

Cedille Records
5255 N. Lakewood Ave.
Chicago, IL 60640
(773) 989-2515
www.cedillerecords.org

Press contact: Nat Silverman
Nathan J. Silverman Co./PR
1830 Sherman Ave., Suite 401
Evanston, IL 60201-3773
Phone (847) 328-4292
Fax (847) 328-4317
Email: natsilv@aol.com

News

For release: April 2005

SURGING PACIFICA QUARTET NAVIGATES COMPLETE MENDELSSOHN CYCLE ON NEW CD SET

Celebrating its tenth season, the young Pacifica Quartet has become the first of a new generation of top-rank ensembles to weigh in with a recording of the complete string quartets of Felix Mendelssohn, a once relatively neglected body of work that's recently attracted the attention of elder ensembles.

Recorded between 2002 and 2004, the Pacifica's three-CD set (priced as two CDs) from Cedille Records offers all seven of Mendelssohn's completed quartets, plus the four separate quartet movements posthumously designated Opus 81 (Cedille Records 90000 082). The cycle traces Mendelssohn's evolution from a gifted acolyte of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven to a strikingly original composer of rich melodies, entrancing harmonies, and piquant dynamic contrasts.

The Pacifica, whose members are in their late 20s and early 30s, comprises first violinist Simin Ganatra, violinist Sibbi Bernhardsson, violist Masumi Per Rostad, and cellist Brandon Vamos.

The CDs arrive as the quartet winds up an ambitious anniversary season in which Mendelssohn (1809–1847) has been a constant presence, including a coast-to-coast tour with more than 60 concerts, plus performances in New York, London, and Tokyo.

Reviewing the Pacifica at Alice Tully Hall in December, the *New York Times* called them “a magnificently polished ensemble” whose performance of Mendelssohn's A Minor Quartet, Op. 13, “benefited from the remarkable precision the players brought to it and from the group's use of vibrato, which was laid on thick enough to give the music a warm glow but was never overdone.”

Of the Pacifica's Cleveland performance of the same work, the *Plain Dealer* said, “Every lyrical gesture proceeded with utmost inevitability, the slow movement's inspired lines touched with special poetry, and the dramatic episodes received impassioned shading.”

The Pacifica has always had some Mendelssohn quartets in its repertoire, violinist Bernhardsson explained in an interview with Cedille Records. Over the years, the ensemble gradually found Mendelssohn's quartets to be as addictive as snack food: it was hard to stop indulging. “Of course, consuming lots of Mendelssohn is much better for your health,” he says.

The members “very quickly” reached a consensus to commit to the Mendelssohn cycle, Bernhardsson recalls. “His music spoke to us, and we had an affinity for it.” He says their intent is “to highlight the lyrical aspect while not neglecting the passion and drama.”

Bernhardsson says the Pacifica's immersion in the complete quartets of contemporary composer Elliot Carter, which they've performed to great acclaim in marathon concerts, has influenced their interpretations of Mendelssohn's music.

“Carter is so interested in the textures and individuality of the voices,” he explains. “It became ingrained in us.”

Record producer Judith Sherman, whose credits include work with the Kronos and Cleveland quartets, says the Pacifica manages to get beneath the sunny surfaces of Mendelssohn's music to “capture him smiling through his tears.” In producing the Mendelssohn sessions for Cedille, Sherman says she was struck by the Pacifica's “overall group energy” and open-mindedness. “There's a total lack of cynicism. You don't sense any tension in this group,” she says.

As with Beethoven, Mendelssohn's quartets fall into three distinct groupings. The early string quartets in E-Flat Major (1823); E-Flat Major, Op. 12; and A Minor, Op. 13, “find a youthful composer appraising, confronting, and partially transcending the traditions of his predecessors,” writes WFMT-FM's Andrea Lamoreaux in the liner notes.

The three “middle” quartets, Op. 44, Nos. 1-3, find Mendelssohn “forging a true Classical-Romantic union of satisfying formal structures and expressive melody,” Lamoreaux writes.

The powerful and impassioned late String Quartet in F Minor, Op. 80, of 1847, was written five months before Mendelssohn's death at age 38 while he was grieving for his beloved older sister.

Capping the CD set are the four individual, unrelated quartet movements known as Op.81: the Andante in E Major; Scherzo in A Minor; Capriccio in E Minor; and Fugue in E-Flat Major.

Founded in 1994 on the West Coast and now based in Illinois, the Pacifica Quartet is Faculty Quartet in Residence at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Quartet in Residence at the University of Chicago. In 2002, the Pacifica received Chamber Music America's Cleveland Quartet Award and was appointed a member of The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center's CMS Two program for gifted young musicians. The quartet won the top prizes in the 1998 Naumburg Chamber Music Competition, 1997 Concert Artists Guild Competition, and 1996 Coleman Chamber Music Competition.

Cedille Records (pronounced say-DEE) is dedicated to showcasing the most noteworthy classical artists in and from Chicago. The nonprofit label is an arm of The Chicago Classical Recording Foundation.

For a free catalog and the locations of local retail outlets, consumers are invited to contact Cedille Records, 5255 N. Lakewood Ave., Chicago, IL 60640-2220; telephone: (773) 989-2515; e-mail: info@cedillerecords.org; on the Net: www.cedillerecords.org.

###

MENDELSSOHN: THE COMPLETE STRING QUARTETS
(Cedille Records CDR 90000 082, 3 CDs)

Quartet in E-Flat Major (1823); E-Flat Major, Op. 12; A Minor, Op. 13
D Major, Op. 44, No. 1; E Minor Op. 44, No. 2
E-Flat Major, Op. 44, No. 3; F Minor, Op. 80
Andante in E Major, Op. 81, No. 1
Scherzo in A Minor, Op. 81, No. 2
Capriccio in E Minor, Op. 81, No. 3
Fugue in E-Flat Major, Op. 81, No. 4

The Pacifica Quartet