



**S Y M P H O N Y I N C**  
**Virtual Chamber Series 2021**

Sunday, May 16, 2021 at 4:00 p.m.

**About the Concert**

**Piano Trio no. 1, in D minor, op. 49 (1839)**

**Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1809-1847)**

- I. Molto allegro agitato**
- II. Andante con moto tranquillo**
- III. Scherzo: Leggiero e vivace**
- IV. Finale: Allegro assai appassionato**

Like Beethoven, Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy was a prolific composer of chamber music, especially of pieces for the piano. Although his piano sonatas don't turn up in concert with too much regularity, the eight books of Songs without Words do, and his two piano concertos rival Chopin's as the most elegant works in the genre of the second quarter of the 19th century.

Mendelssohn's two piano trios, both written in the last decade of his life, are among his finest works and rank as two of the greatest examples of a genre explored by composers ranging from Mozart to Shostakovich (and beyond).

The first trio was composed in the summer of 1839. Cast in four movements, it shares the same key – D minor – as the Second Piano Concerto, written two years prior. The first movement opens with a passionate cello melody, accompanied by a syncopated figure in the piano. The violin eventually joins in and the ensemble proceeds to develop elements of the opening tune. Throughout, the piano writing is decidedly virtuosic: Mendelssohn's close friend Ferdinand Hiller apparently encouraged him in this direction, which lends the Trio a rather progressive feel for its era.

The slow second movement brings to the fore Mendelssohn's exquisite melodic gifts. This is essentially a song without words for three instruments, each of which is provided moments that display their lyrical capabilities. The composer fills the contrasting middle section with melancholy gestures and a pulsing

triplet accompaniment; the return of the opening material in the violin's high register over cello accompaniment is one of the Trio's many highlights.

In the third movement, Mendelssohn wrote a movement that recalled the style and character of his Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (and foreshadowed the brilliant incidental music he would compose for the same play just three years later), writing a lithe, agile scherzo filled with color and good humor.

The opening of the finale returns to the rather grim sound world of the first movement, commencing with a driving, march-like rhythm in D minor. Gradually, the spirit of the slow second movement infuses this material with lyricism that becomes a flowing melodic gesture. After a turbulent development and recapitulation, the coda dispels the gloom of D minor with a radiant turn to D major. In lesser hands, this type of gesture might sound perfunctory or rudimentary, however, it become the perfect summation of all that has come before, rounding out one of Mendelssohn's most substantial chamber works on a note of triumph.

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