

Meridian

MENDELSSOHN

Complete Works For String Quartet Vol. 1

String Quartet in E minor, Op.44, No.2

Four Pieces for String Quartet, Op.81

String Quartet in F minor, Op.80



MAGGINI QUARTET



MENDELSSOHN

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String Quartet in E minor, Op.44, No.2

[1]	Allegro assai appassionato	7:59
[2]	Scherzo: Allegro di molto	3:59
[3]	Andante	6:45
[4]	Presto agitato	6:29

Four Pieces for String Quartet, Op.81

[5]	Capriccio: Andante con moto - Allegro fugato, assai vivace	5:50
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String Quartet in F minor, Op.80

[6]	Allegro vivace assai	7:40
[7]	Allegro assai	4:30
[8]	Adagio	8:33
[9]	Finale: Allegro molto	6:30



MEDELSSOHN'S STRING QUARTETS
op. 44 no. 2, op. 80 and op. 81 no. 3

The different phases of Mendelssohn's creative genius are reflected in his string quartets. The early works (op. 12 and op. 13) show that, by the time he reached his twenties, he already possessed a remarkable understanding of the recently published late Beethoven string quartets and was able to learn from them, not simply to copy them. Some claim that Mendelssohn never surpassed his precocious early compositions in originality and flair, but that would be to ignore the heartfelt, mature works of the later, more experienced composer which are featured on this disc.

The first performance of the E minor Quartet op. 44 no. 2 was given in Leipzig on 28th October 1837 by a quartet led by Ferdinand David. It was the first of the three op. 44 quartets to be composed, followed by the Eb no. 3 and finally the D major no. 1. No-one knows why Mendelssohn chose to publish them in a different order from their composition. All three were written in 1837-8, though subject to much revision, for which Mendelssohn apologised abjectly to the publisher: "Please be kind enough to excuse my very frequent, unending corrections; it is a bad habit, of which I would gladly rid myself but cannot." ("Entschuldigen Sie gütigst, daß ich so oft und so lange nachcorrigire [sic]; es ist eine böse Gewohnheit, die ich gern ablegen möchte und nicht kann.") Letter to Breitkopf and Härtel, Leipzig, 25th February 1839. Almost a year had passed since Mendelssohn expressed a desire to see them quickly in print. "I would also very much like to see the 3 Violin Quartets, about which Herr Dr. Härtel asked me recently, engraved soon; I confirm that I want the title to be 3 Violin Quartets, and they should come out as *one* work..."



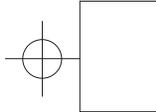


(“Auch die beiden Violinquartette , nach welchen Herr Dr. Härtel mich neulich fragte, würde ich gern bald gestochen sehn; zwar wünsche ich, daß der Titel heiße: 3 Violinquartetten und daß sie als *ein* Werk herauskommen..”) Letter to Breitkopf and Härtel, Leipzig, 24th March 1838. All three were published together in a set of performing parts in June 1839 and were quickly duplicated in an English and French edition, but it was another year before they appeared in score. Mendelssohn's attention to every detail of the publication process is seen in his letter to Breitkopf & Härtel of 30 May 1839: “Many thanks for sending the title page of my Quartets, which I like very much. It is in the rococo style, which subtle critics may take as an allusion to the content, - but it is very nice.” (“ Meinen besten Dank für Übersendung des Titels meiner Quartette, welcher mir sehr wohlgefällt. Er ist im Rococogeschmack, was feine Kritiker für eine Anspielung auf den Inhalt nehmen können, - aber sehr schön.”)

Op. 44 no. 2 was begun while Mendelssohn was on honeymoon, and one may expect the music to mirror his personal happiness, but the choice of minor key and the passionate, opening syncopations in the inner parts reveal disquieting undercurrents and a sombre mood. The music is constructed on traditional contrapuntal lines, displaying Mendelssohn's sensitive awareness of the colours obtainable from the different string registers. The hard-driven first movement finds temporary relief in a gentle, understated second subject. The Scherzo which follows has that lightness of touch instantly recognisable as uniquely Mendelssohnian. The tuneful slow movement is enriched by an almost ceaseless flow of semiquavers in the inner, and sometimes outer, textures. The dramatic *Presto agitato* is music of high energy, with a lengthy coda joyously breaking free (in the manner of Beethoven) from the demands of sonata form to trace its own imaginative path to a conclusion strongly reinforcing the tonic.



The temptation to link music to significant events in a composer's life can be hard to resist. But composers do not necessarily indulge their inner feelings on a day-to-day basis in their music, as we have noted in the case of Mendelssohn's 'honeymoon' quartet. However, the death of his beloved sister Fanny on 14th May 1847 sent him into a deep depression. Five days later he wrote to his younger sister Rebecka "God help us all – since yesterday I have been unable to say or think anything further . . . today and yesterday and in many, many days I won't be able to write anything more than just – God help us, God help us!" ("Gott helfe uns allen – weiter weiß ich nichts zu sagen und zu denken, seit gestern . . . heut und gestern und in vielen, vielen Tagen werde ich nicht mehr zu schreiben wissen, als eben – Gott helfe uns, Gott helfe uns!"). Two months later he began work on the op. 80 quartet. He had travelled to Switzerland in an attempt to regain his composure, but, though written in the beautiful alpine scenery of Interlaken, the quartet conveys a powerful sense of grief. The opening is hardly a conventional first subject, more an atmosphere than a theme. The second subject brings the relief of the major but is initially dominated by restless syncopations. A movement in 3/4 time follows, but it is neither Minuet nor Scherzo in character. Underlying rhythmic and harmonic disturbances generate a feeling of deep unease, which is also present in the exceptionally austere trio section. The Adagio conveys a weight and seriousness more than a little reminiscent of Beethoven. The long lines of the Finale are built on pithy motifs and unexpected phrase lengths, proclaiming that this is the work of a composer of both substance and experience. The recapitulation brings new counterpoint in the first violin, leading eventually to a coda combining brilliance with sombre intensity. The work was published posthumously, following the death of Mendelssohn on 4th November 1847 at the lamentably young age of 38.





The Capriccio op. 81 no. 3 was composed in 1843. Like the F minor Quartet it was published posthumously, as one of a set of four pieces for string quartet written over a period of twenty years (1827-47). The term *Capriccio*, first used in the 16th century, denotes a certain looseness of structure, a piece in which rules are broken rather than obeyed. Mendelssohn's divides into two parts, a tender, lilting Andante followed by a vigorous fugato, which opens as a strict fugue but develops more in the spirit than in the letter of a fugue. It uses well-behaved fugal devices such as inversion and pedal points, but a romantic fugue by default straddles the romantic and baroque idiom, and this one is no exception. Mendelssohn's passion for Bachian counterpoint, infiltrated with the spirit of his own music, makes this Capriccio a masterpiece of multiculturalism. In the words of that most generous of musical composer critics, Robert Schumann,

" . . . he [Mendelssohn] is the Mozart of the nineteenth century, the most brilliant musician who most clearly recognises the contradictions of our time and is the first to reconcile them."

" . . . er [Mendelssohn] ist der Mozart des 19ten Jahrhunderts, der hellste Musiker, der die Widersprüche der Zeit am klarsten durchschaut, und zuerst versöhnt."

Robert Schumann, *Gesammelte Schriften über Musik und Musiker*, Leipzig 1854, III, 273. https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=1PAsA AAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&uthuser=0&hl=en_GB&pg=GBS.PA273. Page 273.

Formed in 1988, the Maggini Quartet is one of the finest British string quartets. Its acclaimed recordings have won international awards including Gramophone Chamber Music Award of the Year, Diapason d'Or of the Year and a Cannes Classical Award, and have twice been nominated for Grammy Awards. The Quartet is commencing a new collaboration with Meridian Records by recording the complete Mendelssohn quartet cycle. The Maggini Quartet's commitment to new music has led to important commissions including works by James MacMillan, Robert Simpson, Eleanor Alberga and Roxanna Panufnik. The Quartet's unique collaboration with Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, performing and recording his ten 'Naxos Quartets', has been hailed as "a 21st century landmark". Their next commission is a string quartet by Stuart MacRae to celebrate the ensemble's 25th Anniversary in 2013. The Maggini Quartet appears frequently in prestigious concert series at home and abroad and makes regular media broadcasts.

Recent international visits have included Dubai, Switzerland and the Netherlands. The Quartet tours in Norway every summer, and will undertake a major tour of Germany in autumn 2013. The Maggini are renowned for their interpretations of British Repertoire and The Glory of the English String Quartet continues to be an important ongoing initiative, drawing upon the wonderful repertoire which the Quartet is committed to bringing to a worldwide audience. The coming season features concert cycles of repertoire by Bridge and Britten. The Maggini Quartet launched its own chamber music festival

in May 2012. 'Maggini in Breckland' is an annual event based in Norfolk, bringing musicians of the highest calibre to the community, with concerts reflecting the full range of the Maggini's eclectic repertoire. In addition to their concert activity, the members of the Quartet have an international reputation as chamber music coaches. They hold several UK residencies and have worked at the UK's senior music institutions.

The Maggini Quartet would like to extend their warmest thanks to the following Friends for their continuing support:

Vivian Flynn
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Martin Outram

Susanne Stanzeleit

David Angel

Michal Kaznowski

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A Natural Sound Recording

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Recorded in
St. Michael and All Angels, Barton Turf
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Photos of Quartet & Members
Melanie Strover
Photo of Mendelssohn Statue
Michal Kaznowski
Recorded by **Richard Hughes**
Produced by **Rachel Smith**
Edited by **Susanne Stanzeleit**

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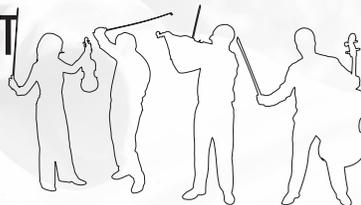
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