

A highly competent conductor whose repertory was extensive, Peter Maag made his reputation in Europe, but was a presence in American theaters as well. Although most of his life was devoted to opera, he made several recordings that honestly represented his eloquence in the symphonic literature and suggested that he might have made an even more appreciable impact there had he spent more time in concert work. After musical training in Zürich and Basel, Maag studied with Ernest Ansermet in Geneva and soon became an assistant to the elder conductor. He served first as coach and chorus master in Biel-Solothurn beginning in 1943, two years later working his way to full conductor. He served as principal conductor at Düsseldorf from 1952 to 1954 before becoming music director at Bonn from 1954 to 1959. Maag's Covent Garden debut came in 1959 when he conducted *Die Zauberflöte*. From 1964 to 1968, Maag held the post of principal conductor at the Volksoper in Vienna. Meanwhile, Maag had made his American debut at the Lyric Opera of Chicago conducting a November 1, 1961, performance of *Così fan tutte*. For his *Fiordiligi*, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf was ill, likely contributing to the caution evident in the performance. Maag was even less fortunate with *Don Giovanni* when Schwarzkopf succumbed and Lisa della Casa had to be flown in to sing Donna Elvira. Still, the first performance was well regarded and subsequent performances were better still when Schwarzkopf returned as Elvira. Despite a wayward horn section, Maag did well with the Lyric's *Fidelio*, firing an intense performance with Birgit Nilsson and Jon Vickers. Making his Metropolitan Opera debut with *Don Giovanni* in September 1972, Maag conducted there for three seasons. Other assignments included *Norma*, *Die Zauberflöte*, and *La Traviata*. Critics found him supportive of his singers, but deficient in eliciting orchestral sheen in the Verdi. From 1982 to 1991, Maag served as music director of the Berne Municipal Opera. Among Maag's most notable recordings are those devoted to the symphonies of Beethoven (the complete cycle), Mendelssohn, Mozart, Schubert, and the piano and orchestra works of Schumann. For Decca, he led a *Luisa Miller* with Milnes, Caballé, and Pavarotti. Several other operas are available in recordings captured from stage performances.



Mastered in DSD256



PETER MAAG
conducting
THE LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
JENNIFER VVYAN,
soprano
MARION LOWE,
soprano
CHORUS OF ROYAL OPERA HOUSE,
COVENT GARDEN

MENDELSSOHN
A MIDSUMMER

NIGHT'S DREAM
INCIDENTAL MUSIC

Mendelssohn's incidental music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Op. 61, was completed 16 years after he wrote the Overture, Op. 21. The consistency of style and musical unity between them belie the disparate dates of composition. The overture was by an incredibly musically gifted youth of 17, and the incidental music was by the music director of Prussia's King Friedrich Wilhelm IV's Academy of the Arts and the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra.

A Midsummer Night's Dream had always been a favorite of Felix and his sister, Fanny. The commission for the remaining music came from the King, for a Potsdam production of the play, one of several commissions for theatrical music Mendelssohn received while in this post. The producer of the play was Ludwig Tieck, one of the translators of the definitive German version of the play, the same version that the Mendelssohns had enjoyed and absorbed thoroughly as their own.

The incidental music consists of 14 sections, including the overture. There are vocal sections and instrumental movements. The vocal selections include the song "Ye spotted snakes" and the melodramas "Over hill, over dale," "The Spells," "What hempen homespuns," and "The Removal of the Spells." The melodramas served to enhance Shakespeare's text. The remaining sections are primarily cues. The music combines the traditional forms and structures of Classical music with the feeling and expression of the Romantic era. Throughout the sections, Mendelssohn sprinkles themes and motives pulled from the earlier overture to create coherence.

The instrumental movements, Scherzo, Intermezzo, Notturmo, and the "Wedding March," are usually excerpted with the overture for orchestral concert performance. The Scherzo appropriately introduces the fairy-world of Act Two with rapid, running passages in the woodwinds, similar to the string passage in the opening of the overture, both set in a minor mode. The rest of the orchestra joins the woodwinds in a Classical sonata-form movement. Several small motives are repeated, up and down, then down and up the scale, to form the development section. The Intermezzo represents the confusion encountered as Hermia awakes, with a swirling melody buffeted about by the orchestra. The rustic players enter jauntily, represented by the bassoons and ending the Intermezzo in the major. A German Romantic horn melody is the theme of the Notturmo. The music evokes the dreams of the couples as Puck puts right his previous mischief. The "Wedding March" opens with that oh-so-familiar trumpet fanfare, fitting for the Duke of Athens' wedding. Two trio sections are separated by the opening theme; the final occurrence of the main theme includes twittering flutes and strings, suggesting the fairies' part in the matchmaking. The "Finale" returns to the overture for most of its sparkling material, ending with the same four woodwind chords that begin the entire work.

Although some consider Mendelssohn's work to be lightweight and uninspired, the entirety of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* proves otherwise in its inventiveness in reviving his older material and in its expression.

Mendelssohn

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Peter Maag conducting The London Symphony Orchestra

- 1 Overture Op. 21 11:45
- 2 Scherzo, Op. 61 No. 1 4:33
- 3 You Spotted Snakes, Op. 61 No. 3 4:23
- 4 Intermezzo, Op. 61 No. 5 3:30
- 5 Nocturne, Op. 61 No. 7 6:20
- 6 Wedding March, Op. 61 No. 9 4:25
- 7 Dance Of The Clowns, Op. 61 No. 11 1:45
- 8 Finale, Op. 61 No. 12 3:52
- Total Time: 40:33

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