A Midsummer Night’s Dream
Welcome to Kidsbook, your guide to the Chicago Symphony Orchestra School Concerts and Family Matinee Concerts!

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM

SCHOOL CONCERTS
February 10 and 11, 10:15 & 12:00

CSO FAMILY MATINEE SERIES CONCERTS
February 13, 11:00 & 12:45

PERFORMERS
Chicago Symphony Orchestra
Edwin Outwater conductor
Chicago Shakespeare Theater guest artists

ON THE PROGRAM
Mendelssohn
Incidental Music to A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Op. 21 and 61
Overture
Scherzo
Nocturne
Wedding March

THE COMPOSER AT PLAY

When he was a child, Felix Mendelssohn and his sister Fanny loved to play pretend in the world of William Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream. By the time he was a young composer, it was easy for him to write music that captured the magic and silliness of the fairy world found in this story. Mendelssohn was only 17 years old in 1826, when he wrote the Overture to A Midsummer Night’s Dream. Sixteen years later, Mendelssohn returned to this tangled tale and wrote the incidental music to accompany the entire play. This performance by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the Chicago Shakespeare Theater illustrates the story’s unexpected turns in love and life, with music that transforms time and place, and characters that shift back and forth, eventually arriving back where they belong.

Mendelssohn’s overture immediately transports us into Shakespeare’s story with four magical notes that hang in the air, leaving us to wonder what will happen next. Then, the music swiftly transforms! Can you hear the scurrying fairies as the violins quickly and quietly play up and down the fingerboard? Suddenly, the royal brass instruments take over, announcing Oberon and Titania. Again, the music transitions, and a clarinet begins to play the theme of the couples in love as they wander in the forest. Keep reading to learn why the “hee-haw” of a donkey, performed by the strings, is so important to the story...

The young sweethearts of the story are involved in a complicated situation. See if you can keep score!

The CAST

MORTALS (real people)
Four young sweethearts

FAIRIES

Oberon (King)
Titania (Queen)
Puck (Oberon’s servant)

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Night falls once again, the world slowly transforms back into the fairy world, and our story ends with these words from Puck:

“If we shadows have offended
Think but this, and all is mended,
That you have but slumber’d here
While these visions did appear.”

Which means….

If we actors have offended you,
just think of it this way and
everything will be all right—
you were asleep, and this silly
and tangled story was only a dream.

The brass instruments blast a regal opening at the beginning of the Wedding March, celebrating the marriage of the young couples, as well as the marriage between the Duke, Theseus, and his bride, Hippolyta. The trombones get to join the orchestra for the first time, signaling that the day has come and that we are once again in the world of the mortals. This famous wedding march was made popular when Queen Victoria chose it for her daughter’s wedding in 1858, and it has been used at weddings ever since.

Others have tried to celebrate and capture Shakespeare’s fairy world in music, but none have done it quite like Mendelssohn. He was an avid reader of Shakespeare’s plays, as well as a brilliant and innovative composer, who used his keen sense of humor and wit to write the clever and magical music to A Midsummer Night’s Dream.

Finally, all of the mortals fall asleep. This time, Puck does the right thing and sets the magic spell so that Demetrius still loves Helena and Lysander falls back in love with Hermia.

As the music transitions to nightfall, the horn plays a lush lullaby. Soon the bassoons accompany the horn’s beautiful melody, reassuring us that all will be right in the morning. Later, the flute enters, suggesting the wings of night have taken flight.

The nocturne captures the magical world of the fairies where the fairy servant, Puck, plays jokes on everyone. Listen for Puck’s theme being played on the flute. The rest of the woodwinds then join the flute and play give-and-take with the strings, creating the sound of a magical land where the free-spirited Puck tries to do the right thing, but causes confusion instead.

Puck has also uses this magic to play matchmaker with the four young sweethearts, but he mistakenly puts the magic potion on the eyes of Lysander, causing him to fall in love with Helena. Puck tries to make things right by putting magic potion on Demetrius’ eyes, too, but now both Demetrius and Lysander are in love with Helena, and poor Hermia is furious!

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The scherzo captures the magical world of the fairies where the fairy servant, Puck, plays jokes on everyone. Listen for Puck’s theme being played on the flute. The rest of the woodwinds then join the flute and play give-and-take with the strings, creating the sound of a magical land where the free-spirited Puck tries to do the right thing, but causes confusion instead.

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EDWIN OUTWATER

- Edwin is music director of the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony in Ontario, Canada.
- He also is the director of Summer Concerts at the San Francisco Symphony.
- He has conducted the Chicago Symphony, New York Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic and Seattle Symphony, among many others.
- Edwin conducted the world premiere of The Composer is Dead by Nathaniel Stookey and Lemony Snicket while he was resident conductor of the San Francisco Symphony from 2001 to 2006.

CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE THEATER

- CST is dedicated to creating extraordinary productions of classics, new works and family programming; to unlocking Shakespeare’s work for educators and students; and to serving as Chicago’s cultural ambassador through its World’s Stage Series.
- Through a year-round season encompassing more than 650 performances, CST attracts 225,000 audience members annually. One in four of its audience members is under eighteen years old, and today its education programs have impacted the learning of over one million students.
- The CST Family Series presents a wide range of affordable programming especially for families. These programs reach more than 45,000 patrons each season—making Chicago Shakespeare one of the largest providers of family programming in Chicago.
- CST is proud to take an active role in empowering the next generation of literate, engaged cultural champions and creative minds.
- David H. Bell has written the script and directed this production of A Midsummer Night’s Dream. His work as a director, choreographer and writer in Chicago has earned him eleven Jeff Awards and forty-five nominations.
The CSO thanks John Hart and Carol Prins for their support of our family concerts.

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For more information, call 312-294-3410 or e-mail institute@cso.org.

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