



SLSO At-Home Learning Symphony No. 4, "Italian"

Composer Felix Mendelssohn loved to travel! Can you find the continent of Europe on a world map? Mendelssohn traveled all over Europe. One of his favorite countries to visit was Italy. While in Italy he attended different festivals and ate so much delicious food! Have you ever been to a festival in your community? Describe the festival. Was there food, music, dancing, or other forms of entertainment? What adjectives could you use to describe your festival experience?

The Saltarello and the Tarantella are some of the traditional Italian "folk" dances Mendelssohn saw at the festivals in Italy. Folk dance is a broad term that encompasses many types of dancing. Some folk dances are part of rituals while others are purely entertainment. Folk dances are often unique to the culture they originate from. The Saltarello and Tarantella provided the inspiration for the final movement of Mendelssohn's Symphony No. 4, "Italian". Does the USA have any folk dances? What are they? Could country line dancing be considered a folk dance? What about TikTok dances? How are these similar and different to the folk dances Mendelssohn saw in Italy? Videos showing the Saltarello and the Tarantella:

- **Saltarello** - youtube.com/watch?v=D-OEIVDeeHQ
- **Tarantella** - youtube.com/watch?v=7K7zrefNxLo or youtube.com/watch?v=T1Po78JhKMo

Now listen to the lively fourth movement of [Mendelssohn's Italian Symphony](#). This movement incorporates elements of both the Saltarello and Tarantella. Does it remind you of a festival or celebration? How so? Could you dance to it? Make up your own moves!

If you are not comfortable reading music skip to the folk dancing section.

Tarantella Rhythm

Clap or play the Tarantella rhythm below on found instruments (a **found instrument** is an object that is used to create music that is not made for that purpose, like ringing a bicycle bell or using pots and pans as drums.) Try to play along with the recording of the fourth movement of [Mendelssohn's Italian Symphony](#) whenever you think you hear the rhythm.



(First heard at 0:13 in the upper woodwinds)

What does it feel like when you clap or play the rhythm along with the music? (driving forward, lively, spirited)

Folk Dancing

Check out these "how to" videos and learn to dance the Tarantella! How to dance the Tarantella videos:

- youtube.com/watch?v=f855OhmYrE0
- youtube.com/watch?v=9eef7ENpmO8&t=4s





SPOTLIGHT ON THE COMPOSER

Name: Jakob Ludwig Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy
Lived: February 3, 1809 – November 4, 1847 (38 years old)
Nationality: German
Occupation: Composer (Early Romantic period)
Hobbies: Sketching and painting



Bartholdy Felix's family was Jewish and from Germany, a combination that at the time brought about many challenges. At the age of seven, Felix was baptized and the family took the surname Bartholdy to hide their Jewish heritage. However, when he was grown, Felix decided to keep the name Mendelssohn and lived his life in a balancing act between his Jewish heritage and his Christian faith. After Felix passed in 1847, his legacy endured much religious persecution. In the mid 1930's Adolf Hitler, then leader of the Nazi Party in Germany, added Felix's music to the list of forbidden artists and had his statue in Leipzig, where Felix started a music conservatory, torn down. Not everyone felt the same way the Nazi's did. During the second world war, when composer Richard Strauss was asked to write new music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, he replied that he could not improve on Mendelssohn's music!

Child Prodigy Doesn't every eight-year-old study composition for fun? Felix did. He was about 12 years old when the first public performance of his work took place. At age 17 he wrote *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Overture. At age 20 he pretty much single-handedly brought Bach's music back to the foreground of popular music. Felix was a hard worker and a perfectionist. In his short 38 years, he wrote a handful of masterpieces still performed today, and he started a music conservatory in Leipzig!

Fanny or Felix? Felix's older sister, Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, was also a composer. In fact, some of Felix's works might have actually been written by his sister. Why would Fanny let her little brother take credit for her work? Because in the early 19th century women weren't supposed to be composers or professional musicians. While their father was supportive of Felix's musical pursuits, he only tolerated Fanny's. At a young age, Fanny married painter Wilhelm Hensel and quickly fell into her role as a house wife. However, during the course of her life she wrote over 500 different musical works! She and Felix were very close. In fact, many of the letters that Felix wrote to Fanny during his travels survived throughout the years and have been published for us to read.

Where in the World is Felix Mendelssohn? Felix spent a lot of time traveling through Europe. In fact, many of the pieces he composed were inspired by his travels! He brought sketch books with him so he could capture his memories on paper.





St. Louis Symphony
Orchestra

stéphane denève : music director

FELIX'S TRAVELS – ITALY



In 1829, 20-year-old Felix set off on a trip of discovery across the continent of Europe. Leaving his home in Berlin, Germany, he traveled first to England and then Scotland. After Scotland, he set out for Wales. Apparently, Felix wasn't in love with Welsh folk music. In a letter home he wrote:

"No national music for me! Ten thousand devils take all nationality! Now I am in Wales, and, dear me, a harper sits in the hall of every reputed inn, playing incessantly so-called national melodies; that is to say, the most infamous, vulgar, out-of-tune trash, with

a hurdy-gurdy going on at the same time. It's maddening, and has given me a toothache already."



Yes, a hurdy-gurdy is a real instrument.

Felix eventually returned to London and was planning to head back to Berlin for his sister Fanny's wedding when a knee injury from a carriage accident made the journey impossible. Felix missed the wedding entirely. Too bad the first car wasn't invented until the late 1800's, if he had a car, maybe he wouldn't have missed the wedding.

Eventually, Felix left the United Kingdom, made a stop in Austria and then headed on to Italy. Felix toured Italy from 1830-1831. Symphony No. 4, the third symphony Felix wrote, is known as the *Italian Symphony*. Why is the third symphony, Symphony No. 4? Mendelssohn was a perfectionist. He would write a piece of music, then revise it, then revise it again, and maybe even revise some more! Symphony No. 4, the *Italian Symphony*, was first performed in 1833. In 1834, Felix took to editing it again and in fact he continued tinkering with it until his death in 1947. It wasn't until after his death that the symphony was finally published as his fourth symphony.



The *Italian Symphony* is intended to evoke the sights and sounds of Italy. For example, the second movement, *Andante con moto* (flowing with motion), might have been inspired by a religious procession Felix witnessed in Rome during Holy Week. The fourth movement, *Saltarello: Presto*, is in a lively dance tempo, blending together two traditional Italian folk dances, the Saltarello and the Tarantella. Maybe it depicts a royal scene in southern Italy or a festival Felix witnessed in Florence. We don't know the exact inspiration for each movement, but what we do know is that in

1831, Mendelssohn wrote in a letter to Fanny, "The *Italian Symphony* is making rapid progress. It will be the jolliest piece I have so far written, especially the last movement."

