

Serafin Quartet 'Reunites' Two Celebrated Composers

By Christine Facciolo

Born one year and 300 miles apart, Felix Mendelssohn and Robert Schumann met for the first time in Leipzig on August 31, 1835. The Serafin String Quartet reunited them at Wilmington's Trinity Episcopal Church with a program of two of their most Beethoven-inspired works: the A minor quartet, Op. 13 (Mendelssohn) and the A major quartet, Op. 41, No. 3 (Schumann). The date was also — coincidentally — the 210th anniversary of Mendelssohn's birth.

Mendelssohn, often referred to as the “classical romantic,” was a most celebrated composer during his lifetime. His stature slipped somewhat during the 20th Century, but this most underrated of the Romantics is enjoying a resurgence in popularity as many top-flight recordings and performances of his works indicate.

Mendelssohn was just 18 years old when he wrote his A minor String Quartet in 1827, which was also the year Beethoven died. The Beethovenian influence is evident, as are influences from Mozart and Haydn. The quartet also displays the young composer's facility with the cyclical technique and exhibits a degree of passion and drama not characteristic of Mendelssohn.

Kate Ransom's first violin was reliably lyrical and dramatic in the highly expressive opening movement, while the ensemble played as if it were one. The musicians lovingly conveyed the aching sorrow of the second movement, a complex and dramatic affair marked *adagio non lento* (“slow not slow”). Beautifully judged phrasing and dynamics characterized the fiendishly difficult third movement with its contrasting moods.

The finale returned to the emotional world of the first movement. Beethoven's influence again evident with its stormy recitative over tremolo accompaniment. The Serafin delivered a glowing and energetic performance of this most complex movement yet managed a conclusion that was gentle and calming.

Schumann's A major quartet was again delivered with tonal precision and blend. In the first movement, the playing was flexible and fluid, capturing the halting nature of the music with its unsettling syncopations. The musicians delivered the *fugato* and *tempo risoluto* sections of the second movement with a muscular certainty, while the finale was exuberant and full of toe-tapping dance.