

argo

MENDELSSOHN

Octet Op. 20



BOCCHERINI

Quintet in C major

Op. 37 No. 7

ACADEMY OF ST. MARTIN-IN-THE-FIELDS

ZRG 569

stereo

MENDELSSOHN OCTET Op.20

BOCCHERINI

CELLO QUINTET Op.37 No.7

ACADEMY OF ST MARTIN-IN-THE-FIELDS

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SIDE ONE

Mendelssohn Octet Op.20

1st Movement *Allegro moderato ma con fuoco*

2nd Movement *Andante*

3rd Movement *Scherzo*

SIDE TWO

4th Movement *Presto*

Boccherini Cello Quintet Op.37 No.7 (Pleyel)

1st Movement *Andante con moto*

2nd Movement *Menuett*

3rd Movement *Grave*

4th Movement *Rondo Allegro con moto*

Of all the great Romantic composers, only Mendelssohn (1809-1847) together with Schubert and Schumann contributed seriously to the chamber music repertoire. Written in 1825 when Mendelssohn was only 16, the Octet was his first really mature work and was far ahead of his previous instrumental works in style and expression. It is written for double string quartet, although these are always treated as a whole and not as two antiphonal bodies. The writing is often for eight real parts but there is necessarily a certain amount of doubling and filling in by the inner parts and occasionally too orchestral a treatment. But more evident is Mendelssohn's great skill in handling such a large tonal body.

The first movement starts with an exuberant theme on the 1st violin accompanied by orchestral sounding tremolos. This passes to the cellos and is followed by some development before the more serene 2nd subject appears on 4th violin and 1st viola. In the development the note-values of this theme are augmented in the 2nd and 3rd bars. A brilliant fortissimo in unison heralds in a shortened recapitulation and Coda.

The Andante, in C minor 6-8, starts with a quiet Siciliano-like melody before breaking into triplets. The 2nd theme starts in E flat minor and leads into a central episode in E flat major. When the original themes re-appear they do so in reverse order.

The third movement, the Scherzo (G minor 2-4) is perhaps the finest movement of the whole work and shows Mendelssohn's genius for this particular kind of music. The motto for the piece was a stanza from Goethe's Faust:

Scudding clouds and misty meads,
Are tinged by light of day,
Gusts in the leaves and wind in the reeds,
And all is blown away.

This is the earliest instance of Mendelssohn's love of Programme music, so evident in his later works, and is certainly a perfect illustration of Goethe's poem. Although the individual parts do not require a virtuoso technique it is in fact an extremely difficult piece to play together. Throughout there is an extraordinary lightness and grace, and an immense range of tone-colour.

The Finale illustrates Mendelssohn's complete mastery of counterpoint, no doubt due to his strict

early training under Zelter. This inculcated into him the habit of looking at themes contrapuntally and gave him a complete command over all their resources. The movement starts with an 8-part fugal exposition, the last 3 in stretto. A new theme appears with its counter-subject and after a harmonic passage the original theme returns to the last violin over a tremolo accompaniment. Then follows a long passage based on this material, and a solo passage for 1st violin leads to another fugal exposition together with the original subject. After yet another fugal exposition and a long modulating section, the main theme of the Scherzo appears and this is a very early instance of the 'transformation of themes'. The Finale ends with a recapitulation of all the subjects, as many of them as possible being combined.

Luigi Boccherini (1743-1805), probably the greatest Italian composer of instrumental music of his day, was first and foremost a chamber music composer. He wrote over 100 cello quintets, as well as numerous string quartets and trios, piano quintets etc., all of which forms were developed later by the Romantic composers. He was Haydn's most serious rival in this field and a violinist of the period once said "Boccherini is the wife of Haydn", probably referring to the ornamental, graceful and melodious style of so much of his music. Boccherini was himself an accomplished cellist and he was among the first composers to realise the potentialities of that instrument - with its broad singing tone, particularly in the higher register.

Along with composers of the Mannheim School, Boccherini contributed to the slowly emerging Classical style. Practically every musical form known to the pre-Classical style period appears in one or other of his works. Until recently Boccherini was chiefly known for his famous Minuet from the Quintet in E major, but today his music is gradually being rediscovered, although much more bibliographical work is needed in sorting out the present chaos of opus numbers, dates of composition, etc.

Many of Boccherini's characteristics can be seen in this Quintet in C major, which needs no introduction. The first movement, an Andante in simple binary form is followed by a Minuet (G major) and Trio (G Minor). The third movement is also slow and the final movement, a Rondo, is the most extensive of the whole work.



VALERIE GARDENER

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Cover picture, a reproduction of a painting by Mendelssohn of his house in Leipzig reproduced by kind permission of Miss V. Gotch.

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