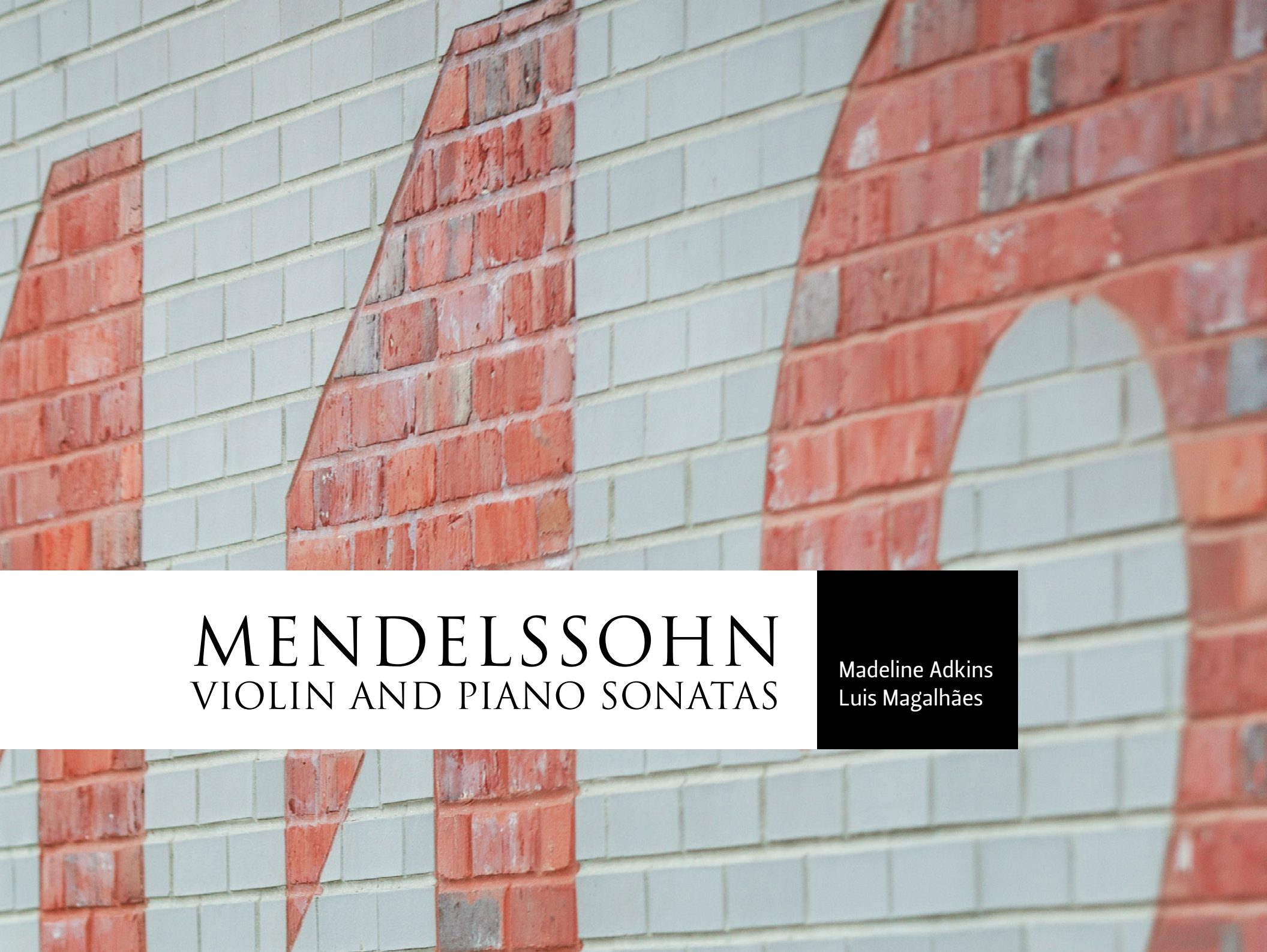

MENDELSSOHN
VIOLIN AND PIANO SONATAS

Madeline Adkins
Luis Magalhães

MENDELSSOHN
VIOLIN AND PIANO SONATAS

Felix Mendelssohn was born 1809 in Hamburg, the second of four children to Abraham Mendelssohn and Lea Salomon. The Mendelssohn family was both financially prosperous and socially esteemed, and the children had every material and intellectual benefit an upper class upbringing could provide. Abraham Mendelssohn and his brother Joseph were bankers by profession, who together founded the Berlin banking and investment operation Mendelssohn & Co. The family banking business was enormously successful, and made rich men of the Mendelssohn brothers. Mendelssohn & Co. survived long enough to weather the Great Depression, only to be ruined by anti-Semitic Nazi policies imposed in 1938. The Mendelssohn brothers' father (that is, Felix's paternal grandfather) was Moses Mendelssohn, a revered philosopher famous for espousing religious tolerance in an increasingly anti-Semitic Europe. Prussian monarch Friedrich Wilhelm II granted Moses Mendelssohn's widow and her children special state protection from discrimination in view of the philosopher's contributions to intellectual life. A similar right was afforded to Lea Salomon's family, who were granted special protection by the Russian monarchy in light of their contribution to commerce (Lea's grandfather was the banker Daniel Itzig). Given Moses Mendelssohn's views on religious tolerance, it is ironic that in 1816 Lea and Abraham Mendelssohn quietly had their children baptised as Lutherans, in an attempt to afford them a life free from discrimination. After their own conversion to Christianity in 1822, Abraham and Lea adopted for the family the additional surname 'Bartholdy'. Despite the obvious convenience of his parents' religious amendment, Felix Mendelssohn was to remain a faithful Christian until the end of his life, composing many sacred works as expressions of his faith. These prolific statements of adherence to the Christian religion didn't stop the denigration of Mendelssohn's talents by influential commentators such as Wagner, who singled him out in the infamous anti-Semitic essay *Das Judenthum in der Musik* (1850). By the time European anti-Semitism reached its zenith with National Socialism in Germany, Mendelssohn's music had been declared degenerate, and was banned on racial grounds.

Felix and his two sisters, Fanny and Rebecka, showed remarkable musical talent from a young age. Rebecka was to be all but eclipsed by her siblings, and soon a stop was put to Fanny's aspirations of professional musicianship as well. Abraham and Lea Mendelssohn

considered professional musicianship to be an unladylike activity for a marriage-worthy woman of the upper classes, regardless of the obvious talent displayed by Fanny especially. It was Felix who was destined to be the star. Around 1819, Carl Friedrich Zelter (1758-1832) was selected as the children's music teacher. Zelter was thorough and meticulous in his duties. He provided young Felix with a solid grounding in harmony and counterpoint, using 18th century music as a model. This thorough academic foundation in compositional technique is already evident in the early works featured on this recording. Zelter's zeal for 18th century music was to have a very profound influence on music history: it was through Zelter that Mendelssohn developed a passion for the music of Bach and his contemporaries, which culminated in the famous 1829 performance of the *St. Matthew Passion*. This concert, directed by a 20-year old Mendelssohn, was arguably the spearhead of the Romantic Bach-revival. This interest in the music of the past had the knock-on effect of firmly establishing an appreciation for music predating the Viennese Classicists, Haydn and Mozart. It is difficult to overstate the importance of this rediscovery of Baroque music, as it has shaped concert programmes (and hence the classical music industry as a whole) throughout the course of the 20th century.

Carl Zelter very soon realised that he had a musical genius on his hands in the form of the young Felix. Both as a pianist and a composer, Mendelssohn was no run-of-the-mill child prodigy. Rather, he one of the most extraordinarily stupendous child prodigies Western music had yet produced. When the 12-year old Mendelssohn played the piano for Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, the aging writer saw fit to compare him to Mozart, who had given him a similar private performance at the age of 7. In terms of compositional output, a modern critic might compare Mendelssohn to Erich Korngold, arguably the greatest compositional prodigy of the 20th century. Mendelssohn's talents were, in short, otherworldly; in the history of Western society's obsession with musical precociousness, Mendelssohn holds pride of place.

Consider the recordings featured on this disk. The Sonata in F major was composed in 1820—Mendelssohn was only 11 years old. The Sonata in F minor, op. 4, was composed in 1824, when the composer was 15. The unfinished fragment of the Sonata in D minor followed the next year. It is only the second of the F major sonatas recorded here that is chronologically the odd one out, having been written when Mendelssohn was 29 years old. By the time of Mendelssohn's 1821 performance for Goethe, the young composer had written three one-act operas in Mozart's Singspiel-style, a piano sonata, sacred music, six sinfonias, and several individual pieces for string quartet, commonly seen as the litmus-test medium for compositional technique. Several canonical masterpieces were also the product of youth, including the remarkable Octet in E flat (1825, age 16) and the overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1826, age 17).

Of course, when dealing with cases of child-wonder composers, questions of misplaced value are often raised. Does it really matter to the listener what age Mendelssohn was when he wrote his first violin sonata? Is maturity in years somehow reflected in terms of musical style? Would our appreciation of Mendelssohn's early works be any different had they been written when the composer was 35?

Western fascination with musical prodigies is a late-19th century trend that has endured most probably due to the domination of Romantic views about music amongst performers and audiences alike. Whether prodigy *ought* to be valued in and of itself, is perhaps a question that makes critics and music lovers a little uneasy. After all, this fascination with musical precociousness does have a few negative consequences. For instance, the compositions of very young composers (such as Mendelssohn's 1820 sonata featured here, written at the age of 11) tend to be treated as exotic animals, and not as artworks with value independent of the age of the composer. That is, there is a tendency to marvel at the fact that a child could write a substantial sonata, and not that the sonata would be equally remarkable when considered alone, without biographical baggage. This occasionally results in precocious works being dismissed as not having any serious critical value, a situation which is sadly true of many of the early efforts of young Mendelssohn. The paradigm example of this sort of prejudice is Erich Korngold, who not only had the critical stigma of prodigy to overcome, but also a father who ruthlessly attacked critics of his compositional style in a very public and distasteful fashion. In short, the label of being a product of prodigy often adds the wrong sort of value to musical works.

The entire Western ideal of precocious musicality also works to undermine the fact, so beautifully written about in ethnomusicologist John Blacking's classic *How Musical is Man*, and today so firmly shown by cognitive investigations of human musicality, that all humans are born with the basic, requisite ability to appreciate and partake in musical activities. The idea of musical prodigy reinforces the typically Western view that only a select few have God-given talent, and the others simply don't. This idea—that only some people are musical to any valuable degree—is one of the great tragic absurdities of modern Western society. The obsession with prodigy also results in thoroughly unpleasant (yet surprisingly widely-tolerated) practice regimes for young children, imposed by over-zealous parents when any above-average instrumental abilities become evident. Such cases serve to illustrate how the preoccupation with displays of childhood genius can be somewhat cruel, and painfully at odds with the focus on individual autonomous rights in other spheres of Western life. None of this, however, puts into doubt just how remarkable Mendelssohn's precocious talents were, of course. These talents even extended beyond music: at the age of 17 he translated, from Greek, Horace's *Ars poetica*; he was also well-versed in

geography, mathematics and history while still a teenager. Fortunately for Mendelssohn, however, his parents weren't interested in exploiting his talents in pursuit of fame and fortune, and the young composer took the day-to-day life of being a child genius in his stride.

Mendelssohn's music has been, in many instances, at the sharp end of the critic's stick. Whether small solo works (such as the *Lieder ohne Worte*), large works (such as the oratorios and symphonies), or early chamber music (such as the sonatas recorded here), it has often been fashionable to dismiss Mendelssohn's music as exhibiting at best Victorian sentimentality, and at worst, a lack of the fiery inspiration apparently so vital to the Romantic view of musicianship. Perceived variability in the quality of his musical output over the course of his career even prompted the otherwise sober-talking critic Donald Francis Tovey to call Mendelssohn 'one of the strangest problems in musical history'. Much of the devaluing of Mendelssohn's compositional output may have to do with pervasive ideas of what a Romantic artist should be like: tormented, anguished, anti-social, possessed by art, and often destitute. Mendelssohn was, of course, the polar opposite. Rich, well-educated and well-travelled, the adult Mendelssohn also had a sparkling social life, and found that composition came relatively easy to him. The fact that the death of his sister Fanny arguably contributed to his own early demise at the age of 38, has not dimmed the view of Mendelssohn as the embodiment of genteel Victorian ease and triviality. It is a view that has prevented a fair assessment of much of his oeuvre.

Mendelssohn's sonatas for violin and piano are the subject of this recording. Only one of his three completed violin sonatas was published and assigned an opus number, reflecting the doubts that the composer had regarding his output for the medium of violin and piano. The first sonata on the program is the last historically—the unpublished Sonata in F major, dating from 1838. At the time of composition, Mendelssohn was employed as the conductor of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, where the 28-year old violinist Ferdinand David was leader. Mendelssohn composed the F major Sonata specifically for David, and it is known that the two played through the work together in private. Mendelssohn was not entirely happy with the end product, however, and set about revising the first movement. He soon gave it up as a bad job, and the sonata was shelved. David would eventually get to play a part in a Mendelssohn debut—he was the soloist at the 1845 premiere of the famous Violin Concerto in E minor. The shelved sonata, in the mean time, went unpublished and remained ignored for some 115 years, until it was rediscovered, edited and championed by the legendary Yehudi Menuhin in 1952.

The second sonata featured on this recording is the Sonata in F minor, op. 4, completed in 1823 and published in 1824. This sonata was published along with three piano trios, the four works serving as Mendelssohn's first

opus number-bearing publications. Although today the sonata is a cornerstone of the Romantic violin repertoire, early performances were slated by critics much to the disappointment of the young composer. One wonders whether the negative reception of this sonata flavoured Mendelssohn's attitude regarding the publication of subsequent works for violin. The F minor Sonata bears a dedication to Eduard Rietz (1802-1832), who was also the dedicatee of the lesser-known Violin Concerto in D minor, as well as the Octet. Rietz would become close friend to the adult Mendelssohn, and was for a while his violin teacher. Rietz was a violinist of considerable skill, taking part in the famous 1829 performance of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* as a member of the Berlin Philharmonic Society under the direction of Mendelssohn. Rietz was, in fact, the founder and conductor of that orchestra, but had surrendered the baton to Mendelssohn for that seminal performance.

The third work recorded here is an incomplete fragment of a sonata, representing a somewhat-compromised first movement. Cast in D minor, it was written around 1825 and was left unfinished by the composer. There is little information available on this fragment. As far as can be reliably ascertained, the manuscript was given to the Berlin State Library along with other sketches after the end of the Second World War, so that it might form part of the reconstituted Mendelssohn Archive. (Mendelssohn had, of course, been *persona non grata* in Nazi Germany.) The manuscript includes a slow introductory passage (*Adagio*), followed by a D minor *Allegro molto*; a listening leaves one wondering why Mendelssohn neglected a work with such clear potential.

The final piece on the program is Mendelssohn's earliest attempt at a violin sonata: the complete Sonata in F major, composed in 1820. This too was left unpublished by Mendelssohn—the edition recorded here was edited by Renate Unger, and published only in 1977. Despite Mendelssohn's lack of confidence in this sonata, it has become a firmly entrenched part of the chamber repertoire since the 1980s, with numerous performances and recordings. The 1820 sonata dates from the same time as several other collected fragments for violin and piano, which were written as exercises without any intention to publish. It therefore stands to reason that the sonata was most probably written as a composition exercise for Carl Zelter: it is indeed a striking example of the technical prowess that the young 11-year old composer had gained under his teacher's guidance. Despite being a pedagogical exercise, this sonata is stamped with the lyric genius we associate with so many of Mendelssohn's more famous compositions. It is also further evidence that circumstantial factors, such as a composer's age, shouldn't prevent the listener from forming a fair critical assessment of a piece of music. And, listening to the music featured on this recording, one cannot help but think that unbiased critical reflection will prove Mendelssohn's decision not to publish his early violin works mistaken.

Madeline Adkins

Hailed as "deliciously exuberant" by the Baltimore Sun, violinist Madeline Adkins has established herself as equally at home in the spheres of solo performance, chamber music, and orchestral playing.

In September 2016, Adkins will assume her new post as Concertmaster of the Utah Symphony under Maestro Thierry Fischer.

She was appointed to the position of Associate Concertmaster of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra by Maestro Yuri Temirkanov in 2005, after joining the orchestra as Assistant Concertmaster in 2000. A sought-after soloist, Adkins has appeared with orchestras in 15 US states, Europe, Asia, and Africa. During her time with the BSO, she was featured semi-annually and has performed over 25 works with that orchestra. She has also been the concertmaster of the Baltimore Chamber Orchestra since 2008. Her tenure there has led the Baltimore Sun's Tim Smith to write, "I've never heard this orchestra's string sections sound quite so luxurious... Concertmaster Madeline Adkins has clearly been a positive influence in that chair."

She has served as guest concertmaster of the Hong Kong Philharmonic, the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, the Oregon Symphony, and the Grant Park Symphony Orchestra in Chicago, where she was featured in Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*. An active recitalist and chamber musician, Adkins performs frequently in the Baltimore/Washington area. Recent engagements include a recital as part of the Embassy Series at the Romanian Embassy in Washington DC. She has also been a guest artist at numerous summer festivals including the Stellenbosch International Chamber Music Festival in South Africa, Music in the Mountains, the Grand Teton Music Festival, and the Sewanee Summer Music Festival, as well as a clinician at the National Orchestral Institute.

A champion of early music, Adkins has been active in baroque performance on period instruments since the age of 11. She has been a member of the Handel and Haydn Society, Boston Baroque, the Dallas Bach Society, and Pro Musica Rara of Baltimore. With the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Adkins has appeared as conductor and soloist in several baroque programs of her own design, as well as hosting concerts on the Casual Series. These appearances on the BSO's subscription series included works of Vivaldi, Handel, Bach, Biber, and Carlo Farina.

The daughter of noted musicologists, Adkins is the youngest of eight children, six of whom are professional musicians. The siblings, who included titled players in the National, Dallas, and Houston symphonies, joined together to form the Adkins String Ensemble. She performed on viola and violin with this unique chamber ensemble for over 15 years, and the group has made numerous recordings, including Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht*.

Adkins received her Bachelor's summa cum laude from the University of North Texas and her Master's degree from the New England Conservatory where she studied with James Buswell. While a student, she served as concertmaster of the Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra under Seiji Ozawa and won first prize in a number of competitions, including the Stulberg International String Competition, the ASTA National Solo Competition, and the New England Conservatory Concerto Competition. She was also a second prize winner in the Irving Klein International String Competition.

Madeline is extraordinarily grateful to conductor Marin Alsop for the loan of her personal instrument, a 1753 Guadagnini.

When not on stage, Madeline is passionate about animal rescue. She has volunteered weekly for Small Miracles Cat and Dog Rescue in Maryland since 2008, and has fostered over 100 kittens.

Madeline would like to thank her husband, John Forrest, for his unwavering love and support.

Luis Magalhães

Described as possessing a "wonderfully full sound" (American Record Guide) and a "polished, refined technique" (Allmusic.com), Luis Magalhães has achieved critical acclaim as both a soloist and a chamber musician. Born in Portugal and currently residing in Stellenbosch, South Africa, Luis's career as a pianist displays the cosmopolitanism typical of successful 21st century musicianship. Luis has played extensively across Europe with engagements in Germany, Austria, the United Kingdom, his native Portugal, Switzerland, Spain, France, Italy, amongst others. Beyond Europe, he has appeared on stages in Brazil, South Africa, China, Japan, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and on numerous occasions, the United States. Reflecting his eminence as an artist of global standing, Luis was bestowed the honour of being named a Yamaha International Artist.

Luis is active as a studio musician, and has collaborated with many remarkable recording artists including Frank Stadler (violin), Daniel Rowland (violin), Priya Mitchell (violin), Gareth Lubbe (viola), Julian Arp (cello) Peter Martens (cello), and James Austin Smith (oboe). The recording with Martens, featuring the complete cello sonatas of L. v. Beethoven, was awarded a coveted South African Music Award (SAMA) in 2011, while both violin recordings have received glowing reviews in The Strad. As one half of the Schumann-Magalhães duo, better known as TwoPianists Piano Duo, Luis has also released a further four critically acclaimed CDs, with another soon to be released. This collaboration with his wife, Nina Schumann, has been compared to the celebrated Ashkenazy-Previn and Argerich-Freire duos (American Record Guide).

Luis's further activities in the recording industry include the co-founding of the independent label TwoPianists Records. The result has been both local and international accolades, such as a German Record Critic's Award in 2011. Luis is also amongst the musicians involved in the pioneering Korngold Project, which features high quality recordings of the chamber music of Erich Korngold, as performed by some of the most exciting artists of this generation. Luis's immersion in the world of classical music recording has extended to the role of producer, to which he brings a wealth of experience as a practicing musician of the highest calibre. As a promoter of classical music in South Africa, Luis is a co-founder of the Stellenbosch International Chamber Music Festival, which has since 2004 become the premier classical music festival on African soil. He is also a co-founder of the

biannual Stellenbosch International Piano Symposium.

Eminent musicianship always leaves a legacy in the form of tuition. Luis himself was a student of maestro Vladimir Viardo at the University of North Texas. He has since gone to teach students who have scooped up major awards and placings in South African competitions, such as the MUSIQ Competition and the UNISA National Piano Competition. Luis was awarded a DMus in Piano Performance from the University of Cape Town in 2011, and continues his association with university musical life with his appointment to an Associate Professorship at the University of Stellenbosch. Luis has also given extensive masterclass tuition including lessons at New York's fabled Juilliard School and numerous universities across Europe, Asia and the United States. As an expert pianist and educator, Luis has also served in the jury of many competitions including the prestigious Tchaikovsky International Piano Competition for Young Musicians (2012).

MENDELSSOHN VIOLIN AND PIANO SONATA

Madeline Adkins (violin) & Luis Magalhães (piano)

Felix Mendelssohn

		Sonata in F Major (1838)
1	12:37	Allegro vivace
2	8:37	Adagio
3	6:13	Allegro vivace
		Sonata in F minor, Op. 4
4	10:34	Adagio - Allegro moderato
5	7:38	Poco adagio
6	4:47	Allegro agitato
		Sonata in D minor (1825, unfinished)
7	7:28	Adagio - Allegro molto
		Sonata in F Major (1820)
8	6:13	Allegro
9	5:09	Andante
10	3:49	Presto
TOTAL	73:05:00	

TP1039329

RECORDED AT Endler Hall, Stellenbosch University - South Africa: 20-22 June 2015

PRODUCED BY: Nina Schumann

BALANCE ENGINEER: Gerhard Roux

MIXED & EDITED BY: Gerhard Roux

MASTERED BY: Tim Lengfeld

PIANO TUNER: Keith Goodwill

PHOTOS: Cassidy Duhon

PROGRAM NOTES: Barry Ross

GRAPHIC DESIGN: mrdesign

TWOPIANISTS RECORDS

COMPACT disc DIGITAL AUDIO

LC 27868

DDD

www.twopianists.com