

CHAMBER

Martha Argerich is joined by *Mischa Maisky* and friends in Lugano with compelling results; *Martin Fröst* sheds fresh light on Brahms; plus superb Zemlinsky from the *Escher Quartet*

MUSIC CHAMBER CHOICE

When Felix met Fanny

Roger Nichols applauds the musicianship in an all-Mendelssohn recital



'INFINITE VARIETY':
The Cavaleri Quartet play
Mendelssohn with passion



MENDELSSOHN, FELIX

String Quartets Nos 1-6; String Quartet in E flat minor, Op. post.; Four Pieces for String Quartet, Op. 81; Fugues for String Quartet

MENDELSSOHN, FANNY

String Quartet in E flat major Benyounes, Idomeneo, Sacconi, Navarra, Castalian, Piatti, Badke, Wu, Cavaleri and Artea String Quartets Champs Hill Records CHRCDO85 258:31 mins (4 discs)

BBC Music Direct £25.99

After sounding off with various grumpy remarks over the years about players who treat Mendelssohn's music as a playground for 'romantic'

effects, distorting rhythms and inventing tempos, it has been a true delight for me to find ten groups of young string players who take the composer's notes seriously. They prove that such fidelity does not inevitably lead to performances that are stilted or unimpassioned. It can be argued that the value of

Mendelssohn at his best: full of energy, passion and wit

any musical work is related to the number of persuasive interpretations it can carry. If so, then David and Mary Bowerman, the founders of Champs Hill Records, deserve our gratitude for setting up a format that allows these quartets, showing Mendelssohn at his best, to reveal their multifarious qualities: energy, passion, tenderness, wit and civilised authority.

Not everything is perfect. In the first movement of the D major Quartet a few of the semiquavers are obscured by the volume, and in the *Allegretto* of Fanny's Quartet there's an uneasy tempo fluctuation just before the reprise. I wonder also about the wisdom of including the 12 Fugues from 1821, and of playing them more or less *mf* throughout; if one is going to play them, then surely some dynamics have to be invented? But these are small points. Overall, I can only applaud the musicianship of these excellently recorded performances, which give us Mendelssohn in his infinite variety.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

ON THE WEBSITE

Hear extracts from this recording and the rest of this month's choices on the [BBC Music Magazine website](http://www.bbcmusicmagazine.com) www.classical-music.com



BARTÓK

Contrasts, BB 116; Sonata, BB 102a; 44 Duos for two violins, BB 104

James Ehnes (violin); Michael Collins (clarinet); Amy Schwartz Moretti (violin); Andrew Armstrong (piano) Chandos CHAN 10820 68:34 mins

BBC Music Direct £12.99

Although Bartók's 44 Duos for two violins may have initially been conceived as a sequence of teaching pieces, such is the quality of musical invention in these unpretentious miniatures that they prove as satisfying for listeners as for performers. Certainly James Ehnes and Amy Schwartz Moretti make the best possible case for experiencing the entire cycle in one whole sweep. They maximise the amount of colour that can be squeezed out of the simplest two-part writing and sustain vibrant musical dialogue throughout. More importantly, both artists manage to encapsulate an amazing variety of moods. Particularly impressive is the pathos and melancholy projected in the 'Cradle Song' and 'Wedding Song' in Book One and the sensuality and exoticism of the 'Arabian Song' from the Book Four.

Prior to the Duos, Ehnes and Andrew Armstrong deliver a charming account of the Piano Sonata in an effective transcription for violin and piano by André Gertler. But the major work in this fine disc is *Contrasts*, composed for Joseph Szigeti and Benny Goodman in the late 1930s. Here Ehnes and Armstrong are joined by Michael Collins, a superbly responsive partner making light work of the outrageously virtuosic cadenza in the first movement and daring violinist and pianist to maintain immaculate ensemble, even in the fast and furious stretto passages in the closing section of the Finale. Indeed, such is the brilliance and