



F. Mendelssohn-Bartholdy: Trio op. 49 in D minor

Felix Mendelssohn's d minor Piano Trio, with the exception of a childhood trio composed in 1820, is his first work for this constellation. It was written in 1839, in Mendelssohn's Leipzig period, an extremely productive time for him as a composer despite his obligations as chief conductor of the Gewandhaus Orchestra. Robert Schumann was a great fan of this Trio, calling it nothing less than "the Master Trio of the Present", and adding the following comment after hearing it for the first time: "Mendelssohn is the Mozart of the 19th century, the brightest musician, who sees the clearest through the contradictions of the time and is the first to reconcile them".

The piece stands out for its formal completeness and clarity, although the basic tone of the two movements framing the piece are tumultuous and passionate, as can be seen in the tempo markings "Molto allegro agitato" and "Allegro assai appassionato".

The cello opens the first movement with the longing, cantabile first theme added on top of a backdrop of restless piano syncopations, and introduces the contented, gently swinging second theme to an accompaniment of soft-flowing legato eighth-notes. Each time the violin joins subsequently in singing out these themes. However, in this movement, as in the Finale movement, the piano soon steps to the forefront, displaying tremendous virtuosity over the course of the piece. This is particularly apparent in the development section, which runs out in a tender, inward-felt reprise, and also in the rapid and turbulent coda.

The second movement, "Andante con moto tranquillo", is a sweet, poetic song in the style of Mendelssohn's "Song Without Words" ("Lied ohne Worte"), whose light warmth only clouds over in the dark-hued, lamenting tones of the middle section.

The Scherzo movement “*Leggiero e vivace*” by contrast, steals the listener away into a fantastical world full of magic and spirits, full of dances ranging from the delicate to the exuberant; in short, it is a classical Mendelssohnian Scherzo, evoking the world of *Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

The Finale is a weightier movement, beginning in a quiet, covered tone driven by excited, marked rhythms and sforzati. Only after much searching and hesitation is the inner tension discharged by a long-anticipated fortissimo. However the relief is short-lived, lasting only a few measures before being thrown back into piano, similar to an approaching storm that announces itself in single flashes and gusts. A healing side-theme is barely allowed to establish itself; however a broad, heart-felt, singing middle section offers a welcome counterpole to the movement’s predominant tone of unsettled storminess. The movement ends back in this unsettled mood, a powerful build-up bringing the piece to a close.