

MENDELSSOHN: Piano Pieces

Variations Serieuses; Variations; 6 Preludes & Fugues; Prelude & Fugue in E minor; 7 Character Pieces; Andante & Presto agitato; 2 Pieces; 3 Etudes; 3 Preludes; Etude in F minor; Albumblatt; Perpetuum Mobile; Early and Unpublished Works

Roberto Prosseda

Decca 481 1010 [3CD] 214 minutes

In the final installment of his project to record Mendelssohn's complete oeuvre, Prosseda stresses rarely heard, newly published, and yet unpublished repertoire. He acknowledges the aid of the *Mendelssohn-Werkverzeichnis*, the first complete thematic catalog of Mendelssohn's works. His scholarly acumen (he wrote his own liner notes), impeccable technique, and good taste lead to one of the best Mendelssohn recordings I have reviewed.

He alludes to the influence of Bach and Haydn on the young Mendelssohn, providing thoughtful renderings of the Preludes and Fugues, supplemented by subtleties in pedaling and phrasing. The Baroque legacy recurs in the more familiar *Variations Serieuses*, with his admirable attention to its dense textures and contrapuntal moments. He supplements the variations with four additional variations excluded from the definitive version. The 7 *Charakterstücke*, an earlier set, are short, charming works performed with sensitivity and gusto. Also lively are the poised and brilliant 3 Etudes. Though not as inspired as Chopin's or Liszt's etudes, they serve as a good precursor to their efforts. The third disc of this set contains entirely early and unpublished works, most of them world premieres.

An invaluable release for the Mendelssohn enthusiast or scholar.

KANG

MENDELSSOHN: Songs 1

Mary Bevan, Sophie Bevan, s; Allan Clayton, Robin Tritschler, t; Benjamin Appl, Jonathan McGovern, bar; Malcolm Martineau, p

Champs Hill 56—65 minutes

Malcolm Martineau and his cast of fine young singers launch this latest foray into the songs of Mendelssohn. Eugene Asti's Hyperion project (J/A 1998, J/F 2002, M/J 2004, N/D 2009) set a high standard for performing Mendelssohn's songs. So far this project surpasses Asti's.

For this volume the songs are grouped by themes rather than opus: Songs of Journeys, Departures, and Greetings from Afar; Songs of Spring; The Boy Mendelssohn; Antique Strains and Voices from Yesteryear. Only the Six Duets, Opus 6 are presented as a published group.

The inadequate notes do not indicate that Mary and Sophie Bevan are sisters in one of England's distinguished musical families, nor do they indicate which one sings which part in the duets. Sophie is 3 years older and has a fuller and weightier voice, so it seems safe to assume that Mary sings the higher line. Mary sings five solo songs, Sophie three. Their singing is graceful and elegant.

Appl has the richer voice of the two baritones. McGovern with his light voice could be mistaken for a tenor. Both sing well. The two tenors are both excellent lieder singers. Tritschler brings a magical aura to 'Morgengruss'. Clayton sings only one song here, but his singing is the most satisfying of them all.

The notes imply that this project will champion the songs of both Felix and his sister Fanny. If that is true, it will be a valuable contribution to lovers of their music. It would be helpful if Champs Hill were explicit about it. Their notes for this volume indicate that Fanny wrote 'Das Heimweh', but their website attributes all the songs to Felix.

With fresh-voiced vocalists who sing with masterly technique, with the brilliant collaboration of Martineau, and with first-rate sound, this first volume is a thorough delight.

Texts and translations.

R MOORE

MENDELSSOHN: *String Quintets 1+2; Quartet Pieces 3+4*

Mandelring Quartet; Gunter Teuffel, va
Audite 92.659 [SACD] 69 minutes

Haydn, the "father of the string quartet", never wrote a quintet for strings; nor did many classical composers (but Mozart did). As stated in the notes for this release, it was felt that the four instruments could achieve perfect harmony, and a "fifth person" did not add to the conversation. In the romantic era, adding richness to the inner parts was sometimes desired. The greatest quintet, Schubert's in C, uses two cellos, but the two-violin format, as in Beethoven, Brahms, and Dvorak, is somewhat more common. Mendelssohn's use two violas.

Quintet 1 bears the opus number 18, though it was in fact composed after Mendelssohn's great Octet, Op. 20. This quintet is rarely performed, possibly because it is eclipsed by the monumental Octet, but I would not call it a minor work. It is mature, yet youthful in its exuberance. As the notes tell us, Mendelssohn here is "paying tribute to Mozart in tone-color, but thinking harmonically in romantic directions". Quintet 2 was composed almost 20 years later, and it is full-blown romanticism. It opens with a heroic theme over tremolos, and almost never loses steam. Even III, Adagio, takes full advantage of the