



Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy: Piano Trios

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Felix Mendelssohn

Robert Schumann, in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, hailed Felix Mendelssohn as the Mozart of the nineteenth century, the "brightest musician who sees through the contradictions of our time most clearly and is the first to reconcile them, and he will not be the last artist." This is high praise and a bold prediction coming from one of the foremost musicians of the day. Such praise is borne out in these near perfect piano trios. This is music that is replete with every emotion. Even as they are set in minor keys with somewhat turbulent opening movements, they sound sunny and hopeful, full of wit and charm and no small amount of youthful joie de vivre.

Mendelssohn's own piano playing must have been remarkable, given the sheer virtuosity of the piano writing in these works. The c minor trio opens with a rollicking theme and the piano never quits. A beautifully lyrical Andante follows, and Mendelssohn shows his ability to create a gorgeous melody that, while somewhat sentimental, is never over the top or maudlin. A fleeting scherzo is followed by a jaunty finale. The second trio is no less a masterpiece, flashy without being gaudy, packed full of the wonderful tunes that only a Schubert could match. It struck me as amusing that the theme of the Scherzo is remarkably similar to Legrenzi's *Che fiero costume*, known the world over to beginning students of singing.

The Schweizer Trio is nothing less than superb in these performances. Particular kudos goes to Martin Lucas Staub, whose keyboard skills are beyond reproach. It is fairly evident that Mendelssohn was thinking beyond the salon when he composed these works. They are so full in scope and rich in tone that he must have had a concert hall in mind. Having said that, Mr. Staub never lets the formidable piano parts overwhelm his string playing colleagues, who by the way, play with spotless intonation, elegant phrasing and youthful panache. I particularly admired the manner in which this ensemble was able to take the fast movements at an almost roller-coaster tempo, yet never leave the listener feeling out of breath. The playing is of such high quality that the music just flows out effortlessly. One is left believing that there is no other way to play this music, and this is a delightful quality. I was thrilled by repeated listening to this disc.