

SOUNDBITE #2: MENDELSSOHN CHAMBER MUSIC

MONDAY 8 SEPTEMBER 11AM

ROSINA AUDITORIUM, ABBOTSFORD CONVENT

Felix MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847) Piano Trio No. 2 in C Minor, op. 66 (1845) 28'

- i. Allegro energico e con fuoco*
- ii. Andante espressivo*
- iii. Scherzo. Molto allegro quasi presto*
- iv. Finale. Allegro appassionato*

Lili Stephens (QLD) director / violin

Boudewijn Keenan (NZ) cello

Reuben Johnson (ANAM alum 2024) piano

MENDELSSOHN String Quintet No. 2 in B-flat Major, op. 87 (1845) 31'

- i. Allegro vivace*
- ii. Andante scherzando*
- iii. Adagio e lento*
- iv. Allegro molto vivace*

Lili Stephens (QLD) director / violin

Sophia Jones (QLD) violin

Daniel Casey (VIC) viola

Lachlan McKie (VIC) viola

Boudewijn Keenan (NZ) cello

Approximate duration: 60 minutes with no interval

Lili is supported by ANAM Syndicate donors Olga Abrahams, Barry and Joan Miskin, Peter and Jane Phillips, Igor Zambelli OAM.

Sophia is supported by ANAM Syndicate donor Gina Fairfax AC. Sophia currently plays a A.E. Smith 1927 Violin on loan to ANAM from Jannie Brown, and an Albert Nuernberger violin bow gifted to ANAM by a private foundation.

Daniel is the Georgina Grosvenor Scholarship recipient supported by the Bokhara Foundation.

Lachlan is supported by ANAM Syndicate donors Helen Ballantyne and the late Milton Robinson, Elise Callander, John and Barry Miskin, Adrian Turley.

Boudewijn is supported by ANAM Syndicate donors Faye Goldsmith, Graeme Hairsine, Geoff McLaren, Liz O'Shaughnessy and Roger Badalassi, Ralph and Margaret Plarre.

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PROGRAM NOTES

Felix Mendelssohn's B-flat major string quintet, written just two years before his death, is one of his final chamber works, showcasing his mature style with a heightened dramatic energy and a broadening of classical forms.

The piece opens with a lively *Allegro vivace*, driven by the first violin's heroic theme, reminiscent of his *Italian* symphony and string octet. This gives way to a restless triplet rhythm, alternating between moments of beauty and intensity. The development section intertwines these themes before returning to the first theme in B-flat major.

The *Allegretto scherzando* contrasts sharply, with a playful yet elegant waltz in G minor. The emotional heart of the piece, however, lies in its uncharacteristically grief-stricken slow movement, the *Adagio e Lento*, which begins with a funeral march motif and carries a great sense of weight and inevitability. Despite functioning as the slow movement of the work, it grows to remarkable intensity, reaching a high point towards the end with the lower parts begin a restless tremolo while the first violin soars above with an unusual melody which seems never to settle and know not where it's going. Mendelssohn concludes this D minor movement in D major, providing a poignant sense of resolution.

The finale restores the energy with swift theme exchanges between the voices, echoing the string octet in its vivacity. Though considered one of his finest works, Mendelssohn rejected this quintet for publication, being particularly dissatisfied with the fourth movement. It was posthumously published in 1851.

The C minor piano trio is thematically difficult to pin down. The opening *Allegro energico e con fuoco* ('energetic and with fire'), is dark, brooding, almost menacing. Quickly the piece turns more light-hearted as sweeping melodies take us to an almost triumphant high point. Perhaps the most striking part of this movement is in the development, where the piano texture changes to flowing triplets under the pedal, providing a sense of stillness and a bed of harmony for the string above it. The harmony subtly morphs back to the original key allowing for the main theme to begin again, almost completely unexpectedly.

The *Andante* opens with a gently lilting triplet theme, first introduced by the piano and then echoed by the violin. The cantabile lines have a singing quality to them, so much so that they're often described as a lullaby with expressive leaps and phrases which continue across the bar lines, continuing the tension of the line ensuring constant momentum.

Mendelssohn described the *Scherzo* as "a nasty trifle to play". The three parts enter separately offset by only one beat, and continuous semiquavers make interesting twists and turns. The climatic section is interrupted by an abrupt key change to a pompous, almost sarcastic major theme, before returning back to the opening material. It finishes as quickly as it began, scurrying to nothing.

Beginning immediately after the conclusion of the previous moment, the *Finale* opens with a distinctive and charismatic leap of a minor ninth — first in the cello, then followed by the violin and the piano — before the theme continues down the scale. This descending line is marked specifically by Mendelssohn under one slur, to be played in a single up-bow, giving the visual and auditory effect of effortless panache (Lili and Bou assure you that this is certainly not the case). The centre of this movement is a stunning chorale theme, introduced by the piano and ornamented by the strings. It's likely a quote of a 1524 hymn attributed to Martin Luther, *Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ*. It could also be a nod to fellow pianist/composer Frédéric Chopin, as a very similar theme appears in his Scherzo No. 3, written only a few years before this trio. After recapitulation of the opening material, the choral theme returns, this time in C major, with tremolo in the piano and triple stops in the strings, serving as the climatic point of the work, before the piece rockets forward to a coda which feels almost fleeting for such a substantial piece.

Words by Lili Stephens and Reuben Johnson