

Johan Svendsen was born in Christiania (now Oslo) in 1840 and died in Copenhagen in 1911.

His principal instrument was the violin and he played in the orchestra of the Norske Theater (of which Ibsen was Director). His formal music education did not begin until 1863 when he entered the Conservatoire in Leipzig where he concentrated on composition and conducting. He pursued a successful career in both capacities, and only returned to Norway in 1872. He was appointed Musical Director of the Royal opera in Copenhagen in 1883, remaining in that position until ill-health forced him to retire in 1908.

His most important compositions, including two symphonies, two concertos, for Norwegian Rhapsodies, vocal and chamber music, were all written before 1880. The Octet for Strings (four violins, two violas, two cellos) dates from his last years in the Leipzig Conservatoire. It was performed for the first time in 1866 and won the Conservatoire's First Prize.

The inventive and rhythmically intriguing second movement *Allegro scherzoso* has something of the spirit of a scherzo, but is formally more like a loose-limbed rondo. The 'scherzo' element is provided by the chattering triplets of the opening, the 'trio' element by the short, lyrical theme (with a dotted rhythm in its second bar) initiated by the first violin but subsequently expanded almost beyond recognition.