Felix Mendelssohn’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream: Music of Two Worlds
Musical Traits of Two Worlds

Skills/Learning Goals:
- Listening for musical opposites
- Identifying musical traits in Mendelssohn’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream
- Relating musical traits to character traits

Big Idea:
Musicians use everyday words, and sometimes special musical words, to describe the different qualities of music.

Preparing for the Video:
Brainstorm examples of things that are opposite, such as cold and hot, smooth and rough.
Introduce the idea that musical traits can have opposites, such as having a slow or fast beat (tempo), or being loud or soft (dynamics).

How to Use this Video:
After Teaching Artist Erin Wight demonstrates a pair of musical opposites, decide which term describes a musical passage from the Fairy world.

Pause 1: Light (played softly, delicately) or heavy (played strongly, powerfully).
Decide whether fairy music is light or heavy.
[Hint: Compare fairies [small, light] to the sound of the music.]

Pause 2: Staccato (choppy, separated notes) or legato (smooth, connected or flowing notes).
[Hint: Staccato notes are disconnected, detached, and have silence or space between them.
Legato notes are connected and joined, without space between notes.]

Pause 3: Major (bright, clear) or minor mode (dark, mysterious).
[Hint: Major can be thought of as bright or cheerier sounding notes, such as a sunny day.
Minor is darker, or sadder, and can be compared to a cloudy or rainy day.]

Pause 4: Try to describe other qualities of Fairy music, such as:
- Tempo: How fast or slow the music is
- Dynamics: How loud or soft the music is
- Register: How high or low the musical notes [or pitches] are

Extension: Think of your favorite song. Using the musical terms from the video, how would you describe the song? For example, does it sound staccato or legato?
Light or heavy? Next, how would that song sound if you changed its musical traits to be the opposite of how you described it?
Try humming the original song, and then hum the opposite version!