

Mozart & Mendelssohn – May 8 – 10, 2026

Wolfgang Mozart and Felix Mendelssohn share three things in common: both were celebrated child prodigies, both died before the age of 40, and both shared an early spotlight with their equally talented sisters. Any discussion about child prodigies invariably includes both composers, but their sisters, Maria Anna Mozart (also known as Nannerl) and Fanny Mendelssohn, were excluded from the limelight solely because of their gender. This issue of *Prelude* explores some notable historical child prodigies as well as those who are on the rise today in the world of music.¹

In 18th century Europe, “prodigies of nature” came from diverse backgrounds and social classes and were featured in a variety of venues from taverns to leading concert halls. Some, like Mozart and Mendelssohn, lived up to their full potential, while others vanished from the public’s view after a few years. The English language acquired the word “wunderkind” thanks to Mozart’s genius; before Mozart, the word was used to describe the miraculously conceived Jesus Christ.



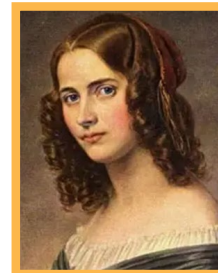
As children, **Wolfgang Mozart** (1756-1791) and his older sister **Maria Anna**, (1751-1829) travelled throughout Austria and beyond with their father Leopold, demonstrating their amazing talents to audiences that invariably included European royalty. Wolfgang composed his first published music at age seven. He wrote a symphony at the age of eight and his first opera at age eleven. At the time of his death at age 35, he left a legacy of more than 600 compositions. His equally talented sister, however, soon became little more than a footnote,



because 18th-century societal constraints restricted women from public performance and composition upon reaching adulthood. Mozart’s Symphony No. 1, composed when he was eight, is performed by the Vienna Philharmonic: [Mozart: Symphony No. 1 - Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra/Böhm \(1978\) - YouTube.](#)

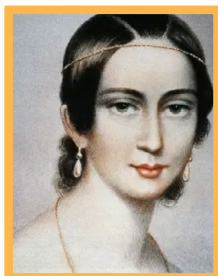


Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) performed his first public concert at the age of nine, wrote 14 string symphonies between the ages of 12 and 14, and published his first piano quartet at the age of 13. Enjoy his String Symphony No. 1, composed at the age of twelve: [Mendelssohn: 1. Sinfonie · hr-Sinfonieorchester · Andrés Orozco-Estrada.](#) Although his older sister **Fanny** (1805-1847) was equally gifted as a pianist and composer (she memorized the entirety of Bach’s *Well Tempered Clavier* by the age of 13), her genius was pushed into the background by their father, who deemed it “improper” for a woman to embark on a career in music. Thanks to Felix, who



¹There are many child prodigies in other fields - this *Prelude* includes those in classical music. Other child prodigies include Pablo Picasso (art), Enrico Fermi (math and physics) Blaise Pascal (math), Arthur Rimbaud (poetry), Mary Shelley (literature), Bodhana Sivanandan and Judit Polgar (chess), and Michael Phelps (swimming). No list would be complete without these remarkable musicians: Jacob Collier, Stevie Wonder, Michael Jackson, Billie Eilish, Victor Wooten and Joey Alexander, who took the stage at the Newport Jazz Festival at the age of 11 and earned a Grammy at age 12. If there are names that you don’t recognize, we urge that you investigate further!

encouraged his sister and even published some of her music under his name, Fanny was not lost to history.



When **Clara Schumann**, born as Clara Wieck (1819-1896), rose to fame in the 1800s, she broke some of the barriers for women in music and set a powerful example for future generations. She embarked on the first of several European concert tours at the age of 12, winning acclaim from both Chopin and Liszt (who were also child prodigies). By the age of 13, she was performing with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra. Clara was both a gifted pianist and composer, and even her teenage works influenced the direction of Romantic music. Given the persistent illness of her pianist/composer husband, Robert Schumann, Clara became the family breadwinner. She juggled an impressive concert career with family life and responsibility for the couple's eight children, setting new visions for what women could achieve in the arts.



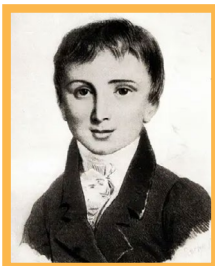
George Bridgetower (1778-1860), a Black violinist who began performing as a soloist at age ten, was concertizing throughout London by age 11. Born in Poland (where his West Indian father worked for a prince), Bridgetower spent much of his life in England and at the age of 25, he became close friends with Ludwig van Beethoven. They performed together and jointly performed Beethoven's Violin Sonata No. 9 in A minor while Beethoven was still working on the composition. The sonata, also known as the "Kreutzer" Sonata, was originally dedicated to Bridgetower. Later, insulted by Bridgetower's comment about a woman, Beethoven scratched out the dedication and revised it to honor violinist Rudolphe Kreutzer, who declared the piece "unplayable" and never performed it. Ironically, it was Bridgetower who performed the piece and contributed to Beethoven's work.



The renowned Italian opera composer **Vincenzo Bellini** (1801-1835) is perhaps best known for his opera *Norma*. Reports of his early years indicate he could sing an aria at eighteen months of age, that he began to study music theory at the age of two and was playing the piano by age three. His first compositions were written when he was just six. He was born into a family of musicians and his fame is tied to the *bel canto* style of singing.



Piano genius and staunch Polish National **Frédéric Chopin** (1810-1849) published his first composition at age seven. As a pre-teen, he was performing in public and astonishing audiences. By 18, he had already transformed the piano repertoire with dazzling compositions that demanded both technical brilliance and an unparalleled depth of emotion.



Franz Liszt (1811-1886) was exposed to music at an early age, thanks to his father, Ádám Liszt, a talented cellist in the court of Hungarian Prince Esterhazy. Liszt began to compose at the age of eight and made his first public appearance as a concert pianist at nine. His playing so impressed Hungarian royalty that the court paid for his musical education for the next six years. His Paris debut in 1824, at the age of 13, was heralded as a sensation, and other concerts quickly followed. Given the extent of his widespread popularity especially among his many female fans who pursued him, he was the world's first superstar celebrity.



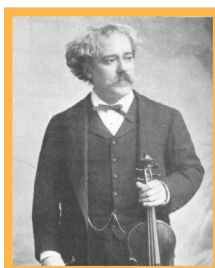
Italian violin child prodigies **Teresa Milanollo** (1827-1904) and her younger sister **Maria Milanollo** (1832-1848) toured Europe extensively in the 1840s, starting when Teresa was ten and her sister only six. Their father, a poor silk

manufacturer, yielded to Teresa's pleas, at age four, to pursue violin studies, and with Maria's birth, the family soon had a second prodigy. Although Maria tragically died from whooping cough at age 16, Teresa, also a composer, enjoyed a long solo career as a performer. The Milanollo sisters were instrumental in influencing the public about the "suitability" of the violin for women, in that before they burst on the music scene, female violin virtuosos were a rarity.



The French opera composer **Georges Bizet** (1838-1875), most well-known for *Carmen*, was accepted at the Conservatoire de Paris at the age of nine, though the minimum age limit at the time was ten. He came from a family of musicians, and during his time at

the Conservatoire, won a series of awards including the prestigious Prix de Rome at the age of 19. His premature death from a heart attack came just three months after the world premiere of *Carmen*. Convinced the work was a failure, Bizet died unaware that his work would prove to be a spectacular and enduring success.



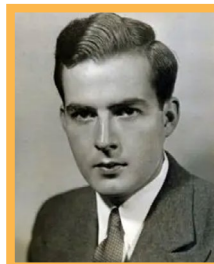
Pablo de Sarasate (1844-1908) began touring Europe as a violinist at the age of ten. His performances were technically dazzling and infused with a fiery Spanish spirit that captivated audiences. Sarasate premiered many pieces of his own that have become part of the

essential repertoire for violinists, such as his show-stopping *Zigeunerweisen*. Musicians look to him as both a composer and performer, and his influence can still be heard in concert halls today.

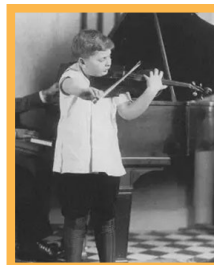


Russian composer **Sergei Prokofiev** (1891-1953) received his first music lessons at age four from his mother, and by age thirteen he was accepted for study at the acclaimed St. Petersburg Conservatory. His first composition was created when he was five and his first opera,

The Giant, was composed at age nine. By his early twenties, Prokofiev was well-established as a talented pianist and composer.



American composer **Samuel Barber** (1910-1981) displayed musical genius from an early age and persisted despite his family's attempts to discourage him from pursuing a career in music. He began piano studies at six, and by age ten, had written the first act of an opera, *The Rose Tree*. At age 14, he was accepted into the newly created Curtis Institute of Music, where he studied for eight years. At age 18, Barber won the coveted Bearn's Prize for his Sonata for Violin and Piano and then won the prize a second time for his *School for Scandal Overture*.



Famed violinist **Yehudi Menuhin** (1916-1999) is also recognized for the prestigious Violin Competition that bears his name. He began violin at age four and his debut at age eight was a solo performance with the San Francisco Symphony, quickly followed by his New York debut at the Manhattan Opera House.

Child prodigies who are living legends in the world of classical music today include:



Argentinian pianist/conductor **Daniel Barenboim**, (b.1942) gave his first public concert at age seven in Buenos Aires, after having started piano lessons at age five. Today, Barenboim is beloved as both pianist and conductor. Barenboim was married to another child prodigy, British cellist **Jacqueline du Pré** (1945-1987), widely regarded as one of the great cellists of the 20th century, who died prematurely from multiple sclerosis.



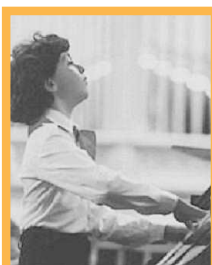
Famed cellist **Yo-Yo Ma** (b.1955) is now a household name. He began on drums, violin and piano at the age of three, but settled on cello at the age of four, with instructions from his father. Ma performed for Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy when he was just seven.

At age eight he appeared on a television broadcast hosted by Leonard Bernstein, with his sister Yeou-Cheng Ma, who accompanied him on piano. With an eclectic repertoire, Ma is arguably one of the most beloved classical musicians today.



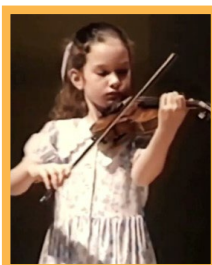
German violinist **Anne-Sophie Mutter** (b.1963) began violin at age five, and after only one year of lessons, won the National Music Prize at age six. At the age of 13, her performance at the Lucerne Music Festival caught the attention of Maestro Herbert von Karajan,

who arranged her orchestral debut the following year with the Berlin Philharmonic. She has recorded more than 50 albums and earned four Grammy awards.



Russian pianist **Evgeny Kissin** (b.1971) was recognized as a child prodigy at the age of six. He made his performing debut at age ten with the Ulyanovsk Symphony Orchestra, performing Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 20. At the age of 12, he recorded both of Chopin's

piano concertos with the Moscow Philharmonic. Today, he lives in Prague with his wife, performs extensively, and is an outspoken critic of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.



Three-time Grammy winner **Hilary Hahn** (b.1979) began playing violin one month before her fourth birthday. By the age of ten, she was admitted to the renowned Curtis Institute of Music and made her first major orchestral debut at the age of 12 with the Baltimore Symphony

Orchestra. Performances with the Cleveland

Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony and the New York Philharmonic followed in close succession.



Chinese Pianist **Lang Lang** (b.1982) began piano lessons at age two after seeing a *Tom & Jerry* cartoon episode called *The Cat Concerto*. He performed his first public recital at age five. At the age of 11, he won the Xinghai National Piano Competition in Beijing,

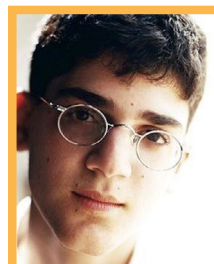
and at age 13, won the International Tchaikovsky Competition for Young Musicians. Today, Lang Lang is a much-adored performer and collaborator, and lives in Paris with his wife.



Pianist **Yuja Wang** (b.1987) began piano at age six, and at the age of 11 won third prize at the Ettlingen International Competition for Young Pianists in Germany. At 15, she won the concerto competition at the Aspen Music Festival and, by 21, had a well-established international

career. A brilliant and charismatic performer, Wang remains in great demand as a gifted artist.

Child prodigies continue to make news and just a few of the younger musicians deserving of your attention include:



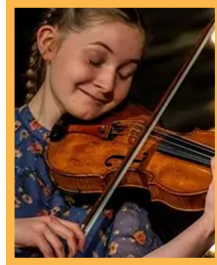
American composer **Jay Greenberg** (b. 1991) caught the attention of the American media thanks to a *60 Minutes* broadcast in November of 2004 when he was just 12. Greenberg began composing symphonies at age three and entered the Juilliard

Pre-College Division at age ten, where his works, including symphonies and chamber music, were performed by major symphonies. His Fifth Symphony was premiered by the New Haven Symphony Orchestra when he was just 12. Here is the *60 Minutes* broadcast that brought him to the public's attention: [Prodigy, 12, Compared To Mozart - CBS News](#).



The young Russian harpist, **Alisa Sadikova** (b. 2003) performed at Carnegie Hall at the age of seven, and by ten, was enrolled at St. Petersburg's State Conservatory. Here is her performance of *The*

Fountain at age 9: [The Fountain — Marcel Lucien Grandjany.](#)



British composer/musician **Alma Deutscher** (b.2005) began playing piano at age two and violin at age three. By six, she had composed her first piano sonata and by ten premiered her first full length opera, *Cinderella*.

A performer as well as a composer, Alma was featured on *60 Minutes*: [60 Minutes Archives: Alma Deutscher, British music prodigy.](#)



Nine-year old **Samuel Tan** (b.2005) from Singapore surprised everyone when he took first prize in the 2014 adult-level Andrea Postacchini International Violin Competition in Italy. He was then chosen

to compete in the 2016 Menuhin Violin Competition. Enjoy his performance of the Kabalevsky Violin Concerto, when he was just eight years old: [SAMUEL TAN 8 years old/ Kabalevsky Violin Concerto.](#)

JOIN US!

Please join the HSO on May 8 - 10 2026, to enjoy an exciting performance of Anna Clyne's *Color Field*, Mozart's *Concerto for Clarinet in A Major*, featuring HSO's Principal Clarinet Sangwon Lee, and Mendelssohn's *Symphony No. 3 in A Minor*, also called the *Scottish Symphony*, all under the baton of HSO's Music Director, Carolyn Kuan.

Did you borrow this *Prelude*? Get your own free copy! Whether you're a ticket buyer, donor, curious about the music, or know someone who is, just send an email to dshulansky@hartfordsymphony.org. We'll make sure you receive *Prelude* by email, in advance of each HSO Masterworks concert!

Are you interested in watching some performances by the prodigies listed? Try these suggestions:

Enjoy 12-year-old **Evgeny Kissin** performing Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 1:

[Evgeny Kissin - Chopin Piano Concerto No.1 1984.](#)

Here is 15-year-old **Hilary Hahn** playing Bach's Gigue in D minor:

[Young Hilary Hahn plays Bach \(Gigue in d minor\).](#)

It is thrilling to watch **Alma Deutscher** compose in real time, and we know you will enjoy these two videos that demonstrate her genius:

[Watch a prodigy create -- from four notes in a hat;](#) and

[Improvising on notes chosen by the audience.](#)

Alisa Sadikova's performance of the Mozart Concerto for Harp and Flute is breathtaking:

[Mozart - Concert for Harp and Flute in C, II part. \(Alisa Sadikova \(Hp\), Maria Uribina \(Fl\)\).](#)

Enjoy 12-year-old **Yuja Wang** performing Chopin's Etude Op. 10 No. 4:

[She plays like a pro at such a young age | Yuja Wang \(12\) plays Chopin's Etude Op 10 no 4.](#)

A wonderful video of **Lang Lang** at the age of 12 offers a glimpse into his genius:

[Lang Lang at Age 12.](#)

Finally, enjoy nine-year-old **Anne-Sophie Mutter** performing Sarasate's Zigeunerweisen:

[9 year old Anne-Sophie Mutter plays Sarasate's Zigeunerweisen.](#)



WONDERING HOW THE MUSIC OF OUR FEATURED CONCERT WILL SOUND? Below is HSO'S LISTENING GUIDE, with links to the pieces you'll hear on our concert stage – and more!

The first movement (*Yellow*) from Anna Clyne's *Color Field* is performed by the Baltimore Symphony under the direction of Marin Alsop: [Color Field: I. Yellow.](#)

The second movement, *Red*, may be viewed at: [Color Field: II. Red.](#)

The third movement, *Orange*, may be viewed at: [Color Field: III. Orange.](#)

Enjoy this brief video with composer Anna Clyne, explaining her connection between art and music, and Rothko's painting which inspired the composition:

[Anna Clyne on Bringing Together Visual Art and Music.](#)

Mozart's Concerto for Clarinet in A Major, featuring soloist Carlos Britto Ferreira with the Romanian Symphony Orchestra, is sure to make you smile:

[W. A. Mozart - Clarinet Concerto in A major | C. Ferreira | C. Măcelaru | Romanian Chamber Orchestra.](#)

Mendelssohn's much loved *Scottish Symphony* is beautifully performed by the Orquesta Sinfónica de Galicia, under the baton of Rumon Gamba:

[Mendelssohn: Symphony No. 3 "Scottish" - Rumon Gamba - Orquesta Sinfónica de Galicia.](#)



As you begin to realize that every different type of music, everybody's individual music, has its own rhythm, life, language and heritage, you realize how life changes, and you learn how to be more open and adaptive to what is around us.

- Yo-Yo Ma

SOURCE MATERIAL

[Wunderkind \(1756–1773\) | Mediathek](https://www.history.com/articles/8-famous-child-prodigies)<https://www.history.com/articles/8-famous-child-prodigies>

[10 Amazing Child Music Prodigies: from Past to Present](#)

[14 of the Most Extraordinary Child Prodigies in History - Australian Chamber Orchestra](#)

[10 Musical Prodigies Who Changed Music Before Age 18 - Festivaltopia](#)

[Mozart's Early Works: Sonata in C, Köchel Catalogue & More](#)

[Top 10 Recent Young Musical Prodigies - Narrative](#)

[10 Amazing Child Music Prodigies: from Past to Present](#)

[9 Modern Music Prodigies to Know](#)

[10 videos of astonishing child prodigies - Classic FM](#)

[Milanollo - Violin Virtuosas](#)

[Georges Bizet | French Composer & Opera Innovator | Britannica](#)

[Samuel Barber | History | Research Starters | EBSCO Research](#)

[Nine-year-old violin prodigy wins international competition - Classic FM](#)