

The Classics Labels



CC1029

Mendelssohn

COMPLETE WORKS FOR CELLO AND PIANO

Colin Carr • Thomas Sauer



In reviewing Mendelssohn's B-flat-Major Cello Sonata for the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, Robert Schumann chose to discuss the composer's influences rather than details of the sonata itself:

"In the first bloom of youth [Mendelssohn] still worked partly under the influence of Bach and Beethoven, even though already a master of form and polyphony. In his overtures he allowed himself to be influenced by foreign poetry or drew from nature; and though he always did so as musician and poet, voices here and there warned against this tendency lest it become exclusive with him. But this sonata is again of the purest, most self-sufficing music..."

Mendelssohn in one sense shared the fate of a post-modern composer: conversant with past musical styles to a degree unprecedented in 1830, he was freer than any of his predecessors or contemporaries to choose a compositional path. He owed this freedom both to a culturally privileged upbringing – that is, to a virtually unlimited exposure to German musical heritage – and to his own astonishing powers of assimilation. Such an education might well have shackled a man of lesser confidence or talent. The music on this disc, however, serves as testament to Mendelssohn's unique ability to blend the whims and characteristic colors of Romanticism with the craft he inherited from Bach, Mozart and Beethoven.

In the **B-flat Sonata**, Romanticism surfaces most characteristically in the third movement, with its long-breathed melody whose three recurrences suggest a sense of cyclic return rather than mere restatement, so magically does Mendelssohn manage each thematic return. A contrasting section sets off at a lively gallop on its way to a secondary key area rich in theme and, later, to an exciting developmental passage. The second movement is a *canzonetta* in G minor whose three-part form is enlarged by a coda full of fantasy, in the guise of a meandering obbligato line in the piano right hand. Its first is the Sonata's most Mozartean movement: beautifully balanced between piano and cello and full of thematic invention, the movement undergoes numerous textural transformations despite a registral compass that is unusually narrow for both instruments.

The **D-Major Sonata** is Mendelssohn's *chef d'oeuvre* for this instrumental combination, yet for all its youthful enthusiasm and virtuosity, it represents a retrenchment of sorts. Its outer



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movements seem to follow a path previously trodden, masterly though they be. Their virtuosity is dazzling but never dangerous; formal processes seem instructive rather than instinctive. That said, the music's verve persuades all but the seeker of novelties. These (novelties) are to be found in the inner movements, a moderate scherzo (a *presto* would not have balanced the first movement well) and a hybrid slow movement, a kind of chorale-recitative that depicts both the comfort of belief and the anguish of doubt. There is something of twilight in the scherzo, an ambiguity that hovers in compositional terms between major and minor, staccato and legato, pizzicato and arco, delicacy and forcefulness. As sometimes happens in the music of Brahms, the shorter-formed inner movements here possess a spontaneity that enriches their attention-grabbing neighbours immeasurably.

Wonderfully quixotic and inventive, the **Variations Concertantes** present a straightforward two-part theme and at once (Var. 1) undermine formal regularity by halving its length. Mendelssohn hews to tradition in his treatment of rhythm – with increasing diminutions from the theme through Var. 4 – but seems predominantly concerned with the interplay of different characters as he moves from a gentle lyricism (Var. 1) to a Chopinesque delicacy (Var. 2), from operatic swagger (Var. 3) to fleet-fingered virtuosity (Var. 4) and on to sheer buffoonery in Var. 5, where the cello in pizzicato is asked to stand up to full chordal writing in the piano. Var. 6 suggests the warm glow of evening before the nightmarish vision in D minor of the seventh variation, which quickly breaks entirely from the structure of the theme in a kind of cadenza-recitative. A reprise of the theme over a pedal-point in the cello opens a door to an expansive coda of great beauty. Mendelssohn repeatedly quotes the second strain of the theme, but the effect is one of reminiscence rather than development or further variation.

The **Romance sans paroles**, known as Song without Words after Mendelssohn's beloved collections for piano solo, gives the cello an opportunity to do what it does best. Spinning a melodic line over a simple accompaniment, its lyric voice seems to accomplish the impossible, suggesting at once contentment and a Romantic yearning. The latter was a feeling essential to the art of Mendelssohn's Leipzig colleague Schumann, yet one not as often indulged musically by Mendelssohn himself.



Colin Carr appears throughout the world as soloist, chamber musician, recording artist, and teacher. He has played with major orchestras worldwide, including the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, The Philharmonia, Royal Philharmonic, BBC Symphony, the orchestras of Chicago, Los Angeles, Washington, Philadelphia, Montréal and all the major orchestras of Australia and New Zealand. Conductors with whom he has worked include Rattle, Gergiev, Dutoit, Elder, Skrowaszewski and Marriner. He has been a regular guest at the BBC Proms, has twice toured Australia, and has played concertos in South Korea, Hong Kong, Malaysia and New Zealand. Memorable performances include the Dvorák Concerto to close the Prague Autumn Festival, and Beethoven's Triple Concerto, with Sir Colin Davis conducting, at London's Royal Festival Hall.

In recent seasons Carr has performed cycles of Beethoven's complete works for cello and piano Thomas Sauer throughout the United States and in England and France. Other recent highlights include performances of Don Quixote in Germany, Shostakovich Concerto No. 1 in Korea, the original version of the Rococo Variations in Holland, Shostakovich Concerto No. 2 in the U.S. and the Elgar Concerto with the Halle Orchestra and Mark Elder. He has also given several cycles of the Bach Suites in London, at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center in New York and the Gardner Museum in Boston.

As a member of the Golub-Kaplan-Carr Trio, he has recorded and toured extensively for 20 years. He is a frequent visitor to international chamber music festivals worldwide, has appeared often as a guest with the Guarneri and Emerson string quartets and with New York's Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and gives regular recitals in London, New York and Boston.

Carr's GM recordings of the unaccompanied cello works of Kodaly, Britten, Crumb, and Schuller, as well as the Bach Suites, have been highly acclaimed, as was his recording of Brahms Sonatas with pianist Lee Luvisi on Arabesque. He was the soloist in Elgar's Cello Concerto with the BBC Philharmonic for a BBC Music Magazine recording.

Colin Carr is the winner of many prestigious international awards, including First Prize in the Naumburg Competition, the Gregor Piatigorsky Memorial Award and Second Prize in the Rostropovich International Cello Competition.

Having started the cello at the age of five, he went three years later to the Yehudi Menuhin School where he studied with Maurice Gendron and later William Pleeth. He was made a professor at the Royal Academy of Music in 1998, having been on the faculty of the New England Conservatory in Boston for 16 years. In 1998, St. John's College, Oxford created the post of "Musician in Residence" for him, and in September 2002 he became a professor at Stony Brook University in New York.

Colin Carr's cello was made by Matteo Gofriller in Venice in 1730. He makes his home with his wife Caroline and 3 young children, Clifford, Frankie and Anya, in an old house outside Oxford.



Pianist **Thomas Sauer** is highly sought after as soloist, chamber musician, and teacher. His varied concert career includes concerto performances with the Quad-City Symphony and Greenwich Village Orchestra; solo performances at Carnegie Hall, Rockefeller University, and St. John's College, Oxford; two appearances on Broadway as the pianist in *33 Variations*, a play about the composition of Beethoven's Diabelli Variations; performances at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society; duo recitals with Colin Carr at Wigmore Hall (London), Holywell Music Room (Oxford), the Konzerthgebouw (Amsterdam), Bargemusic (New York City) and Princeton University; duo recitals with Midori at the Philharmonie in Berlin and the Palais des Beaux Arts in Brussels; performances with members of the Juilliard String Quartet at the Library of

Congress, and numerous concerts with the Brentano String Quartet.

Sauer has performed at many of the leading festivals in the United States and abroad, including Marlboro, Caramoor, Music@Menlo, Chamber Music Northwest, El Paso Pro Musica,

and the Chamber Music Festivals of Seattle, Taos, Four Seasons (North Carolina), Portland and Salt Bay (Maine), as well as Lake District Summer Music (England) and Festival des Consonances (France).

His varied discography includes recordings of Beethoven and Haydn piano sonatas for MSR Classics; a disc of Hindemith sonatas with violist Misha Amory (Musical Heritage Society); music by Britten and Schnittke with cellist Wilhelmina Smith on Arabesque; music of Ross Lee Finney with violinist Miranda Cuckson on Centaur Records, and Mozart violin sonatas with Aaron Berofsky on Blue Griffin Recordings.

Sauer has premiered works by Philippe Bodin, Robert Cuckson, Sebastian Currier, Keith Fitch, David Loeb, Donald Martino, and David Tcimpidis.

A member of the music faculty of Vassar College and the piano faculty of the Mannes College, Thomas Sauer is the founder and director of the Mannes Beethoven Institute.

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Sonata No.1 in B flat, Op.45

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| 1 | Allegro vivace | 12:38 |
| 2 | Andante | 6:29 |
| 3 | Allegro assai | 6:25 |

Sonata No.2 in D, Op.58

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| 4 | Allegro assai vivace | 7:49 |
| 5 | Allegro scherzando | 5:03 |
| 6 | Adagio | 4:45 |
| 7 | Molto allegro e vivace | 7:07 |

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| 8 | Variations Concertantes, Op.17 | 9:33 |
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| 9 | Romance sans paroles Op. 109 | 4:16 |
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