

Mendelssohn on the Mall

January 11 – February 27, 2009

Celebrating the 200th Anniversary of
the birth of Felix Mendelssohn
(February 3, 1809 – November 4, 1847)



Presented by the Library of Congress,
the National Academy of Sciences, and the
National Gallery of Art under the gracious patronage
of His Excellency Dr. Klaus Scharioth, Ambassador
of Germany to the United States

Admission is free

The Sixty-seventh Season of
The William Nelson Cromwell
and F. Lammot Belin Concerts

National Gallery of Art
2,707th Concert
February 22, 2009

Mendelssohn Piano Trio
Peter Sirotin, violin
Fiona Thompson, cello
Ya-Ting Chang, piano

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)
Piano Trio, op. 70, no. 2
Poco sostenuto; allegro ma non troppo
Allegretto
Allegretto ma non troppo
Finale: Allegro

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)
Adagio “Notturmo,” op. posth. 148, D. 897

INTERMISSION

Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1809–1847)
Piano Trio in D Minor, op. 49, no. 1
Molto allegro agitato
Andante con moto tranquillo
Scherzo: Leggiero e vivace
Finale: Allegro assai appassionato

The Musicians

In 1997 three talented musicians formed a chamber music ensemble under the tutelage of violinist Earl Carlyss and pianist Ann Schein. In searching for a name, they came upon a nineteenth-century composer whose versatility they greatly admired, and the Mendelssohn Piano Trio was born. The Trio's extensive repertoire embraces works from all periods of the genre's history. *The Washington Post* described the group's performances of piano trios and piano quartets by Brahms, as presented by the Embassy Series, as "unfathomably beautiful," "transcendent," and "electrifying." Pianist Ya-Ting Chang (from Taiwan), violinist Peter Sirotin (from Russia), and cellist Fiona Thompson (from England) are superb soloists in their own right, each having enjoyed a diversified musical career that transcends international boundaries. Performances range from solo appearances with orchestras to chamber music collaborations with such artists as Natalia Gutman, Ronald Leonard, and Igor Zhukov.

The ensemble has performed and given master classes in a variety of venues nationwide and abroad, including universities, colleges, art academies, and music festivals as well as an international broadcast on *Voice of America*. Highlights of this, the Trio's tenth season, include performances for the Embassy Concert Series as well as concerts at the Black Rock Center for the Arts in Germantown, Maryland; National Concert Hall in Taipei, Taiwan; and the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Its fourth and fifth CDs will be released in the coming months on the Centaur label, with music of Mendelssohn, Smetana, and Suk. Both the *American Record Guide* and *Fanfare Magazine* have praised the Trio's recordings released on Centaur Records. The Trio's 2005 performance at the National Gallery was broadcast on Public Radio International's *Performance Today* program.

The Mendelssohn Piano Trio appears at the National Gallery by arrangement with the Anderson Performance Agency of Baltimore, Maryland.

Program Notes

Felix Mendelssohn was born on February 3, 1809. With “Mendelssohn on the Mall,” the Library of Congress, the National Academy of Sciences, and the National Gallery of Art join musical presenters around the world in celebrating the bicentennial of the birth of a composer whose works have become essential to the Western canon. Art historians and cultural historians alike are fascinated by Mendelssohn because he was a “Renaissance man” who developed skills in many areas to a highly sophisticated level, including drawing and painting, sports, and writing. He was lionized in his own time as a composer, conductor, and performer, and the world mourned his untimely death in 1847 at age thirty-eight.

In the autumn of 1808, Ludwig van Beethoven joined several friends, including Prince Karl Lichnowsky, for a few months’ sojourn at the Vienna residence of Countess Anna Maria Erdödy, a Hungarian aristocrat who was an amateur pianist and a friend of the composer. While at her home, he composed the two piano trios of opus 70 and played them for his hostess and her guests at Christmastime. A friend of the composer, Johann Reichardt, was present and later recalled that he was carried away by the trios. They contained “such a heavenly songlike movement as I have never heard from him before. Indeed, it is the loveliest and most graceful music I have ever heard—it uplifts and melts my soul every time I remember it.”

The introduction to the *E-flat Major Trio*, marked *Poco sostenuto*, features a sedate melody that moves upward and downward by steps, passing sequentially from instrument to instrument. The subsequent *Allegro ma non troppo* presents an opening theme that is more lyrical than forceful. A second subject, in the same tempo, nevertheless seems much slower, as each instrument spins out the melody in a reworking of the introduction. The emotional temperature rises a bit in the development, followed by a coda that is interrupted by a final recollection of the introduction.

In place of a true slow movement there follows a graceful dance-like *Allegretto*. Two musical ideas contend for attention—the first elegant and delicate, the second loud and blustery with strong offbeat accents. Beethoven varies the themes alternately until the coda, where he finally combines the two melodies together. The third movement, *Allegretto ma non troppo*, displays little of the brilliance that we associate with a typical scherzo. The main theme, marked *cantabile*, is borrowed with little change from Beethoven's *Piano Sonata*, op. 26. It has a folk-like purity, with perfectly symmetrical phrases and a simple setting. The second subject, a tit-for-tat dialogue between strings and piano, reveals a hint of pain and suffering toward the end of the section, as we hear what seem to be repeated musical sighs. The violent runs that open the Finale are interrupted by interjections in the strings that appear to be derived from the introduction to the first movement of the trio. A lyrical first subject is followed by a forceful and incisive ascending second theme. A rhythmically vivacious third theme concludes the exposition, as all three thematic groups return in the recapitulation. The movement concludes with a spacious coda.

The provenance of Schubert's *Notturmo in E-flat Major*, D. 897, is uncertain, despite much musicological investigation and the survival of the composer's manuscript. Two theories place the creation of this short work in 1826 or 1827. The first, which holds sway among most Schubert scholars, assumes that the piece was originally intended as the slow movement for the *Piano Trio in B-flat Major*, D. 898, but that Schubert then replaced it with another one that pleased him better. The other theory originates from the Austrian spa town of Gmunden, where Schubert spent six weeks in 1825. It is said that while there the composer came upon a group of pile drivers and used the work song they sang in time to their hammering as a theme in this composition.

The title *Notturmo* appears nowhere on Schubert's manuscript, though it was with that appellation that the music was first published in 1845. It is not inappropriate to the slow tempo and lilting rhythms of the piece, which suggest the character of a nocturne. The piece is written in a broad A-B-A format, a design that Schubert favored for the slow movements of his instrumental works late in his life. The melody of the central section is the putative workers' song from Gmunden.

Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy was described in a recent newspaper essay dedicated to the 200th anniversary of his birth as "a thoroughly modern musician" who stood solidly in the present while remaining strongly focused on the music of the past. His *Piano Trio no. 1 in D Minor*, op. 49, was composed during the summer of 1839, while the composer was spending time in Frankfurt am Main with his wife's family. It was a relaxed time that he described in a letter to a friend as "refreshing." Among Mendelssohn's chamber compositions, this trio has become one of the most popular. The first movement, *Molto allegro ed agitato*, is in sonata form and features two clearly defined broad themes, both given to the cello. The main theme is an elegiac melody with a long arch, reminiscent of similar long melodies of Brahms. The second theme, in A major, features a development section with extremely brilliant scoring. In the recapitulation, the violin introduces a charming counterpoint to the main theme. Mendelssohn biographer R. Larry Todd, whose February 19, 2009, lecture at the Library of Congress was a major event in "Mendelssohn on the Mall," concludes: "If a Mozartean grace suffices the whole, there are nevertheless signs that mark the work as modern and romantic."

The second movement (*Andante*) begins as a gentle "song without words" for solo piano, answered by a duet for violin and cello. The contrasting middle section, in a parallel minor key, introduces a new theme and accompaniment in more insistent triple chords. The original melody returns, as the piano pauses long enough to allow violin and cello to execute two "vocal" cadenzas. The strings then take up the accompaniment, leaving it to the piano to draw this enchanting movement to a murmuring close.

Both the third and fourth movements employ rondo formats. The puckish *Scherzo*, marked *Leggiero e vivace*, is short but extremely demanding of all the players. Set in the key of D major, the impish seven-bar introductory figure divides into three plus four, injecting an element of playful whimsy that takes us into the fairy world of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Mendelssohn frequently returned to that imaginary world for some of his finest effects.

The *Finale* has the tempo marking *Allegro assai appassionato* and is based on a dance theme, twice interrupted by a yearning melody. Todd contends that the finale's main function is to summarize the composition as a whole: "This is a masterful trio with subtle relationships between the movements, and a psychological curve that incorporates the agitated brooding of the first, [the] subdued introspection of the second, and the playful frivolity of the third. The finale combines all three modes, before reconciling them in the celebratory D-major ending."

Program notes by Louis J. Reith, Georgetown University Library

Next Week at the National Gallery of Art

Leon Bates, pianist

Music by Dett, Matheny, Walker, and other composers

Presented in honor of African American History Month

February 25, 2008
Wednesday, 12:10 pm
East Building Auditorium



Ellen Hargis, soprano

Paul O'Dette, lutenist

Music by Camphuysen, Huygens, Vallet, and van den Hove

Presented in honor of *Pride of Place: Dutch Cityscapes of the Golden Age*

March 1, 2009
Sunday Evening, 6:30 pm
West Building, West Garden Court

The use of cameras or recording equipment during the performance is not allowed. Please be sure that cell phones, pagers, and other electronic devices are turned off.

Please note that late entry or reentry of the West Building after 6:30 pm is not permitted.

Mendelssohn on the Mall

January 11–February 27, 2009

Concerts and Events

JANUARY

11 Ma'alot Wind Quintet

Mendelssohn: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, transcribed for wind quintet; music by Ligeti, Barber, and Piazzolla
Preceded at 6:00 pm by a preconcert lecture: *Mendelssohn and the Visual Arts*

SUNDAY, 6:30 PM

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

18 Weiss-Kaplan-Newman Trio with guest artists Amadi Hummings and Sel Kardan, violas, and Kurt Muroki, bass

Mendelssohn: *Sextet for Piano and Strings*, op. 87; music by Sheng and Smetana

SUNDAY, 3:00 PM

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

18 National Gallery Orchestra,

Kenneth Slowik, guest conductor

Mendelssohn: *"Italian" Symphony*;
Schubert: *Symphony in C Major*
("Great")

SUNDAY, 6:30 PM

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

25 Fine Arts Quartet

Mendelssohn: *Quartets*, opp. 12
and 44/1

SUNDAY, 6:30 PM

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

The calendar of concerts and events
continues on the inside back cover.

FEBRUARY

Exhibition of Mendelssohn manuscripts, letters, and drawings

THROUGHOUT FEBRUARY 2009
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

- 1** **Ulrich Urban, pianist**
Mendelssohn: *Fantasies and Caprices*, op. 16; selected *Songs without Words*; *Variations sérieuses*, op. 54
SUNDAY, 6:30 PM
NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART
- 6** **Cypress Quartet**
Mendelssohn: *Quartet*, op. 13; music by Beethoven and Puts
FRIDAY, 8:00 PM
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
- 8** **Josef Feigelson, cellist**
Peep Lassmann, pianist
Mendelssohn's complete works for cello and piano
SUNDAY, 6:30 PM
NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART
- 10** **Mira Trio**
Hensel: *Piano Trio in D minor*, op. 11; Mendelssohn and Hensel: *Songs without Words*; Mendelssohn: *Piano Trio no. 2 in C minor*, op. 66
Preceded at 6:15 pm by a preconcert lecture by Susan Clermont, Music Division, Library of Congress
FRIDAY, 8:00 PM
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
- 13** **Atrium Quartet**
Mendelssohn: *Quartet*, op. 80; music by Shostakovich and Borodin
FRIDAY, 8:00 PM
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
- 15** **University of Akron Concert Choir, Samuel Gordon, conductor**
Mendelssohn: *Wie der Hirsch schreit*, op. 42; Chorale Cantata: *O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden*; hymn: *Hör mein bitten*
SUNDAY, 6:30 PM
NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART
- 18** **Trio con Brio Copenhagen**
Mendelssohn: *Piano Quartet in B Minor*, op. 3; Beethoven: "Archduke" Trio
WEDNESDAY, 8:00 PM
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
- 19** **Lecture by R. Larry Todd, Duke University**
Reflections on the Mendelssohn Bicentenary
THURSDAY, 7:00 PM
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
- 22** **Mendelssohn Piano Trio**
Mendelssohn: *Piano Trio in D Minor*, op. 49; music by Beethoven
SUNDAY, 6:30 PM
NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART
- 27** **Mendelssohn Choir of Pittsburgh, Betsy Burleigh, director**
Mendelssohn: *Psalm 55; Sechs Sprüche*, op. 79; music by Handel, Haydn, and Mozart
FRIDAY, 8:00 PM
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

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National Gallery of Art
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Washington, DC

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2000B South Club Drive
Landover, MD 20785

www.nga.gov

For events at the Library of Congress,
advance reservation of tickets is recommended.
Tickets are distributed by Ticketmaster (202-397-SEAT).
The tickets are free, but there is a service charge
for the reservation.

www.loc.gov/concerts

COVER: Carl Joseph Begas, *Felix Mendelssohn*
Bartholdy, 1821, Private Collection