

London Bridge Trio

(David Adams *violin* · Daniel Tong *piano* · Kate Gould *cello*)

FANNY MENDELSSOHN (1805-47)

Piano Trio in D minor, Op.11

- 1 I Allegro molto vivace 11:08
- 2 II Andante espressivo 6:13
- 3 III Lied: Allegretto 2:00
- 4 IV Finale: Allegretto moderato 6:25

FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809-47)

5 Songs without Words, Op.109 4:45

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810-56)

Piano Trio No.1 in D minor, Op.63

- 6 I Mit Energie und Leidenschaft 11:34
- 7 II Lebhaft, doch nicht zu rasch 4:59
- 8 III Langsam, mid inniger Empfindung 7:00
- 9 IV Mit Feuer 8:11

CLARA SCHUMANN (1819-96)

Three Romances, Op.22

- 10 I Andante molto 2:50
- 11 II Allegretto – Mit zartem Vortrage 3:00
- 12 III Leidenschaftlich schnell 4:05

Total duration: 77:12

Recorded live at Royal Birmingham Conservatoire:

Fanny Mendelssohn and Robert Schumann: April 17, 2018

Felix Mendelssohn and Clara Schumann: December 18, 2018

Producer: Siva Oke Recording Engineer: Paul Arden-Taylor

Front cover: *Sappho*, oil on canvas c.1910, Frederick Arthur Bridgman (1857-1928) Private Collection

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THE LEIPZIG CIRCLE

CHAMBER

MUSIC

by

Fanny,

Clara,

Robert

&

Felix

Vol. I

London

Bridge

Trio



THE LEIPZIG CIRCLE Vol. I

In the world of classical music, the emancipation of women composers has, in recent decades, focussed attention on those whose music tended to be sidelined principally because of their gender. If today such constraints are far looser than they were, it was a different story in the 1830s and 40s. It may be that if the family names of the two female composers whose music we hear on this disc worked in their favour, in that musical historians were at least aware of their existence, general knowledge of their actual music was virtually non-existent, and to some extent remains so.

In the present collection we can hear for ourselves just how accomplished the elder sister of Felix Mendelssohn and the wife of Robert Schumann were in terms of original composition. Fanny Mendelssohn was born in Hamburg, the first of her parents' four children, in 1805, into a prosperous family which had renounced Judaism and had each of their four children baptised, adding their mother's surname, Bartholdy, to that of their father.

As a child, Fanny showed musical gifts of a high order; she began piano lessons early, at which she excelled, and also wrote some original pieces, but although her undoubted musical inclinations were indulged by her parents, and admired by several leading musicians of the day, a professional career in music was considered unrealistic for a lady of her background, but not for her younger brother Felix, a little over three years her junior.

Their common musical gifts bound Fanny and Felix closely, each admiring the other's musicianship above their own, to the extent that several of her original songs were published under Felix's name. But her brother's early successes, and Fanny's enforced reticence, soon outshone her achievements in the public's eyes – in so far as they were permitted to be exhibited. Yet she composed throughout her life, more so after her successful marriage to the painter Wilhelm Hensel, who encouraged her to write music.

Fanny died in 1847 at 41, following a stroke. Felix was to die from a similar cause six months later - brought on, it was believed, by his inability to overcome the shock of her sudden death. Fanny had composed many short piano pieces and songs, but it is her Piano Trio in D minor, written in the last year of her life, that marks her out as a far more significant creative figure than is generally recognised.

Fanny Mendelssohn's D minor Trio may well be considered her masterpiece, and it is by no means inferior to the two examples by her brother. The work falls into the then customary four movements, but her original approach to form, to instrumental texture and indeed emotional expression mark her out as one of music's most significant unknowns.

The first movement, *Allegro molto vivace*, is a magnificent accomplishment by almost any creative standards. Owing something perhaps to her brother's work, the superbly flowing piano part propels and supports the noble theme of the stringed instruments, a theme on which virtually the entire movement is based: secondary thematic ideas spring from aspects of that theme.

The undoubted passionate sensibilities of the music, so typical of European art in the late 1840s, continue in the slow second movement, *Andante espressivo*, a very fine example of the best Romantic music of the era. The attentive listener will be in no doubt as to the depth of feeling inherent in this music, the breadth of which is demonstrated in the character of the third movement. This contrasting *Allegretto* movement precedes the remarkable finale, *Allegretto moderato*, wherein Fanny's textural innovations come to the fore in a lengthy solo piano exordium heightening the tension before the strings enter, capitalising on the inherently serious expression – here is what has been described as a 'Hungarian' theme, but not one wholly exhibiting the release of tension, creating, through secondary theme, a true sonata-rondo such as surely earned her brother's admiration.

Fanny's Trio was not first published until a little over three years after her death, but in the three years from composition to publication Felix himself was to die, yet it is surely inconceivable that he was unaware of his sister's work, and would have raised a rueful smile at the Trio's second movement title, so clearly fashioned at the time after his enormously popular series of short lyrical solo piano pieces, the *Lieder ohne Worte* ('Songs Without Words'). The title was given (not by Mendelssohn himself) to a flowing *Andante* in D major he had composed in 1845 for cello and piano, dedicated to the cellist Lisa Christiani (1827-1853), a Parisian who had impressed Mendelssohn with her artistry but who was to die in Russia aged 26 from cholera. As with Fanny's Trio, Felix's piece for Lisa Christiani was published after his death.

The first two of the three Piano Trios by Robert Schumann, the quintessential German Romantic, was written in the same year as the Mendelssohns' deaths. Robert had been born in June 1810, making him sixteen months Felix's junior, and – like his slightly older contemporary – Robert was to die tragically at the early age of 46, from a degenerative mental condition, the exact nature of which cannot now be definitively identified.

Until quite recent times, Schumann's later works were often dismissed as showing signs of his approaching mental troubles, but such a view is today considered a very superficial one, for close examination of the music reveals it to possess qualities that do not always reveal themselves at a first hearing. The first two piano trios of 1847 are good examples of this, especially the First, in which it could not have been written other than by a great composer. The essential underlying positive outlook of this music, despite its key and containing aspects of passing melancholy, surely reflect the composer in his mid-thirties, happily married and with a growing family, his fecundity in art as well as in life turning to chamber music, following many works for solo piano, orchestra, and songs.

By the time he came to write the expansive Trio in D minor, Schumann was the complete composer, confident in his abilities – and it shows in the very tempo indications of the movements. Such is this great work's individuality that it could not have been written by any other composer. Schumann's first Trio does not possess the melancholy of the second Trio and the late violin Sonatas, but it

foreshadows those works – except in the powerful last movement, which has a fine and characteristically Schumannesque drive.

In 1840 Schumann had at last married the woman, nine years his junior, who was his lifelong love – Clara Wieck, a remarkable pianist and composer herself. By that time, Schumann had abandoned his plans to become a virtuoso pianist – in effect, there was no need, for Clara was probably a finer pianist than her husband, and she urged him to concentrate upon composition.

Clara had been born in Leipzig in 1819. The personal troubles and vicissitudes which attended the love match of her and Robert Schumann are well-known, but Robert's later increasing mental condition, from which he was to die in 1856, meant that Clara's life following their eventual marriage in 1839 was never wholly free from worry and uncertainty, and the demands on her time of familial and professional matters - she bore Robert eight children, and came to be widely regarded as one of the finest pianists of the age - took her away from developing her life as a composer.

This was indeed regrettable, for as these *Romances* demonstrate, Clara was a genuine composer of no little ability. Her music was, not unnaturally, very much influenced by her husband's, but she occasionally shows flashes of originality and a charm of melody that are all her own. Perhaps the most engaging examples of this latter quality are to be found in her *Romances*, which possess a quite individual character, the result of a musician who has made a deep study of the

craft of musical composition. There is nothing in the whole of Clara's output which suggests an executant dabbling in creative work – everything is carried off with complete sureness of touch and a masterly technique.

At the age of 14 Clara had drafted her sole Piano Concerto – certainly with some assistance from Robert: she played the solo part in the premiere of the work two years later in Leipzig, in which the conductor was Felix Mendelssohn. Clearly, at that young age, Clara's gifts were apparent, and we must regret that the demands of her later life circumscribed her development as a composer, although in Clara's *Drei Romanzen* for violin and piano, written in 1853, there is no doubt that by that time she had lost none of her inherent creative gifts.

They were composed for the great violinist Joseph Joachim, who had entered her and her husband's lives, as well as that of the young Johannes Brahms, at that time. It was Joachim and Robert who gave several public performances of the *Romances*, which may – it is not too fanciful to assert – have been originally planned as a three-movement Sonata, for there is more than a reflection of thematic material from Robert's contemporaneous first Violin Sonata in A minor Op 105 in them. These three pieces show Clara's original creativity at its finest – clearly, she was not solely a 'pianist-composer' – the nature of the central *Romance* (marked 'Mit zartem Vortrage' – 'with delicate character') being particularly memorable.

Robert Matthew-Walker © 2019



Photograph: Jack Liebeck

LONDON BRIDGE TRIO

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**“The London Bridge Trio aren’t afraid to tell it like it is.
Playing that is as compelling as it is rapt”**

Gramophone

The **London Bridge Trio** is one of Britain’s leading chamber ensembles, known for their deeply nuanced and searching interpretations. Formed in 2002 as the London Bridge Ensemble, their name reflects an admiration for English music of the early 20th century, which forms part of the group’s varied repertoire.

The trio has appeared frequently at Wigmore Hall and Kings Place in London and at venues including Queen’s Hall, St George’s and Portugal’s Ponte de Lima Festival. They recently visited the Sacconi Festival, Folkstone, Penarth Chamber Music Festival and the inaugural Birmingham International Piano Chamber Music Festival.

In 2008 the ensemble founded the Winchester Chamber Music Festival (in the hometown of their cellist Kate Gould) where they have secured a reputation

for stylish programmes involving exceptional international artists. The festival celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2018 with the world premiere of Colin Matthews' *Hidden Agenda*, and the trio were joined by the Heath Quartet for a series of sold-out concerts.

The London Bridge Trio's recordings have been enthusiastically received. *Gramophone*, *BBC Music Magazine* and *The Observer* all gave rave reviews to their 2015 release of Dvořák's Piano Quartets with the Heath Quartet's violist Gary Pomeroy on Champs Hill.

Their Frank Bridge recordings on Dutton met with unreserved commendations from *Gramophone* (who shortlisted the second volume for the 2011 *Gramophone* Chamber Music Award), *International Record Review*, *American Record Guide* and BBC Radio 3's *CD Review*.

Their Schumann recording for Sonimage drew observations such as "rendered with a bubbling brilliance" and "heart-touchingly eloquent" from the *Sunday Times*. A collection of works by Fauré (also Sonimage) received excellent reviews from *The Strad* and *Gramophone*.

The Leipzig Circle, Volume I marks the trio's debut on SOMM Recordings.



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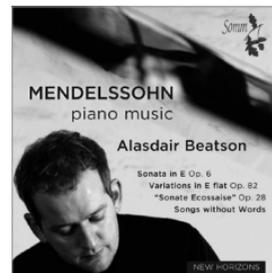
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