

## **Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) Concerto for Piano, Violin, and Strings in D Minor, MWV O4 (1823)**

The premier of this thrilling work, also known as the Double Concerto, took place in Mendelssohn's parents' home in Berlin (he was just 14, after all). Felix was at the piano, and his friend and violin teacher, Eduard Rietz, only seven years his senior, took the solo violin part. Fanny was there as well, and probably had a hand in the editing of the work. As she recounted in letter just a year prior, "I have watched the progress of his talent step by step and may say I have contributed to his development. I have always been his only musical adviser, and he never writes down a thought before submitting it to my judgment." Initially, Felix wrote the work for piano and violin accompanied by a string orchestra. The version we'll hear performed today, however, which he finished that same year, is for soloists and full orchestra with winds and timpani.

What I love most about the Double Concerto is its eclectic mash-up of historical styles. Is it Baroque, Classical, Romantic? It's a bit of each, actually. In its juxtaposition of styles, it was fairly modern for the time. Felix was fascinated with what audiences at the time considered *old* music, which meant anything written as recently as the Classical period, but even more so the works of "ancient" men like Handel and Bach. Today we're quite accustomed to hearing music spanning centuries in a single concert. In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, the sonic museum model was just emerging. Felix played an important role in popularizing the music of Bach and Handel for audiences of nineteenth century, directing works that hadn't been heard since their deaths. Many of Felix's own compositions, the oratorios in particular, and parts of the Double Concerto self-consciously imitate these big names of the Baroque.

The first movement of the Double Concerto, Allegro, begins with a kind of Baroque-sounding seriousness. The rhythm drive and imitated theme in a minor mode sound more like Vivaldi than one of Mendelssohn's contemporaries. When the second theme arrives, after modulating to major mode, it's as if we've arrived in a new century: suddenly the melody is lilting, playful, and very Classical in style. By this point, you may be wondering: where's the piano? And where's the violin? Typical of concertos of this era, we hear a so-called double exposition, a variant of sonata-allegro form mentioned earlier. The first exposition introduces the main themes played by orchestra alone; the second introduces these same themes but this time featuring the soloists. In the interplay between piano and violin we hear a much more romantic interpretation of the themes than we've heard before, with lots of liberty taken in the tempo of the phrases, as well as a lot of one-upmanship between the soloists.

Movement 2, Adagio, recalls the classical balance of some of Mozart's most beautiful slow movements. Its form is ABA, typical for the slower, middle movement, of a concerto. If the interplay between soloists in the first movement seemed competitive, here it's supportive. The piano and violin each take turns singing out the beautiful, hymn-like melody.

Movement 3, Allegro molto, is a playful tour de force. On your marks, get set, go! Both soloists and orchestra get ample opportunity to show off their full virtuosic potential.