

PHILADELPHIA CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY

a life more beautiful

PREVIEW
NOTES

Brentano Quartet
Sunday, October 18 – 3:00 PM

PROGRAM

Tema con Variazioni: Andante sostenuto, Op. 81, Nos. 1 & 2 **Felix Mendelssohn**

Born: March 31, 1732, in Rohrau, Austria

Died: May 31, 1809, in Vienna, Austria

Composed: 1789

Duration: 6 minutes

The Four Pieces for String Quartet, Op. 81 is a collection of movements written for quartet during various points in Mendelssohn's life. Mendelssohn composed a Theme and Variations in E Major (Op. 81, No. 1) and a Scherzo in A Minor (Op. 81, No. 2) in 1847 shortly after completing the String Quartet in F Minor (Op. 80). The E-Major Theme and Variations bears similarities to movements in Robert Schumann's Op. 44 string quartets, which were dedicated to Mendelssohn, and speaks to the influence that these two friends had on each other's music. The Scherzo is a wonderful example of Mendelssohn's continuing mastery of this type of movement and the characters it evokes.

Quartet in A Major, Op. 41, No. 3

Robert Schumann

Born: June 8, 1810, in Zwickau, Germany

Died: July 29, 1856, in Bonn, Germany

Composed: 1842

Duration: 31 minutes

Last in the opus but second in order of composition, the Quartet in A Major Op.41, No.3 is far and away the most structurally traditional work of the group. The very first gesture of the first movement's brief introduction is identical, harmonically and motivically, to the opening gesture of Beethoven's Op.31, No.3, and one must suspect a conscious or subconscious debt on Schumann's part. The falling fifth motive outlined by this gesture is soon built into the first measure of the primary theme proper (A Major, three-four time as opposed to the four-four of the introduction), a tender

idea in two halves: the first a graceful eight-bar melody, the second a quarter-note arpeggiation played out in imitation between the four instruments. In Op.41, No.3, at last, Schumann writes a true second theme, whose gentle offbeats and expressive cello melody provide fertile material for development (as, indeed, does the imitative strain of the first theme).

Quartet in A Minor, Op. 51, No. 2

Johannes Brahms

Born: May 7, 1833, in Hamburg, Germany

Died: April 3, 1897, in Vienna, Austria

Composed: 1865

Duration: 33 minutes

The four movements of Op. 51/2, are: 1. Allegro non troppo, 2. Andante moderato, 3. Quasi Minuetto, moderato -- Allegretto vivace, and 4. Allegro non assai. There is a spaciousness to parts of the opening Allegro non troppo that would have had no place in the first movement of the C Minor quartet. The opening of the first theme, with its four espressivo, even perhaps wistful, half notes in the first violin (the pitches are A-F-A-E, probably a reference to Joseph Joachim's motto "FAE: Frei aber einsam" [freely, but solitary]), certainly has plenty of room—both rhythmically and intervallically—in it; and the C Major second theme, with its mezza voce, grazioso parallel thirds, is *gemütlichkeit* (sociable warmth), if ever chamber music has known it.