

The quartet has four movements, strung together in the same order as are the movements of the other two Op. 44 quartets: sonata-allegro -- scherzo -- slow movement -- finale. The soaring first violin melody, with the help of the quietly simmering second violin and viola and sure-footed "thunks" from the cello, that opens the Molto allegro vivace is as warm and full-blooded as a quartet idea can get; the second theme is, however, cast in the rather more subdued region of F sharp minor (B minor in the recapitulation), and maintains a dignified homophonic chorale tone.

Mendelssohn moves a step backward, historically-speaking, and substitutes a Menuetto for a scherzo-proper (the minuet itself being the movement that the scherzo was originally the substitute for: a nod from Mendelssohn in the direction of the eighteenth-century traditions that were, and would always be, his musical lifeline). Marked Un poco allegretto, this is well-bred, genteel music; some twirling first violin eighth notes, taken up almost half-heartedly by the other instruments, however, save the music from collapsing from the weight of too many good manners.

The Andante espressivo con moto slow movement in B minor has a magical texture: transparent pizzicati from the viola and cello, a continuous light staccato in sixteenth notes from the second violin, and a taut tune in the first violin that every so often joins the second and its staccati, as, in fact, the lower two instruments later do as well.

Something of a gigue found its way into the Presto con brio finale; or perhaps instead of a gigue it is the same snappy-rhythm buoyancy that fills the finale of the famous E minor Violin Concerto (1844) that we are hearing. The first violin part certainly sometimes sounds as though Mendelssohn was thinking violin concerto when he wrote it!

*The Juilliard
String Quartet*
MENDELSSOHN

*Quartet In A Minor, Op. 13
Quartet In D Major, Op. 44, No. 1*

Despite its higher opus number, the String Quartet No. 2 in A minor, Op. 13, was composed almost exactly two years before the String Quartet No. 1 in E flat major, Op. 12. Although it was completed on October 26, 1827, the A minor Quartet was not published until 1830, a year after the Quartet in E flat.

In the introduction to the first movement is a quote from Mendelssohn's song *Ist es wahr?*, the first line of which is "Is it true you are waiting for me in the arbor by the vine-clad wall?" Because of this, some writers have suggested the piece derives from Mendelssohn's emotions concerning a youthful love affair. A much more powerful and significant presence in the quartet, however, is that of Beethoven. After the introduction, the first movement bursts into a passionate sonata-form structure in which the material is treated in counterpoint. A dissonant transition leads to a secondary theme, group, made up of three themes. The development section is frantic, and after the recapitulation, there is more development in the coda.

The pensive slow movement is marked *Adagio non lento*. The *Ist es wahr* figure from the first movement appears in the first section, as does a quote from the *Cavatina* of Beethoven's String Quartet, Op. 130. Its central, fugal segment is clearly a reference to the fugue in the middle of the slow movement of Beethoven's Quartet in F major, Op. 95. Not only are the subjects very similar, but the fugue in both cases begins in the viola and is answered by the second violin. As in the Beethoven, the fugal material alternates with the beginning of the movement, but in the Mendelssohn the two sections are less disparate and come together at the end.

Of the four movements in the Op. 13 quartet, the third, an *Intermezzo*, is the least indebted to Beethoven. It has a more lyrical sound than many of Mendels-

sohn's scherzos, and the contrasting central section is filled with youthful liveliness.

Mendelssohn's "recitative" introduction to the Finale is a blatant imitation of the same procedure in Beethoven's String Quartet in A major, Op. 132, where it gives way, *attacca*, to the ensuing *Allegro* finale. Mendelssohn's recitative even includes detached chords like those in Beethoven's. The development section contains reminiscences of the recitative introduction and the fugue of the second movement, which returns yet again in the coda. Mendelssohn brings the listener full circle by closing with a reprise of the *Adagio* introduction to the first movement, stretching the melody of *Ist es wahr*. Here, the first violin makes a continuous line from reminiscences of the introduction to the main theme of the finale, the second-movement fugue and the main motive of the first movement, unifying the entire piece and making clear the relationships between the themes.

The first of Felix Mendelssohn's Three Quartets, Op. 44, was in fact the last to be composed, being finished some 13 months after he first began work on the set. But this String Quartet No. 3 in D major, Op. 44, No. 1, which bears the date July 24, 1838 (but, like the other Op. 44 works, was revised a bit before going to print in 1839), seems to have been Mendelssohn's own favorite among the three, and so it merited the No. 1 slot. (Numbering and order of composition rarely go hand-in-hand in Mendelssohn's catalog: his two earlier quartets, Opp. 12 and 13, for example, were composed two years apart in the "wrong" order, and the ordering of the symphonies is entirely out of whack.) The D major Quartet was first heard in February 1839 and, although there are many who would place its E minor companion piece (Op. 44, No. 2) above it on the musical totem-pole, Mendelssohn's belief that people would cherish it for its unusual "passion" (the composer's word, in a letter to his violinist friend Ferdinand David) has, over the years, proved well-founded.

The Juilliard String Quartet
MENDELSSOHN

Quartet In A Minor, Op. 13
Quartet In D Major, Op. 44, No. 1

Quartet No. 2 In A Minor, Op. 13 (28:50)

- 1 Adagio; Allegro Vivace 7:28
- 2 Adagio Non Lento 8:19
- 3 Intermezzo: Allegretto Con Moto; Allegro Di Molto 4:32
- 4 Presto; Adagio Non Lento 8:31

Quartet No. 3 In D Major, Op. 44, No. 1 (26:49)

- 5 Molto Allegro Vivace 9:04
- 6 Menuett: Un Poco Allegro 5:31
- 7 Andante Espressivo Ma Con Moto 6:05
- 8 Preso Con Brio 6:09

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