and flutes over an open G held by the soloist for eight bars. The pedal point is then transferred to the second clarinet while the soloist takes up the theme and embroiders it.

Mendelssohn was very opinionated about cadenzas. He saw no reason why the flow of a work should be disturbed for the sake of a cadenza designed for showmanship. However, he realized that his listeners would expect one, so he wrote his own to make sure that it suited the mood of the work, and he placed it between the end of the development and the beginning of the recapitulation.

Mendelssohn was also vehemently opposed to applause before the end of a work. In Mendelssohn's day, audiences habitually applauded between movements and frequently applauded during orchestral tuttis. He tried to prevent applause after the first movement by linking it to the second movement by having the first bassoon sustain its note from the final chord and resolving it upwards a semitone to the tonic of the C-major *Andante*.

In the second movement, after an eight-bar introduction, the violinist enters with a beautiful theme. There is an agitated middle section but the

movement's serene mood is generally sustained. After a 14-bar transition between second and third movements the concluding *Rondo* begins with a gay, fleeting solo violin theme. Some passage work leads to the second main idea in full orchestra. The soloist introduces a third, lyrical, stately subject that is later combined contrapuntally with the first theme – the soloist plays the first against the third in the orchestra. The second idea is restated boldly by the orchestra, and the concerto concludes with a brilliant coda.

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