

- July 13 -

PROGRAM

String Quartet in E minor, Op. 44, No. 2

Allegro assai appassionato

Scherzo: Allegro di molto

Andante

Presto agitato

Felix Mendelssohn

(1809-1847)

Emily Daggett Smith, violin

Cyrus Beroukhim, violin

Catherine Beeson, viola

Alberto Parrini, cello

Clarinet Sonata, Op. 167

Allegretto

Allegro animato

Lento

Molto allegro

Camille Saint-Saëns

(1835-1921)

Alan R Kay, clarinet

Marcantonio Barone, piano

INTERMISSION

Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op. 36 (1802)

arr. by Beethoven for Piano Trio (1805)

Adagio – Allegro con brio

Larghetto, quasi andante

Scherzo: Allegro

Allegro molto

Ludwig van Beethoven

(1770-1827)

Cyrus Beroukhim, violin

Alberto Parrini, cello

Marcantonio Barone, piano

PROGRAM NOTES

FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847): String Quartet in E minor, Op. 44, No. 2 (1839)

One biographer of Felix Mendelssohn describes his habits as “curiously systematic.” It’s no wonder, then, that young Felix would not let anything stand in the way of his productivity - not even his honeymoon! The E Minor string quartet of Op. 44 was just one of many works the composer produced as a (very) newly-married man, which include a choral setting of Psalm 42, the D Minor Piano Concerto, and the Song Without Words. Heard right after the vibrant D Major Op. 44 No. 1 quartet, which actually was composed many months later, the E Minor quartet seems wonderfully tense and urgent.

A success when it was first premiered in 1837, two years before it was published, its popularity with string players is probably second to none of Mendelssohn’s six quartets. The four-movement work begins very much like his famous violin concerto, also in E Minor, with a long, serpentine tune that weaves through some serious rhythmic activity. While the first movement is a minuet, the second is a true scherzo, and represents Mendelssohn at his charming, fanciful best. Think of the scherzo from his Octet, or the fluttering fairies and elves in “Midsummer Night’s Dream,” and you’ll get the idea.

The third movement is a lyrical andante that flows like a song without words, and the finale a presto agitato that borrows some themes from the scherzo. Especially evident here is a fascinating conflict between the fanciful and the formal, a facility that no other composer has matched. Perhaps this stems from both sides of Mendelssohn’s character. He was exceptionally rigorous in matters of structure and counterpoint, yet at the same time was deeply affected by the spirituality of his grandfather Moses, one of the most influential philosophers of his time.

– Steve Siegel

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS (1835-1921): Sonata for Clarinet and Piano, Op. 167 (1921)

French music exists in a world of its own. As stated by Martin Cooper in his French Music, “...it lacks...a strongly flavored emotional content, either moral and uplifting as in Beethoven or introvert and lowering as in Tchaikovsky.” But it has other positive values. It cultivates the “arranging of sounds in agreeable and intellectually satisfying patterns.” There is an objectivity not found in German, Italian or English music. It seeks an ideal of perfection in such varied offerings as a harpsichord piece by Couperin, a song by Fauré or a string quartet by Debussy. Saint-Saëns pursued this style in his own way. He was a man of restrained tastes, and he wrote with consummate craftsmanship, great charm and occasional genius.

When he was eighty-five, he undertook a recital tour of Belgium and Switzerland (fingers as good as ever) and followed it with his usual visit to Algeria. It was on this visit that he composed his last works, the sonatas for oboe, clarinet and bassoon.

The first movement of the clarinet sonata is based on a haunting motif. I feel that I have heard it before but cannot place it. The movement is in a three-part form with the return of the opening theme in the surprising key of G minor, going through F minor and further chromaticism before returning to E-flat. The second movement is fleeting and quite short, hardly more than two minutes. The next movement is a contrast with long notes—first in a low register and then in high. Piano arpeggios form a link with the last movement, *molto allegro*, with a return to the opening E-flat theme of the first movement. It is worthy of note that Saint-Saëns uses the Baroque format—slow, fast, slow, fast—but the style is typical Saint-Saëns with no resemblance to Baroque.

– Hoyle Carpenter

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827): Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op. 36 (1802) arr. by Beethoven for Piano Trio (1805)

There's a reason why Beethoven's D Major Piano Trio bears the same opus number as his second symphony: it's a transcription of that symphony by the composer himself. All the themes of the symphonic work are essentially here, as is its basic structure. As Beethoven was still following in the footsteps of Haydn at this time, both the symphony and the trio follow the classic layout of Haydn's last twelve symphonies - four movements, with a slow introduction and a rondo finale.

A famous cliché in the music world has it that, the basic character of each Beethoven symphony can be instantly gleaned by its number. That is, the odd-numbered ones are supposed to be the heavyweight, heroic works, while the even-numbered ones complement them as relatively more "relaxed." Add to this the fact that many musicologists claim Beethoven's third symphony is his first real symphonic breakthrough, and it's no wonder the second gets such undeserved short shrift.

The Second Symphony and the Trio derived from it is one of Beethoven's most energetic, cheerful, and outgoing works. From his correspondence at the time, it was fairly clear that by mid-1801 he knew he was going deaf. Like other music written at the time, the work shows few signs of Beethoven's obvious despair. It's possible that he put the finishing touches on the confident, rollicking finale only days before he confessed thoughts of suicide in a letter to his brothers.

The first movement opens with a slow introduction before building up into a forceful outburst in D minor, foreshadowing the main theme of the Ninth Symphony's first movement. There's no lack of heroism here, especially with a suggestion of the angst that receives fuller expression in the Eroica's funeral march. The sensuous, lyrical Larghetto proceeds with an unusually slow (for Beethoven) tempo, followed by an exuberant scherzo – the first time Beethoven uses that designation, at least for a symphony. Unlike Haydn's relatively lightweight wrap-ups, the finale is bold and vigorous, with irresistible momentum.

– Steve Siegel