

Meridian

MENDELSSOHN: Complete Works For String Quartet Vol. 3
Maggini Quartet

CDE 84638

Meridian

A Natural Sound Recording

CDE 84638 TT 68'00"



LC 13637 DDD MCPS



Recorded in
St. Michael and All Angels, Barton Turf
12-14 November 2014
Photos of Quartet & Members
Melanie Strover
Picture of Mendelssohn
by Carl Jäger, ca.1870
Archive of the Mendelssohn House, Leipzig
Recorded by **Richard Hughes**
Produced by **Andrew Walton**

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MENDELSSOHN

Complete Works For String Quartet Vol. 3

String Quartet in Eb Op.12

- | | | |
|-----|---|------|
| [1] | Adagio non troppo- Allegro non tardante | 7:50 |
| [2] | Canzonetta, Allegretto | 4:08 |
| [3] | Andante espressivo | 4:10 |
| [4] | Molto Allegro e vivace | 8:16 |

String Quartet in Eb Op.44 no.3

- | | | |
|-----|---------------------------------|-------|
| [5] | Allegro vivace | 10:23 |
| [6] | Scherzo, Assai leggero e vivace | 4:15 |
| [7] | Adagio non troppo | 9:12 |
| [8] | Molto Allegro con fuoco | 9:24 |

[9] Tema Con Variazioni from Op.81

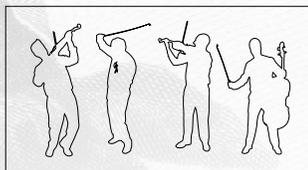
(Andante sostenuto - Presto- Andante sostenuto) 6:19

[10] Scherzo from Op.81

Allegro leggiero 3:56

MAGGINI QUARTET

Julian Leaper
David Angel
Martin Outram
Michal Kaznowski



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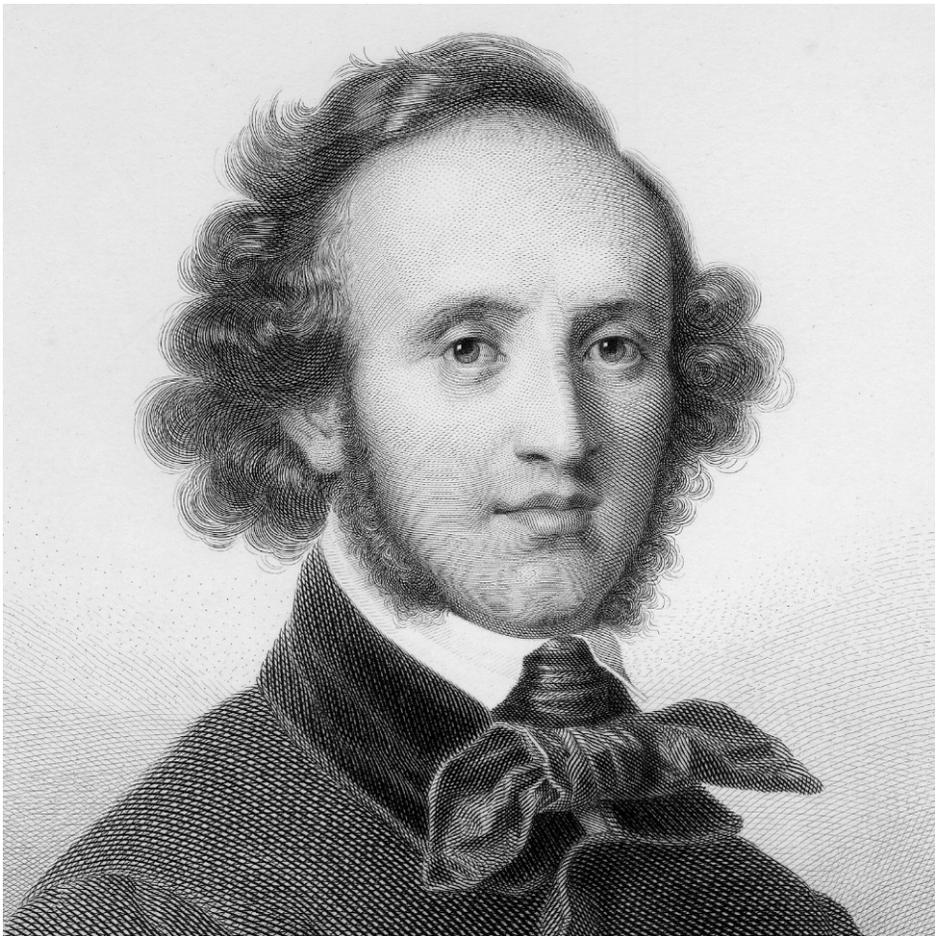
String Quartet in Eb Op.44 no.3

Andante and Scherzo Op.81 nos.1 and 2



MAGGINI QUARTET





String Quartet in Eb Op.12*Adagio non troppo – Allegro non tardante**Canzonetta (Allegretto)**Andante espressivo**Molto allegro e vivace*

An opus number based on order of publication does not always represent the sequence of composition of a composer's works. Op.12 was composed in 1829 and published immediately, while op. 13, written 2 years earlier, had to wait until 1830 before appearing in print, thus receiving a later opus. But what matters is that the genie was long out of the bottle, with teenage works from the composer such as the Octet and Midsummer Night's Dream Overture which have arguably never been surpassed nor even equalled by one so young.

The mature string writing in the Op.12 quartet may owe a debt to the 20-year-old composer's extensive preparatory work in his 12 Sinfonie for strings, written between 1821 and 1823. However, one should not miss the profound influence of late Beethoven on the youthful Mendelssohn. In the seventh bar there is already a reversal of quartet roles with second violin and viola on the top and bottom lines of the score, leaving first violin and cello to supply the middle voices. This is a product of the counterpoint, but it also creates a special quartet sonority, with viola C string substituting for the cello. One may also point to the final 2 bars of the work, where 2nd violin and viola change places simply in order to create movement and colour. If they had not moved the chords would have contained exactly the same notes, but the result would have been more static.

The quartet was completed in London, following a summer trip to Scotland, where Mendelssohn sketched the inspired opening of the Hebrides Overture. On 10th September 1829 he wrote to his two sisters "... I hope to have finished my quartet by next postday, and intend sending it to you ... " We may consider ourselves lucky the quartet was ever completed, since he also confessed

"... you may be scandalised; I do nothing but flirt, and that in English!" Later in the letter he reported progress in a little more detail; "My quartet is now in the middle of the last movement, and I think it will be completed in a few days ... " Four days later it was ready.

Throughout the slow introduction Mendelssohn delays establishing a firm tonic. This creates tension and a sense of expectation which is only resolved by the arrival of the *Allegro* first subject, indisputably in Eb major. Mendelssohn's music abounds in melody, and there is scarcely a moment in the entire movement where it is absent. But it is his mastery of harmony that makes the melodies so endearing. The whimsical *Canzonetta* opens with a subtle combination of *arco* and *pizzicato*. There follows an extended middle section in the major and at an increased tempo, throughout which semiquavers flutter lightly but purposefully against a background of long, sustained notes, as though on an organ pedal. The opening of the slow movement, with all four instruments in a low register, confirms Mendelssohn's instinct for rich instrumental sonority in the manner of late Beethoven. One may reflect that Beethoven had been dead but two years and the composer of this quartet, at the age of twenty, had already absorbed the profundity of his late works. The tempo is *Andante espressivo* but the instruction given to the first violin is to play *largo*, with breadth. Another Beethovenian trait is the recitative for first violin. The Finale arrives *attacca* and unprepared, shattering the quiet intensity of the slow movement's concluding bars with music of high energy. The drama is maintained during the second subject, but the real surprise is the development section, which takes us back to the equivalent moment in the first movement, switching from compound to simple time in order to do so. Mendelssohn introduces further recall in the coda, bringing the work full circle with music from the first movement *Allegro*. In the final bars all dying embers are extinguished.



String Quartet in Eb Op. 44 no. 3*Allegro vivace**Scherzo (Assai leggiero vivace)**Adagio non troppo**Molto Allegro con fuoco*

The three Op.44 quartets were published together in 1838. No.3, the second to be composed, was completed on 6th February 1838. Later that year (on December 10th) Mendelssohn wrote to the pianist and composer Ignaz Moscheles: "I have been rather lazy of late . . . Still, I have composed a new sonata for the piano and violoncello [published in 1839] and three violin quartets, which are shortly to appear. As soon as these four works are out I shall send them to you, and hope you will give me your candid opinion; but mind you criticise, and tell me what should have been done differently, and what I ought to have done better . . ." Despite having invited critical appraisal in a mildly self-deprecating tone Mendelssohn, one suspects, was not displeased with these works. With his return to the medium, after the better part of a decade, experience and assurance have replaced youthful spontaneity. Enthusiasm and energy have not, however, been sacrificed.

Op.44 no.3 is on a grand scale. The musical ideas are treated spaciouly, with neither the themes nor the working-out rushed or compressed. The up-beat semiquaver motif with which the first movement opens is a persistent feature which even the second subject cannot entirely throw off. The development section moves through many different tonalities without for a moment losing stability. But Mendelssohn has a surprise up his sleeve. Following the recapitulation the coda plunges once more into developmental material, as though the composer were reluctant to leave his ever-evolving ideas unused. It is an unmistakably Beethovenian feature. The *Scherzo* is light but not light-hearted, being consistently in the minor. A fugato section interrupts proceedings, but it is not a strict fugue, since the entries come in the order two in the tonic, two in the dominant. The introduction of counterpoint at this moment serves the music well, enabling Mendelssohn to extend the movement substantially. We would not want to have missed the ensuing three-part trills, unusual for this time. The *non troppo* qualification to the slow movement's *Adagio* is in deference to the undulating semiquavers, which demand a flowing tempo for the movement. There is no compromising with the *molto* of the Finale's *Molto Allegro*. The string writing is superlative, with semiquavers tossed recklessly between the instruments, creating a fitting climax to a work of many contrasts.

Andante and Scherzo Op. 81 nos. 1 and 2

Andante

Scherzo (Allegro leggiero)

The four movements for string quartet op. 81 were published posthumously in 1849. Comprising pieces partly from earlier works they nevertheless share a common opus number. As usual, the order is wrong. Nos. 1 and 2, composed in 1847 and forming part of an incomplete string quartet, are the latest of the set. The other two, written in 1827 and 1843, are unconnected.

The *Andante* movement is in the form of a theme and variations. The theme is stated in simple four-part harmony, leaving scope for creative development in the variations. Mendelssohn addresses himself to the task immediately, introducing syncopated semiquavers in the first variation and new harmonies to accompany the viola. The pace quickens inexorably with a variation in triplets, then one featuring semiquavers and subsequently a *presto* in 6/8 time. This leads to a violin cadenza and a restatement of the main theme, imaginatively varied.

The *Scherzo* is delicate, subtle and constantly re-energised by chromatic inflection. This is uniquely Mendelssohnian and home territory for the composer. One cannot help but wonder what kind of outer movements might have been needed to complete the work, or what prevented it. He did complete a quartet that year, op. 80 in F minor, which is darker and more sombre throughout. In contemplating these differences one is struck by the range of Mendelssohn's music and how far removed it is from the empty salon repertoire, with which he is so often and so wrongly associated.

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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's most recent project has been recording the complete Mendelssohn quartet cycle for Meridian Records.

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. Their unique collaboration with Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, performing and recording his ten 'Naxos Quartets', was hailed as "a 21st century landmark".

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, the Netherlands, Germany and France. They also have an annual summer tour in Norway and will be returning to Denmark for a major tour in 2017.

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.

In addition to their concert activity, the members of the Quartet have an international reputation as chamber music coaches and have worked at the UK's senior music institutions. They hold residencies at Brunel University and Canterbury Christ Church University and have innovative ongoing relationships with schools including Kingston Grammar School, Old Palace School of John Whitgift and Trinity School in Croydon





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

Vivian Flynn
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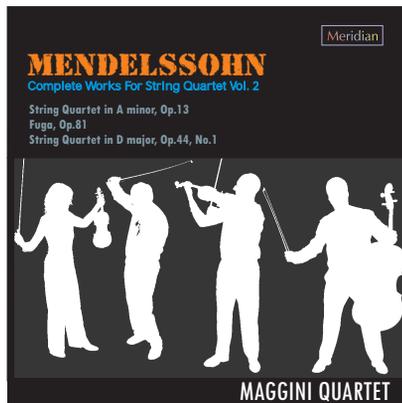


Also Available on Meridian



CDE84618

String Quartet in E minor, Op.44, No.2
Four Pieces for String Quartet, Op.81
String Quartet in F minor, Op.80



CDE84625

String Quartet in A minor, Op.13
Fuga, Op.81
String Quartet in D major, Op.44, No.1