

Felix & Fanny Mendelssohn

String Quartets

CONSONE QUARTET



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BIOGRAPHIES



The players of the Consone Quartet are deeply moved by the siblings' relationship and they felt strongly that Felix's F minor Quartet, composed as a 'Requiem for Fanny', should feature on the album directly after his elder sister's quartet. The group continues to be influenced by players' parts from the time, always striving for a free and expressive approach in the way they shape this highly emotional music.

String Quartets

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847)

Fanny Mendelssohn (1805–1847)

CONSONE QUARTET

AGATA DARAŠKAITĖ violin

MAGDALENA LOTH-HILL violin

ELITSA BOGDANOVA viola

GEORGE ROSS cello

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

1. Allegro assai appassionato 10:59
2. Scherzo: Allegro di molto 4:23
3. Andante 6:08
4. Presto agitato 7:15

Fanny Mendelssohn
String Quartet in E flat major

5. Adagio ma non troppo 3:29
6. Allegretto 3:50
7. Romanze 6:10
8. Allegro molto vivace 6:03

Felix Mendelssohn
String Quartet in F minor, Op. 80

9. Allegro vivace assai 7:42
10. Allegro assai 4:34
11. Adagio 6:44
12. Finale: Allegro molto 5:56

Total Running Time 73:35

Felix & Fanny Mendelssohn

String Quartets

Felix Mendelssohn composed seven string quartets, not including the Four Pieces, Op. 81. After his very early string quartet dating from 1823 and the two quartets Op. 12 and Op. 13, published in 1829 and 1827 respectively, Mendelssohn wrote no more for the medium for another eight years, until the group of three works comprising Op. 44 (1837–8).

Having married Cécile Jeanrenaud on 28 March 1837, Mendelssohn completed his E minor String Quartet less than three months later, during a period of stability and creativity. The quartet opens with an extended melody above a buoyantly syncopated accompaniment. ‘Appassionato’ appears in the tempo marking, but here Mendelssohn tempers passion with elegance. This opening paragraph leads to a unison passage introducing an important new element in the form of running semiquavers – present for the next twenty-eight bars – before the second theme brings temporary calm. In the development section the urgent semiquavers are again prominent but, as in many of Mendelssohn’s major works, it is the approach to the recapitulation which is particularly inspired. In this preparation he shortens the note-values of the opening theme, increasing tension until, at the melody’s actual return, these quaver groups continue as accompaniment. Such resourcefulness is typical of this deeply impressive movement.

The terrific energy of the *Allegro di molto* and the frequent accents separate it from the category of delicate elfin scherzos which Mendelssohn made his own. Here the infectious rhythm of the opening subsequently becomes a feature of the

accompaniment. A gradual easing of the rhythmic drive leads to a sad little viola melody, a kind of afterthought. This melody returns, in a slightly extended version, not long before the exquisite ending.

The G major *Andante* belongs to Mendelssohn's unruffled and mellifluous 'song-without-words' manner. In the two-bar introduction the second violin establishes flowing semiquaver patterns which continue to run like a thread throughout nearly all the movement, though at one point they blossom into sextuplets for the first violin (a hint of a cadenza?). The return of the first melody is re-scored for cello, while the viola plays the bass line.

The *Presto agitato* finale is a fine example of the composer's prodigious fluency and nervous energy, the restless accompaniment to the opening theme being punctuated by many little accents. The exuberant second subject includes the interval of a rising seventh, recalling the falling seventh in the first theme of the opening movement. Throughout the work numerous other melodic connections of this kind – often stemming from the E minor arpeggio at the very opening – contribute a strong sense of unity.

Felix Mendelssohn and his older sister Fanny (1805–47) shared a close relationship. Musically they were both provided with a rigorous education, but any prospect of Fanny fulfilling her potential as a professional composer was a non-starter, as it was made clear to her that her principal duties were to marry and become an exemplary *Hausfrau*. Nevertheless, she composed over four hundred and fifty works in her twenty-seven creative years. Among only a handful of large-scale compositions, which also include a piano trio, a piano quartet and four cantatas, her String Quartet in E flat major (1834) begins, unusually, with an expressive *Adagio ma non troppo* of rather free structure akin to a fantasia. It opens in C minor and accommodates

several passages of free imitation. The scherzo (*Allegretto*) in C minor, including some neat *arco/pizzicato* alternations, leads to an energetic and contrapuntal trio section in the tonic major, which is indebted to the equivalent place in Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. On its return the scherzo material is combined with the busy semiquavers of the trio. The *Romanze* in G minor begins like a melancholy song-without-words but builds to a robust and sustained passage of unexpected intensity. Here and throughout the work Fanny exercises an individual harmonic language, one little example being the insistent chromatic inflection of the flattened supertonic (A flat) in the *Romanze's* final three bars. The exuberant finale is a rondo with passages in a *moto perpetuo* style, but also including darker, more robust, minor-key writing. One specially felicitous section has a graceful, buoyant first violin melody above running viola semiquavers and *pizzicato* cello. Clearly a highly-strung, inexhaustible energy was a quality which she shared with Felix. This attractive, characterful and well-crafted quartet, with its degrees of indebtedness to works by her brother as well as Beethoven, remained unpublished until 1988. Clearly, the status of her gender in the first half of the nineteenth century was Fanny's greatest disadvantage, while one may wonder whether having to work alongside her genius of a brother had a positive or negative effect on her own creativity. It is known that Felix disapproved of her quartet, feeling that her unconventional structural sense required more discipline.

Composed while he was at Interlaken, recovering from his shock at Fanny's premature death on 17 May 1847, Felix Mendelssohn's String Quartet in F minor, Op. 80, is a work of striking bitterness and agitation, an unambiguous reflection of his distraught mental state. Its first movement is almost entirely devoid of Mendelssohn's more typical melodic appeal. On its eventual appearance at bar 23, the first subject (of restricted compass) brings relief from the preceding strenuousness, and again the lyrical second theme offers solace, though even this is underpinned by restless

cello syncopation. The predominantly stressful mood is intensified by a furious coda marked *Presto*. Frequent *sforzandos* and across-the-bar line syncopation impart an unusual vehemence to the following scherzo, while the strange, rather ghostly trio section does not admit any contrasting comfort. A tender lyricism and more sustained respite arrive with the *Adagio* third movement but, as a repeated dotted rhythm is introduced, the mood becomes more impassioned, building towards a *fortissimo* climax. This elegiac *Adagio* ends serenely (*dolce*) but the *Allegro molto* finale returns us to the intensity of the first two movements, albeit with calmer major-key passages. Restless syncopation characterizes the first subject and subsequently, in the development section, harsh fortissimo outbursts interrupt the rapid pianissimo oscillations derived from the cello's opening bar. At the recapitulation the first violin enhances the first subject with a new counterpoint in triplets. This triplet rhythm dominates the fierce coda, the final emphatic bars leaving the listener exhausted from the outpouring of grief and despair which constitutes Mendelssohn's most extraordinary work.

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CONSONE QUARTET

The first period instrument string quartet to be selected as BBC New Generation Artists, the Consone Quartet are known for their honest and expressive interpretations of repertoire, notably from the classical and romantic eras.

Formed at the Royal College of Music in London, the Consone Quartet launched their professional career in 2015, shortly after which they were awarded two prizes at the 2015 York Early Music International Young Artists Competition, the EUBO Development Trust Prize and a place on the EEEmerging Scheme in France. They went on to win the 2016 Royal Over-Seas League Ensemble Prize, and in 2022 were awarded a prestigious Borletti-Buitoni Trust (BBT) fellowship.

The quartet has been enthusiastically received at London's major venues, as well as further afield in Poland, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Austria, Bulgaria, Slovenia and across North America. Festival invitations include Edinburgh, Cheltenham, Dartington, Two Moors, Buxton, MA Festival in Bruges, Heidelberger Streichquartettfest, Schwetzingen Festival and Festspiele Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in Germany, and Styriarte Graz in Austria. Performing highlights of their 25/26 season include a North American tour with Kristian Bezuidenhout, featuring appearances at the Library of Congress in DC and Salle Bourgie in Montreal; a new collaboration with the Chiaroscuro Quartet (Barbican Centre and NCEM, York); a tour with Helen Charlston (Oxford International Song Festival, Brighton Early Music Festival); and a return to Italy with Alexander Gadjiev.

In 2023, the Consone Quartet premiered *The Bridges of Königsberg*, a string sextet by Gavin Bryars, commissioned by friends of the Quartet, the Borletti-Buitoni Trust, and BBC Radio 3, broadcast from St Martin-in-the-Fields. Their recent

collaboration with Oliver Leith continues a developing commitment to contemporary music: July 2025 marked the English and Scottish premieres of his seven-movement quartet *On a horse, on a hill, faraway, through fog and bonfire*, which they will also perform at the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, in May 2026.

Education work remains a core interest to the group, having worked with students at the Royal College of Music in London, Chetham's School of Music in Manchester, the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, as Hans Keller fellows for 2020-2022. 2025 sees the quartet working with students at New England Conservatory in Boston and continuing their community work in South Yorkshire as 'visiting quartet' for Sheffield's Music in the Round, supported by the Frost Trust.

Consone are Artists-in-Residence at Paxton House (2023–2025) and at Saxon Shore Early Music Kenardington (2024–2027).



The Borletti-Buitoni Trust (BBT) helps young artists and charitable organisations around the world. Artist Awards and Fellowships are offered to young musicians to nurture sustainable international careers; Artist Encore Awards reconnect with them later into their careers, by supporting them to imagine and deliver socially-driven musical projects in the communities where they live and work; and Community Grants offer financial support to international charities that are reaching marginalised and disadvantaged communities through music.

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