Mendelssohn

Symphony No. 3, in A Minor ("Scotch")

Op. 56

Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra

Conducted by

JOSÉ ITURBI

MUSICAL MASTERPIECE SERIES

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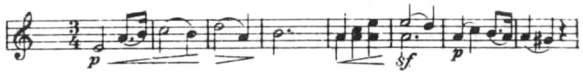
Mendelssohn: Symphony No. 3, in A Minor, Op. 56

("Scotch")

THE first two observations usually made in connection with the Mendelssohn *Scotch Symphony* are, that the designation "Scotch" does not appear on the original score of the work, and that the symphony is not, properly speaking, his third. Although the word "Scotch" was not used by Mendelssohn as part of its official title, it was frequently used by him in his letters in referring to this symphony. One letter in particular reveals the origin of Mendelssohn's inspiration. In 1829, the twenty year old composer, having concluded a series of successful concert engagements on his first trip to Great Britain, started on a journey through the Highlands. "We went, in the deep twilight, to the Palace of Holyrood, where Queen Mary lived and loved;" reported Mendelssohn in a letter from Edinburgh dated July 30, 1829. "There is a little room to be seen there, with a winding staircase leading up to it. There the murderers ascended, and finding Rizzio . . . drew him out; about three chambers away is a small corner where they killed him. The chapel is roofless; grass and ivy grow abundantly in it; and before the altar, now in ruins, Mary was crowned Queen of Scotland. Everything around is broken and mouldering, and the bright sky shines through. I believe I found to-day in that old chapel the beginning of my Scotch symphony." It appears that by a "beginning" Mendelssohn meant more than just the inspiration for the work, for the first sixteen measures of the introductory Andante

Ex. 1  etc.

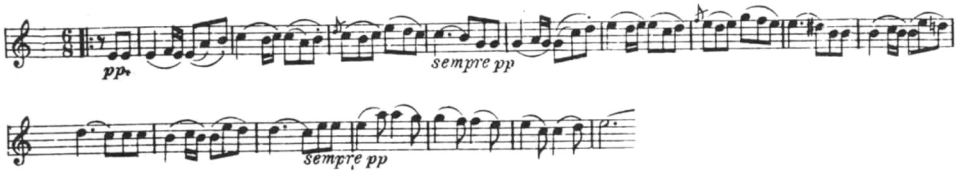
were supposed to have been written down, then and there, in the same form in which they now open the symphony. However urgent the inspiration of the moment may have been, Mendelssohn took his own good time in bringing the work to completion. The autograph of the completed score bears the date, Jan. 20, 1842, more than twelve years after the "twilight . . . of Holyrood."

The date of completion, Jan. 20, 1842, brings us to the second observation: that this is not, properly speaking, Mendelssohn's third symphony. Leaving out of account the twelve symphonies composed by the precocious child between 1820 and 1823 (his eleventh and fourteenth years) we have five symphonies with which to deal. Only three were published during his lifetime; and in order of publication, the *Symphony in C minor* (labeled by Mendelssohn as No. 13) came first, the *Sinfonie Cantata* or *Lobgesang (Hymn of Praise) Symphony*, second, and the *Scotch Symphony*, third.

The two remaining works, the *Italian* and the *Reformation* Symphonies, were published posthumously as No. 4 and No. 5 respectively. It is this order of publication which accounts for their present numbering. However, as the following dates of completion indicate, in order of composition the *Scotch Symphony* stands last; the *Symphony in C minor* was completed in 1824, the *Reformation Symphony* in 1830, the *Italian Symphony* in 1833, the *Lobgesang Symphony* in 1840, and the *Scotch Symphony* in 1842.

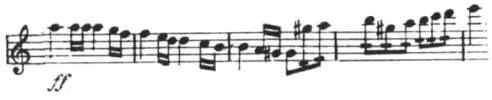
The instruction on the score of the *Scotch Symphony* tells us that the work is to be performed continuously, with no pause between movements. Following the opening Andante, the first measures of which are given above (Ex. 1) the first movement proper (Allegro agitato) gets under way with the following subject,

Ex. 2



a typical example of Mendelssohn's gift for ingratiating melody. It is taken first by strings and clarinet, and, upon its repetition, by flutes and clarinets supported by the full orchestra. The repetition is not literal, for midway through it is transformed into a transition to a subsidiary subject with which the second record side opens.

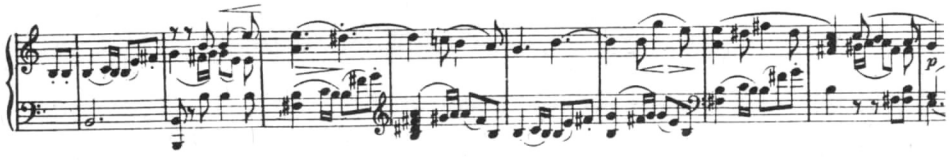
Ex. 3



etc.

The second subject of the movement taken by the clarinet, is ingeniously hung over a contrapuntal figure in the violins based directly upon the first subject.

Ex. 4



The closing subject of the movement is one of the most popular melodies in all of Mendelssohn's symphonies.

Ex. 5

etc.

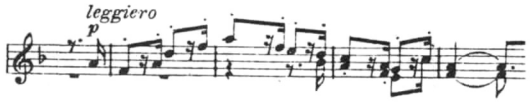
The remainder of the movement is constructed upon the above material. For the listener who desires to keep his bearings through the progress of the movement, we

note that the first portion of the development section (last part of record side 2) is concerned, after a series of modulations based upon the characteristic figure from Ex. 2, first with the two principal subjects in combination (Exs. 2 and 4), and then with the subsidiary subject (Ex. 3). Record side 3 opens with Ex. 5 in major and continues with the first subject (Ex. 2) leading to the recapitulation via a very lovely and very prominent melody assigned to the 'cellos. The recapitulation is punctuated by the celebrated "storm" passage, a designation which the listener is at liberty to reject for it is not Mendelssohn's. The movement concludes as it began, with the opening measures of the Andante (Ex. 1).

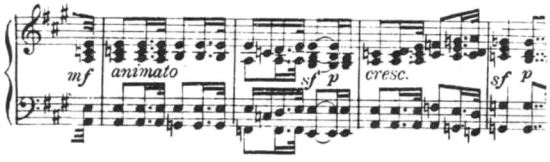
The second movement, Scherzo, is complete on record side 4. It needs no comment beyond the citation of the two principal melodies, and also a third melody (Ex. 8) which figures prominently toward the end of the movement. They are in order of appearance:

Ex. 6  etc.

Ex. 7  etc.

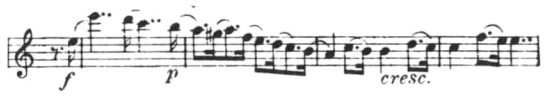
Ex. 8  etc.

The slow movement, Adagio, opens with a melody too long for citation here. It is followed by a martial subject initially stated by the horns, bassoons, and clarinets.

Ex. 9 

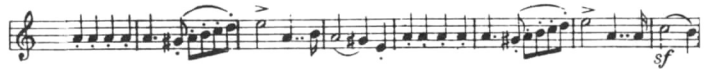
There is little to be said concerning this movement beyond the fact that it is not a deeply personal utterance such as one finds in the symphonies of Schumann or Brahms. Mendelssohn's regrettable tendency to write music often more pleasing than profound, is perhaps more evident here than elsewhere in the symphony. The movement has its own undeniable values, for which no doubt it can be honestly enjoyed; but the listener who expects to find in a slow movement the culminating emotional utterance of a symphony will, perhaps, in this instance be somewhat disappointed.

The closing movement, like those preceding it, is written with a wonderful fluency of musical diction, and a consummate knowledge of the color value of every instrument employed. It opens with a fast stepping melody

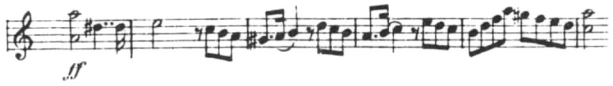
Ex. 10 

etc.

to which this is added.

Ex. 11 

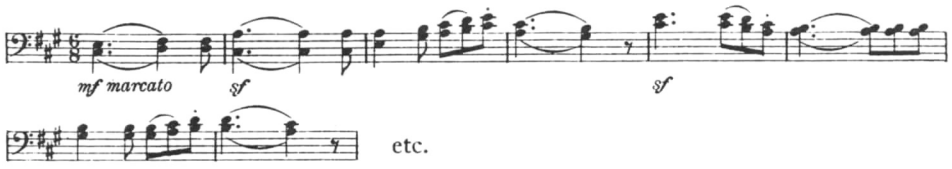
Ex. 10 returns, and is followed by an extension of Ex. 11 which runs as follows:

Ex. 12 

The conclusion of this passage brings us to the second subject proper, a graceful and tender melody taken by the oboe supported by the clarinets.

Ex. 13 

The remainder of this brilliant movement is constructed upon the cited material. Beyond the opening measures of an extensive coda which is almost long enough to constitute an independent movement, there is no other melodic material requiring citation. The opening measures of the stately coda follow:

Ex. 14 

etc.

(Notes by A. Veinus)

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JOSÉ ITURBI

José Iturbi, celebrated as Spain's foremost pianist, was born in Valencia in 1895. He studied at the conservatory in his native city and won the piano prize at the age

of thirteen. Subsequently he went to Barcelona and then to Paris, graduating from the conservatory there at the age of seventeen. In 1919 the Conservatory of Geneva offered him the post as head of the piano department, a position he held for four years.

Iturbi has concertized all over Europe and South America. In 1929 he made his début practically unheralded in the United States and had the entire music-loving population at his feet. In the summer of 1933 he conducted two concerts in Mexico City which were the beginnings of a career that has won him recognition as a great conductor as well as a great pianist. He has conducted many American orchestras, chiefly the Philadelphia, the Philharmonic, the Hollywood Bowl and the Rochester Symphonies.

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