FORMAL PROCEDURES IN THREE WORKS FOR STRING CHAMBER ENSEMBLE

BY FELIX MENDELSOHN-BARTHOLDY

by

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to the required standard

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ABSTRACT

The works of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1809-47) are problematic in that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to categorise them as being "Classic" or "Romantic", or to divide them into "style periods" which present clear indications of progression from one to the other. The architectural parameters of the works selected for this analysis are determined by the classical Sonata Form which was undergoing a degree of neglect during Mendelssohn's lifetime as a result of the work of both the preceding generation of composers and of his contemporaries. Mendelssohn's attempt to prolong the existence of the form will be the prime concern of this exercise.

The Octet, Opus 20, and the String Quartets, Opus 44, Number 3, and Opus 80, were composed over a twenty year period of Mendelssohn's life — from mid-teens to the year of his death. The works are widely enough spaced that any manifestations of change in method or approach would, in all probability, be readily discernable. Further, since these works all fall within the generic classification of music for string chamber ensemble, comparisons between them should be more appropriate than those between works of different genres.

The presentation will be organised as follows:

I. Introduction: The works selected; the form of the string quartet.

II. Analysis of selected works.

III. Devices used in the unfolding of the form.

IV. Evaluation.
Mendelssohn's respect for traditions in general and classical forms in particular, which led Berlioz to remark that:

"He is far too fond of the dead",
remained throughout his life. The material contained within the formal frame will reflect the spirit of the romantic era but the framework will remain classic.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The works selected

The selection of material for this study took into account chamber works for strings from as wide a time span as possible within the composer's life:

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<th>Title</th>
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This selection should illustrate the maximum of evolution in Mendelssohn's formal procedures, at least as indicated by his chamber music, while reducing to a minimum influences brought about by the demands of diverse instrumental families.

The Octet, Opus 20, is in many ways the culmination of Mendelssohn's youthful excursions into the field of musical composition. It can also be considered his first major mature work and its popularity has withstood the ravages of time, causing it to be ranked with the Midsummer Night's Dream, the Hebrides Overture (Fingal's Cave), the Scottish and Italian Symphonies, the Violin Concerto in E minor, and the oratorio, Elijah, as one of his better known works. It is also unique in that it was conceived as a work for eight independent stringed instruments. Other known contemporary octets always included members
of other instrumental families or were conceived as antiphonal double string quartets.  

The three string quartets of Opus 44 are not as well known as the Octet. After completing Number 3, Mendelssohn withdrew from the composition of string chamber music, with the exception of the String Quintet in B flat of 1845, for a period of almost ten years. It will be assumed that Opus 44, Number 3 can be regarded as the culmination of a kind of middle period of his artistic life. The work contains many devices of an experimental nature.

Fanny Hensel, Mendelssohn’s elder sister, died in May of 1847. The String Quartet, Opus 80, was Mendelssohn’s response to the grievous loss of his closest friend, supporter and relative. Never having recovered from his bereavement, Opus 80 is his last complete work for string chamber ensemble. Notwithstanding the return to traditional practices, this work bears eloquent testimony to the probable direction of future compositions had Mendelssohn not died shortly after its completion.

The Form of the String Quartet

The string quartet, or indeed by implication, the double string quartet, had in Mendelssohn’s time, a well-defined formal framework. The number of movements, their order and their forms were defined, at least loosely, by tradition. Also, key relationships between movements, while not specified, tended to be close, and outer movements were, of course, in the tonic.

1Octets by Haydn and Schubert are for winds and strings. Octet, Opus 103 by Beethoven is for wind instruments. Spohr’s compositions, Opp. 65, 77, 88 and 136 were entitled Double Quartets and were antiphonal in nature.
All of these conventions had been broken at one time or another, most strikingly by Beethoven. It was the example of Beethoven which both inspired and frustrated the composers of the nineteenth century. One would expect, therefore, to find in Mendelssohn, a great respector of tradition, and an ardent admirer of Beethoven, an uneasy compromise between the old and the new.

Of the formal components of the four movement string chamber work, the most important was, perhaps, the sonata form, traditionally used in the allegro opening movement. By the time of Mozart's death in 1791, the elements of sonata form could be generalised into the diagram shown in figure 1. (See page 4) Beethoven did not tamper with the structural pillars of the form, but greatly enriched the individual sections through his exquisite sense of the interplay of dramatic tension and release. His motivic and harmonic usages were the principal generators of this enrichment.

The extension of the harmonic frontiers, the inclusion of extra-musical bases for composition, and the resultant development of new forms in what music historians consider the Romantic Era, can be regarded as identifying marks of this period.

Of Mendelssohn, Brandt states:

"Indeed, to his contemporaries Mendelssohn seemed to have solved the problem of uniting traditional forms with romantic contents."

Keeping in mind his flair for long beautiful melodies and his dislike for the effusive excesses of his contemporaries, Mendelssohn's insistence on the application of sonata form as the basis of his compositional technique in the

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Figure 1. Generalised diagram of Sonata form.\footnote{William Brandt, \textit{The Way of Music} (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1963).}
vast majority of the movements of the works examined, certainly supports the view that he did attempt to achieve this marriage of the romantic with the traditional. The general opinion from the distance of the twentieth century is that the evaluation made by his contemporaries was not entirely deserved and that his successes have lost some of their former lustre. This in no way detracts from the cleverness with which he manipulated the materials of music that were available to him. In fact, it is perhaps this cleverness that has been responsible for maintaining a measure of the composer's former musical status.
Analysis of the works selected

The analysis of the works selected will be organised according to the formal characteristics of the individual movements of the works: i.e.

i. Traditional sonata form movements,

ii. Sonata form movements with significant variants,

iii. Movements in non-traditional sonata form,

iv. The Scherzo movements.

Traditional sonata form movements

Opus 20:I E flat major

The first theme (mm.1-21) of the exposition of this movement is followed, as expected, by a bridge passage (mm.21-36). However, instead of leading to the second theme, the passage returns to a varied repetition of the material of the first theme, still in the tonic (mm.37-52). At this point, a portion of the bridge material reappears, punctuated by references to the first theme (mm.52-68). The expected second theme finally arrives at m.68. The principal theme motive (See Ex. 1) is interjected between repetitions of the second theme. Subsequently, the bridge passage, varied and with further interjections of the first theme motive, is followed by a repetition of the second theme. A short transition leads to a closing theme. The traditional repeat sign with first and second endings appears at m.131 signalling the arrival of the development.

The development proceeds in traditional manner. The order of themes is similar to that of the exposition except that the closing theme is absent.
the last eight measures of the bridge passage, a development theme (See Ex. 2) occurs in Violin I (mm.156-164) and it returns, very much transformed, over a four measure portion of the second theme development (mm.178-182) (See Ex. 3). A lengthy retransition over a dominant pedal begins at m.195 and turns into a unison passage which leads to the recapitulation at m.216.

In the recapitulation, a shortened statement of the first theme is followed immediately by a presentation of the second theme, at first over a tonic 6 pedal instead of the expected root position tonic. The bridge passage then occurs with the customary interjections of the first theme motive. The rest of the recapitulation proceeds more or less as expected, and the familiar bridge passage initiates the coda (mm.276-318). The movement ends with a flourish based on the opening motive of the first theme (See Ex. 4).

This movement is obviously in very traditional sonata form. Thematic areas are clearly defined, the established order of themes is maintained, and traditional tonal relationships between sections are very much in evidence. The unexpected use of the first theme motive may be partly explained by the fact that it is a simple arpeggio figure. Its very frequent appearance lends unity to the movement and does not obscure the classical structure.

Opus 20:III  G minor

The title, Scherzo, of this movement is misleading since it suggests that the formal procedure is that of the traditional Scherzo and Trio. The movement is, however, in a very traditional sonata form.

The exposition (mm.1-71) contains a first theme (See Ex. 5) and a second theme (See Ex. 6) separated by a bridge passage and, characteristically, includes the device of interjecting the first theme motive into the second theme area.
(See Ex. 7). The tonal relationship of the two themes is traditional; the first theme is in G minor and the second theme is in the relative major, E flat.

The final portion of the exposition is immediately developed until m. 93, where a sequential canonic expression of a line loosely related to the second theme is presented (See Ex. 8). This is followed (mm. 112-134) by a more closely related second theme development in Violin I, and the first theme motive is then used as retransition material.

The recapitulation (mm. 143-241) begins on a tonic $\frac{6}{4}$ chord and arrives quite unexpectedly (See Ex. 9). The second theme is presented in flat VI instead of the expected I, and the movement ends in the tonic with an extension of the material which originally closed the exposition.

The two unusual features of the movement, the return of the second theme in the flat submediant and, once again, the use of the head of the first theme motive in the second theme area, do not obscure the classical structure of the form.

Opus 44, Number 3: I  E flat major

The first theme area (mm 1-33) is in two sections — "a" (mm. 1-19) being dominated by a simple motive (See Ex. 10), and "b" (mm. 20-33) consisting of a more flowing line (See Ex. 11). The motive which dominates "a" also dominates the bridge passage (mm. 33-47). Its further persistence as an accompanimental figure through much of the second theme area creates a problem in distinguishing the various parts of the exposition and this must be done in retrospect after analysis of the development and the recapitulation. The second theme enters at m. 47 and continues over the persistent accompaniment of the "a" motive which it finally overcomes. This theme may also be considered in two
sections — "c" (mm. 47-70), in which the "a" motive is slowly but definitely overcome, and "d" (mm. 76-86). At m. 86 the transition begins, also dominated by the "a" motive, and continues to m. 93. A closing theme follows (mm. 94-111), and the "a" motive appears again, this time to signal the end of the exposition. Again, the repeat sign in m. 112 gives a certain traditional appearance to the movement.

Continuation of the "a" motive initiates the development. This is quickly followed by the juxtaposition of the second theme over the "a" motive (mm. 117-134) and a modulatory passage follows incorporating elements of both first and second themes. At m. 164, this culminates in the entry of the closing theme (mm. 164-202) followed by a very short retransition.

The recapitulation begins at m. 207 with a somewhat shortened first theme. The second theme returns at m. 242, and the closing theme at m. 275. Both are treated traditionally. The coda (mm. 299-370) is an extended one in which all of the themes of the exposition are expressed either motivically or in toto. The "a" motive is in greatest evidence from m. 299 to m. 317. This is followed by a motive from the closing theme (mm. 317-319), and then by the closing theme in its original order of motivic alignment (mm. 320-339). A bridge (mm. 339-351), again dominated by the "a" motive, leads to the second theme (mm. 351-359). A flourish based on the closing notes of this theme brings the movement to a close.

**Opus 44, Number 3:III A flat major**

The exposition of this movement begins with a statement of the first theme, which is immediately repeated and extended (mm. 1-16). A long bridge (mm. 16-35) modulates to the dominant to link up with the second theme (mm. 35-51).
The development begins immediately by continuing the accompaniment figure which closes the exposition, over the first theme development in the Cello (mm.51-55). At mm.55, the first Violin states a development motive which wends its way through all instruments, to close the section at the relative minor (m. 80). The transition from the relative minor back to the tonic major is effected very simply by making use of the duality of the root and third of the major in their function as the third and fifth, respectively, of the relative minor. Mere unaccompanied repetition of these two pitches achieves the transition (mm.80-81).

An almost traditional recapitulation follows. The first theme is stated and repeated as before (mm.96-99), but the bridge is eliminated and the second theme begins immediately (mm.99-106).

The coda (mm.106-131) begins with a transition leading to the development motive (mm.113-123) in the tonic. A bridge recalling the transition at the end of the development signals the return of the beginning of the first theme, which is used to end the movement.

Although this movement is more continuous and less obviously sectionalised than those earlier studied, this may be due to the fact that it is of a more lyrical nature. The continuously flowing character of the musical materials suits very well the mood of this slow movement and does not obscure the formal clarity of the sonata form. This is, in fact, one of the most traditionally written of the movements to be studied.

**Opus 80: I F minor**

The first theme area is dominated by two contrasting ideas. The first
of these (see Ex. 12) is played tremolo throughout and creates a sense of driving restlessness. This motion is interrupted in m.9 by the presentation in canonic style of the second idea (see Ex. 13). The first idea is repeated at m.15, and the interrupting motive appears transformed at m.23, functioning this time as an integral part of the theme by acting as a consequent phrase and leading to a strong tonic closure at m.41. A bridge (mm.41-61) leads to the second theme in the relative major (mm61-95).

The end of the exposition comes suddenly at m.96 with the return of the first theme tremolo motive treated in sequence and commencing on the dominant in first inversion. The interrupting motive is then dissected and the resulting fragments are treated sequentially. At m.161 the tremolo material returns, still in the first inversion of the dominant, to suggest the idea of recapitulation.

The recapitulation begins at m.167, but is obscured by the new overlapping melody in the first Violin and by the elimination of the original first measure (see Ex. 14). The second idea, used as a consequent phrase, is quickly brought in; the bridge returns, and, at m.221, the second theme returns in the tonic major.

The arrival of the coda is signalled by the return of tremolo material. The second idea of the first theme is now treated, as originally, as an interrupting phrase. The interruption occurs at m.266 and is extended to m.281, during which time Mendelssohn studiously avoids any hint of a tonic cadence.

4The figure, although written in sixteenths gives the aural impression of tremolo.
in root position. A presto section (mm.290-323) based on a chordally treated fragment of the interrupting motive, combined with brilliant scale passages is used to bring the movement to a close.

Although this movement is obviously in sonata form, some aspects of the musical treatment obscure, to some extent, the formal definition. In particular, the use of two contrasting ideas in the first theme area weakens the traditional first theme - second theme contrast. The masked beginning of the recapitulation may also be considered in this light. Particularly ingenious in formal treatment, however, is the use of tremolo to signal the arrival of every large formal division.

Opus 80:IV  F minor

The exposition (mm.1-32) of this movement begins, as does Opus 80:I, with a tremolo figure which continues as an accompaniment throughout the first theme area (mm.1-30). The first theme (mm.1-9) (See Ex. 15) is followed by a bridge passage (mm.10-17) after which it is repeated in transformation so that it ends in D flat instead of the expected dominant, C. The bridge (mm.39-49) between the first and second themes makes use of the tremolo figure and transposed fragments of the first theme. Within this bridge, the tonal shift is made from D flat to E flat, the dominant of the relative major, A flat. The arrival of the second theme (See Ex. 16) at m.49, is obscured to some extent by the secondary dominant chain of harmony which accompanies it. The confirmation of A flat major as the key of the second theme occurs at m.65. A closure (mm.81-124) with tremolo accompaniment and based on the first theme follows. This closure begins in F flat major, a half step above the dominant E flat closure of the second theme, and modulates to arrive in A flat (mm.117).
The development is delayed by the extension of the A flat triad through the use of the tremolo figure (mm.117-124). Only the first theme and the tremolo figure appear in this section until m.213. A dominant pedal, tremolo C, established in m.181 is shifted upwards a half step at the introduction of a retransition theme (mm.213-225) in D flat (See Ex. 17). Further upward half step shifting places this theme in E flat during its repetition (mm.229-240). More tonal fluctuation using the tremolo figure closes this retransition and leads to the recapitulation at m.269.

In the recapitulation, the first theme is presented along with a new triplet scale passage. Its area is very much shortened so that the second theme arrives almost immediately at m.289 and the closing material (the first theme and the tremolo accompaniment) follows at m.325.

The coda begins at m.374 and consists of several brilliant sections based on either the first theme or scale passages or both.

Although this movement is in a very traditional sonata form the almost constant use of the first theme motive tends to negate any sense of drama or development. It does not, however, obscure the formal design of the movement.

Sonata form movements with significant variants

Opus 20:II  C minor

The first theme of the exposition (mm.1-56) of this movement, a sonata without development, presents evidence of Mendelssohn's willingness to experiment. A motive (See Ex. 19) is begun in C minor and is then repeated several times, gradually evolving into a theme which is completes in the flat supertonic, D flat, but ends on its dominant, A flat. The theme is begun again in A flat. At m.14,
D flat is surprisingly introduced in Cello I and II. A diminished seventh (vii of C minor) arpeggio figure in Violin I brings the theme to its close in C major (m.27) making use of the Tierce de Picardie. A long bridge follows (mm.27-41), based on the closing motive of the first theme first heard in mm24-27 (see Ex. 19). A bridge theme (see Ex. 20) is also incorporated. The second theme, in E flat, the relative major, begins at m.41 and is treated sequentially to m.48. The closing motive of the first theme returns transposed to close the exposition in E flat minor, reversing the Tierce de Picardie.

The bridge theme initiates a long retransition (mm.56-76) along with the closing motive of the first theme. In fact, this closing motive dominates the retransition until the arrival of the dominant, G, at m.65. Confirmation of the dominant ensues and again the closing motive, in G, returns at m.73 to end the retransition.

The recapitulation (mm.76-102) begins with the second theme in C major. Again the closing motive of the first theme appears (mm89-92) and again the reverse of the Tierce de Picardie occurs (mm.91-92) to shift the music into C minor. The opening motive of the first theme returns briefly, but long enough to accommodate the half step shift to D flat, before it is abandoned in m.96. The movement then proceeds to its conclusion in C major.

One of the most noticeable features of the movement is the use of the same motive to close both the first and second themes and to dominate the bridge and retransition passages. Another feature is the return of the second theme in the tonic major to initiate a recapitulation with reversed order of themes. The final arrival of the first theme acts almost as a coda. The absence of a development section and the interchange of major and minor are also striking.
The first theme section (mm. 1-17) is firmly in A flat. A bridge begins at m. 17, preparing for the arrival of the second theme in the dominant (E flat). This theme (See Ex. 22) slips in almost unnoticed at m. 27 and is followed immediately by a short closing theme (mm. 39-45). Instead of the expected development, however, a short transition leads back to the first theme in the tonic at m. 49. The theme itself is quoted exactly, but with changed accompaniment for twelve measures and is extended to lead to a short development of second and closing theme materials. The second theme returns in the tonic (m. 83) with the original accompaniment and leads to a restatement of the closing theme in the tonic. This theme is extended to lead to a short coda which suggests, but does not state, the first theme.

This movement resembles sonata without development, a rather commonly used slow movement form, except for the short development section inserted between the first and second themes in the recapitulation. This development section distinctly weakens the sense of recapitulation and even the suggestion of the first theme in the coda does not quite give the movement a sense of completion.

Movements in non-traditional sonata form

The formal relationships of this movement are related to those seen in Opus 80:III, which was treated as a significant variant. The anomalous development section within the recapitulation seen in this movement is, however, of much greater length and musical importance, and tends to distort
the sonata form almost entirely. In addition, the use of the scherzo theme of the previous movement within this lengthy inserted development further confuses the formal boundaries.

The exposition (mm.1-132) is in several sections. The first of these (mm.1-62) can be further subdivided. The first theme (mm.1-24) is treated as a fast moving fugal exposition (See Ex. 23). Following this a short subsection superimposing a theme, reminiscent of "And He shall reign for ever and ever", from Handel's Messiah, over a running eighth pattern derived from the first theme (See Ex. 24). Next follows a transition (See Ex. 25) (mm.33-51), which leads back to the first theme. A bridge based on the first theme and the Messiah quotation then occurs (mm.63-89) preparing the arrival of the second theme in the dominant. At this point, the form becomes difficult to follow since the musical material is that of the original first theme transition passage. This theme is repeated (mm.105-115), and the exposition ends at m.133. The development is very short (mm.133-189).

After a very obvious retransition (mm.179-189), the first theme returns triumphantly. This time, however, Mendelssohn has invented a counter subject (See Ex. 26) for the first theme which appears with the original subject. The effect of this recapitulation is, however, soon destroyed as Mendelssohn wanders off to a second and much more elaborate development. To further confuse and delight the listener, the scherzo theme from the previous movement begins to make an appearance (m.273). At m.291, the second theme, not in the tonic, joins the scherzo theme and they proceed together to m.321 where the Messiah theme reenters along with the running eighth note pattern. This leads to the second theme, this time in the tonic but in second inversion. A dominant
feeling is thus retained, carrying the music forward to the coda. At m.355 the first theme arrives to initiate a brilliant coda.

As is obvious from this description, the form is difficult to perceive, but most of the anomalies have been seen before in less obscure contexts. The use of a fugal exposition for the first theme area is unusual, but one is immediately reminded of the late Mozart. The use of earlier material for the second theme was a favourite device of Haydn's and does not obscure the formal clarity of his works. Here, however, the fact that it is not a clear theme, that it is not related to the first theme, and that the material is modulatory, combined with the fact that it does not appear when or how it is expected to in the recapitulation, makes it difficult to perceive. The inserted development in the recapitulation will be used again by Mendelssohn (Opus 80:III), but here it dwarfs the significance of the traditional one. The use of a theme from a preceding movement is not unusual, especially in the nineteenth century, but in this case it is placed within an anomaly. The total effect of all these anomalies is to disrupt seriously the formal balance of the movement.

Opus 44, Number 3:IV E flat major

The formal arrangement of this movement is perhaps the most unusual of the sonata form movements to be studied. The actual shape of the movement can possibly be explained in terms of Mendelssohn's fondness for inserting a second development between the first and second themes of the recapitulation, and his probable dissatisfaction with the resulting lack of finality. There seems to be a sort of second recapitulation functioning as a coda. The listener's confusion is further increased by the disintegration of the second
theme area into several different melodic ideas and the use of materials from
the first theme to provide one of the melodic ideas of the second theme area
(See Ex. 27). The following chart will perhaps make all of this clear.

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<th>2nd Theme</th>
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<td>44 55 62 76</td>
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<td>motive</td>
<td>a b a b</td>
<td>b b d e</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>key</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>modulatory $\overline{V}$</td>
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<tr>
<td>motive</td>
<td>a b b (as in second theme) d e ab</td>
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<tr>
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The Scherzo Movements

**Opus 80:II  F minor**

This movement is an almost traditional scherzo and trio with a coda. Only the second repeat in the trio is missing, replaced by a transition. In addition, the first trio repeat is written out to allow for melodic additions. The formal diagram is shown in Figure 2. (See page 20)

One extremely interesting feature of this movement lies in the melodic similarity between a portion of the second section of the scherzo (B) and the main melody of the trio (C) (See Ex. 18). This relationship gives an almost developmental function to the trio, and this fact, combined with the use of a coda, gives some suggestion of traditional sonata form. This view might be further strengthened when one considers the fact that the scherzo of Opus 20 is in clear sonata form and that the scherzo of Opus 44 Number 3, is freely written and not in a traditional scherzo pattern.

**Opus 44, Number 3:II  C minor**

In this movement formal considerations seem to be of almost secondary importance. On the most basic level, the constant use of the steady eighth note patterns, the return of themes, and the return to the tonic provide unity. Contrast is provided by a rather free flow of ideas, a free mixture of those ideas, modulations away from the tonic, and, very importantly, an extreme difference in texture between the four-voice sections and the two canonic-entry sections.

The first large section (mm.1-76) consists of several different melodic ideas and the section moves away from and returns to the tonic. Especially because of the repeat (mm.1-16), this seems to function like a freely written
Figure 2. Formal Diagram of Opus 80:II
scherzo section. In m.76, the first of the canonic sections begins, and one perceives this as the beginning of a trio section. However, as all four voices enter, one by one, the writing becomes progressively freer and the resemblance to scherzo and trio is lost. Both new and old motives fly by with some occasional hints at return to the tonic. In m.213, the music again comes to a halt on the tonic and the canonic section begins again. At m.249, the music, for the last time, returns to the original material and the original key, and although newly written, the sense of return is strong enough to bring this movement to a close.

The effect of the appearance of the two canonic sections gives this movement an A B A B A structure which suggests either a rondo or, more accurately, a scherzo with a doubly repeated trio. The fact that the return of the middle A section is difficult to define and that the section uses materials from both sections makes this thesis difficult to accept.

More stringent formal considerations seem to be inappropriate to the movement, and perhaps the textural hints of A B A B A, combined with the more general considerations mentioned above constitute an acceptable level of formal coherence.
Example 1. Opus 20:1

Example 2. Opus 20:1

Example 3. Opus 20:1
Example 4. Opus 20:I

Example 5. Opus 20:III

Example 6. Opus 20:III
Example 7. Opus 20:III

m. 93.
Violin I

Example 8. Opus 20:III

Reduction of score.

Example 9. Opus 20:III
Example 10. Opus 44, Number 3:1

Example 11. Opus 44, Number 3:1

Example 12. Opus 80:1
Example 13. Opus 80:I

Example 14. Opus 80:I

Example 15. Opus 80:IV
Example 16. Opus 80:IV

Example 17. Opus 80:IV

Example 18. Opus 80:II
Example 19. Opus 20:II

Example 20. Opus 20:II

Example 21. Opus 20:II
Example 22. Opus 80:III

Example 23. Opus 20:IV

Example 24. Opus 20:IV
Example 25. Opus 20:IV

Example 26. Opus 20:IV

Example 27. Opus 44, Number 3:IV
CHAPTER III

Formal types and compositional devices used in the works selected

In this chapter the movements will be classified according to formal characteristics. A discussion of the devices, traditional and non-traditional, used by the composer in the unfolding of the works is also included.

Formal types

Mendelssohn seems to be involved in the process of extending the natural development of the sonata form inherited from Beethoven. Of the twelve movements under consideration, six fall within the classification of traditional sonata form, and of the remainder, four can be classified as variants, to a greater or lesser degree thereof. Of the two remaining movements, one is a traditional scherzo and trio (Opus 80:11), and the other (Opus 44, Number 3:11) defies formal classification.

The above classification scheme may seem an oversimplification, but the overall structure of the four movement work must be considered along with it. Traditional expectation suggests the following formal pattern:

I. Allegro - sonata form.

II. Andante or Adagio - sonata form with or without development, theme and variations, ternary or binary forms.

III. Minuet (moderato) or Scherzo (allegro) and Trio.

IV. Allegro - sonata, sonata rondo, rondo, theme and variations, fugue.

The order of movements II and III is sometimes interchanged.
A maximum of nine sonata form movements is therefore expected in the three works under examination - ten are encountered. A minimum of three minuet or scherzo and trio movements is expected. In terms of form, only one exists. The optional fourth movement fugue is hinted at in Opus 20:IV but is soon abandoned in favour of an experimental sonata form movement.

The movements named scherzo by Mendelssohn are not in the expected form, while Opus 80:II, not so labelled by the composer, is a traditional scherzo and trio. Opus 20:II, in the traditional position of the scherzo, is in sonata form, and Opus 44, Number 3:II is a movement in which formal considerations seem almost irrelevant.

The three works under examination all follow the traditional four movement plan in terms of movement speeds and key relationships between movements. The outer movements, I and IV, are all fast and the inner ones consist of a scherzo-like movement and a slow movement. The traditional arrangement is, of course, fast - slow - scherzo - fast, which Mendelssohn uses only in Opus 20. The less common order, fast - scherzo - slow - fast, is used in both Opus 44, Number 3 and Opus 80. This more or less traditional approach to the arrangement of the movements in various tempi is not, however, reflected in a traditional use of movement forms, as has been demonstrated above.

All first movements are as expected, in sonata form. Form, however, is not the arbiter of classification of the scherzo type movements, but rather their non-formal characteristics justify their classification. High speed, airy lightness and uninterrupted motion set these movements apart from the others. The slow movements are all in sonata form, as are
the fourth movements. The use of an extra inserted development in the fourth movements of Opus 20 and Opus 44, Number 3 seems to support formal concepts related to sonata rondo.

The fact that none of the other possible formal options previously mentioned is employed in the works selected for this examination is surprising. That Mendelssohn was aware of the options must be taken for granted since they are all employed in other works composed by him in this and other genres. It seems, therefore, that in these works there is an attempt by the composer to extend the growth of sonata form at a time when there seemed to be a movement towards other forms. The strophic forms of Schubert, the cyclical forms and the idee fixe, both propagated by Berlioz, make no appearance here. This attempt by Mendelssohn to extend the life of sonata form may have justified, to some extent, the remark made by Berlioz, that

"he (Mendelssohn) is far too fond of the dead"\(^5\)

but sonata form did survive in the tone poems of Liszt, the works of Brahms, the works of other composers of the late romantic period, and even occurs in works by Rachmanninoff et al in the twentieth century. Mendelssohn's attempts seem to founder on the shoal of his apparent inability to create themes with enough inherent motivic tension to lay the foundation for the discernable thematic contrast so essential to sonata form. The sense of development and the return of themes, however vague they may be in individual cases, and however misplaced in the traditional sense, do generate the feeling of sonata form in the movements so described.

\(^5\)Quoted in Marek, G.R. : Gentle Genius.
In terms of key relationships, it is important to mention at this stage, that the established tonal relationships between movements in works of this type are in no way altered or tampered with by Mendelssohn.

**Formal devices employed within sonata form movements**

There are a number of devices which are traditionally employed in the construction of sonata form and Mendelssohn shows his awareness of them in many instances. He also abandons some of them in favour of his own unique stylistic leanings. The success of failure of these will be discussed at a later stage, but an explanatory catalogue of both the traditional and innovative devices employed by the composer will be useful here.

The traditional devices in sonata form movements

**The repeated exposition**

In the traditional sonata form movements, Opus 20:I and III and Opus 44, Number 3:I, the exposition is repeated as expected and the occurrence of the repeat sign at the end of the exposition lends a visually traditional appearance to these movements. The remaining movements in traditional sonata form, Opus 44, Number 3:III and Opus 80:I and IV, show the composer abandoning this practice. This necessitated or assumes greater concentration and competence on the part of the listener or analyst to identify themes which, although repeated within the section, are not heard in *toto* and in sequence for the second time to establish clearly their status.

**Key relationships between first and second themes of the exposition**

In the major-key movements, Opus 20:I, Opus 44, Number 3:III and IV,
and Opus 80:III, second themes are in the expected dominant. In the minor-key movements, Opus 20:II and III, and Opus 80:I and IV, second themes are in the expected relative major keys. The second themes of Opus 20:IV and Opus 44, Number 3:I are deviant. In Opus 20:IV, because of the sequential presentation of the second theme and its growth out of the material used as the preceding bridge section, its base key is difficult to determine. Although it appears within the dominant framework, its first appearance as a second theme occurs over secondary dominant harmony. In Opus 44, Number 3:I, the second theme appears in the mediant.

**Key relationships between major sections**

The tonal architecture of the ten sonata form movements closely follows the traditional pattern:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exposition</th>
<th>Development</th>
<th>Recapitulation</th>
<th>Coda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I - V</td>
<td>V (modulating)</td>
<td>I - I</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

or in the case of minor key movements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exposition</th>
<th>Development</th>
<th>Recapitulation</th>
<th>Coda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i - V or relative major</td>
<td>major (modulating)</td>
<td>i - i</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A slight variation is introduced in Opus 20:III. The tonal scheme of this movement is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exposition</th>
<th>Development</th>
<th>Recapitulation</th>
<th>Coda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i - relative major</td>
<td>relative major modulating</td>
<td>i - VI</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, if one considers the VI chord as a tonic substitute and recognises its tonic relationship to the relative major chord functioning as a dominant, then the occurrence here no longer seems strange or untraditional. In the slow movement sonata without development, Opus 20:II, the major close of the coda is achieved through the use of the Tierce de Picardie.
Thematic order in the recapitulation

The only exception to the traditional thematic order in recapitulation sections occurs in Opus 20:II, in which the order of themes is reversed and the first theme returns briefly and incompletely in an area which tends to be more of a coda than a recapitulation. In the movements with development sections inserted within the recapitulation, the order of themes remains unchanged from that established in the exposition, the inserted development sections occurring between first and second theme returns.

The coda and the slow introduction

It is notable that all sonata form movements in these works contain a coda. Equally notable is the absence of the slow introduction so evident in the compositions of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. Indeed, Mendelssohn dispenses with the introduction altogether.

The non-traditional devices in sonata form movements

As previously stated, Mendelssohn employs devices unique to his style in his contribution to the life of sonata form. Instead of cataloguing these devices, as was done in the case of the traditional ones, it is intended that these devices be seen through the various stages of their development.

The most prominent and far reaching of these unique devices is Mendelssohn's practice of interjecting a motive from the first theme area into the area reserved for the second theme of the exposition. In Opus 20:I, the effect is surprising, yet it lends to the unification of the movement.
practice is repeated in Opus 20:III. The closing motive of the first theme area of the exposition of Opus 20:II is used again, transposed, to close the second theme area. This material is also extensively used to accompany bridge and transition sections. In Opus 44, Number 3:I the process grows into the practice of using the opening motive of the first theme as a persistent undercurrent through a major portion of the second theme area. In Opus 44, Number 3:IV, the second theme seems to be developed from the closing motive of the first theme. Opus 80:I and IV seem to bring this process to a refined conclusion in that each section of these movements is introduced by the same device—a tremolo figure first heard at the beginning of the movement. What began as thematic or motivic leakage in order to lend unity to Opus 20:I became a structural signpost in Opus 80:I and IV. This idea of thematic leakage also occurs between the third and fourth movements of Opus 20. The scherzo theme of Opus 20:III appears in the inserted development section of Opus 20:IV. Motivic and thematic ideas from other works by Mendelssohn and other composers such as Handel make brief but somewhat recognisable appearances. Coming as it did after Beethoven's Ninth Symphony of 1823, the practice of thematic leakage was not a Mendelssohnian innovation but conscious or unconscious homage to Beethoven from one of his most respectful supporters. Its subsequent development into a structural signpost, however, is purely Mendelssohnian.

The recapitulation section of a traditional sonata form movement commences with the return of the first theme very definitely in the tonic expressed in root position. The return of the second theme is also similarly placed in the tonic in root position. However, in Opus 20:I, Mendelssohn placed the second theme over a second inversion tonic chord although the first theme received traditional treatment. The return of the first theme of Opus
20:III also occurs over the second inversion tonic while the second theme is placed over a root position submediant chord. In the fourth movement of Opus 20, the return of the second theme after the inserted development is also over the second inversion tonic chord. In Opus 44, Number 3, seemingly the most experimental of the works examined, this practice is not observed, nor does it appear in Opus 80.

The inserted development mentioned in the above paragraph is a non-traditional feature of the fourth movements of both Opus 20 and Opus 44, Number 3. It is also hinted at in Opus 80:III. After completing the return of the first theme in the recapitulation of Opus 20:IV, the composer wanders off into a developmental passage containing previously used material. Eventually, the first theme of the previous movement enters and only then follows the return of the second theme and the rest of the recapitulation of the fourth movement. In Opus 44, Number 3:IV, while the principle is evident, only material drawn from the movement itself is used in the inserted development. In Opus 80:III, there is no traditional development section. However, after the return of the first theme, a short passage containing elements of both themes is used to precede the arrival of the second theme return.

The reversal of the order of themes occurs in the recapitulation of Opus 20:II, but fails to appear elsewhere in the works under analysis. However, another interesting feature of recapitulation sections is that some of them contain countermelodies that occur with the presentation of the first theme return. The first example of this is presented in Opus 20:IV, and the next in Opus 44, Number 3:IV. Opus 80 exhibits this phenomenon in both the first and fourth movements. Particularly interesting is the fact that in Opus 80:I, the countermelody begins prior to the start of the
recapitulation and would effectively mask it were it not for the tremolo divisional marker of the sections of this movement. The countermelodies are usually slow-moving chromatic lines or arpeggio figures. However, ascending scales in triplet rhythm are used in Opus 80:IV.

Stepwise tonal fluctuation within a thematic area is evident in Opus 20:II and in Opus 80:IV. The opening motive of the first theme of Opus 20:II is immediately restated in the flat supertonic major. The thematic process then continues in the traditional manner to the dominant of the new key with subsequent stepwise return to the original key after the raised dominant statement. In Opus 80:IV, the closing tremolo passage of the exposition contains a similar half-step shift and return. Possibly linked with this phenomenon is the use of the Tierce de Picardie and its cancellation in Opus 20:II. This device is used to close the first theme and is cancelled to close the second theme of the exposition. The retransition ends in C major instead of the expected minor, allowing for the use of C major at the beginning of the recapitulation. The movement also ends with the use of the raised third.

Long, free-flowing song-like themes are characteristic of Mendelssohn's style and evidence of this is amply exhibited in the works examined. This characteristic poses for the composer the problem of creating the thematic contrast required by sonata form. The solutions he proposes will be examined later. It is sufficient to mention at this time that only once did he attempt to construct a theme based on a short motive - the first theme of Opus 44, Number 3:I. Before the motive is developed into a theme, however, Mendelssohn reverts to a free-flowing idea to complete the thematic area.
Form in the scherzo-like movements

The scherzi, perhaps the most successful of the movements studied, pose a special problem in terms of formal classification. All of these movements, Opus 20:III, Opus 44, Number 3:II and Opus 80:II, are in minor keys and, as previously stated, are characterised by their high speed, lightness, and the sense of uninterrupted motion.

The third movement of Opus 20 is entitled "Scherzo", as would be expected in any four movement work written during that period. The movement, however, is in sonata form. Developing on this departure from tradition, Mendelssohn places the scherzo titled movement of Opus 44, Number 3 immediately after the first movement. Furthermore, the form of this movement is not recognisable as that of a scherzo in any traditional sense but it is probably the most freely constructed movement in the three works studied. Opus 80:II is untitled, but analysis reveals that it is in the form of a traditional scherzo and trio although with an added coda. In addition to the coda, Mendelssohn cleverly manages to introduce further suggestions of sonata form into this movement.

The traditional scherzo - Opus 80:II

Scherzo characteristics

The formal repetitions of this movement are signalled traditionally, except for the written out trio repeat and the absence of the da capo sign. The triplet metric division of the measure is also traditional but more reminiscent of the minuet, the predecessor of the scherzo.

Non-scherzo characteristics

Some cross pollination with sonata form seems to occur as a result of the ambiguity generated by the trio. The intervallic and rhythmic similarity
of the trio theme to the B theme of the scherzo is enough to suggest the possibility of a sonata form development section. The new material of this section also seems rhythmically related to the scherzo. The addition of the coda is also not typical.

The non-traditional scherzi

Opus 20:III

The sonata form exhibited by this movement places it in a previously treated category. It serves, however, as a point of departure from the established third movement form.

Opus 44, Number 3:II

Initially, it seems that the traditional scherzo form was intended as the compositional basis of this movement as evidenced by the sixteen measure repeated section which opens it. However, the immediate abandonment of the traditional form is courageously undertaken. Suggestions of rondo and sonata forms are indicated in the movement and in common with the other scherzo movements in these works, it contains a coda.

As can be recognised from the foregoing, the three movements cannot be satisfactorily fitted into any one formal classification, but a progression can be traced from a scherzo sounding sonata form, Opus 20:II, through a free-flowing movement, Opus 44, Number 3:II, in which formal considerations are secondary, reverting to a traditional scherzo and trio, Opus 80:II, incorporating manifestations of sonata form. Taking into consideration the sonata form suggestions of Opus 44, Number 3:II, it is possible to assume that sonata form played a significant role in Mendelssohn's approach to
scherzo composition.
CHAPTER IV

Evaluation

Since ten of the twelve movements examined fall within the classification of some type of sonata form, and since one of the two remaining movements exhibits some sonata form characteristics, any evaluation of these œuvres must concentrate primarily on Mendelssohn’s success or lack of it in the use of this form.

The Sonata form movements

Contrast between first and second themes or thematic areas is probably the most important characteristic of sonata form composition since the structure of this form follows closely the manner and principles of rhetoric. Rhetoric demands the presence of propositio, confutatio, and confirmatio, which means that it is essential that there be a first theme proposition against which a second theme presents confutation. These opposing themes must be presented in the exposition section of sonata form movements and the struggle for individual thematic predominance is the province of the development section. In the recapitulation, the differences between the themes are resolved and the confirmation of the status of each theme is presented. The dramatic peroratio of rhetoric takes place in the coda. The introduction to this musical discussion, like the initio in rhetoric, prepares the listener for the coming thematic struggle. In music, the speed of this section is
generally slower than that of the main body of the work.

The tonal relationships between the various sections of the form were well established before Mendelssohn's entry into the art. The second theme opposition is reinforced by its placement usually in the key of the dominant or the relative major, but definitely in a key not centred on the tonic. Even Haydn's last monothematic work, the first movement sonata form of Symphony Number 104, the second section of the exposition is firmly placed in the dominant although the thematic material is exactly the same as that of the first section. Although this work negates the principle of thematic contrast stated above, harmonic contrast is clearly evident.

It is intended first to assess each section of sonata form in relation to the movements in these works and then to proceed to the more general characteristics which appear. Subsequently, an assessment of the scherzo-type movements will be undertaken, and this will be followed by an assessment of each work as a complete entity.

The introduction

In the movements examined and found to be in sonata form, the intent of all of the principles of rhetoric outlined previously is present except for the introduction, which is neither intended nor present. From the distance of the closing quarter of the twentieth century, the omission is unimportant, but to the listener or analyst of Mendelssohn's time it must have been somewhat startling if not innovative. Such tactics had been used previously by Beethoven and the classical composers, but the intent of the
introduction was nearly always present. Its speed notwithstanding, the
staccato repeated tonic in the opening measures of the first movement of the
Eroica Symphony performs the function of an introduction quite adequately
since the first theme is, in fact, an arpeggiation of that chord. An attempt
seems to be made by Mendelssohn to imitate the procedure of the introduction
of the first movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony by using the open fifth
tremolo seen in the first measure of both the first and fourth movement
sonatas of Opus 80. The brevity of the device and the subsequent musical
materials of the movements tend to deny the validity of regarding these sounds
as introductions to the movements. Their return at the beginning of every
formal division of those movements also weakens the value of their initial
presentation.

The exposition

This is the section in which the themes which will be predominant in
sonata form movements are presented in an identifiable manner. There are always
two specific themes or thematic areas, and in most instances, a closing theme
appears to end the section. Thematic contrast assisted by, or as in the case
of the monothematic sonata previously mentioned, replaced by harmonic contrast
is essential.

Thematic contrast in the works selected

None of Mendelssohn's thematic ideas seems to contain enough of the
inherent motivic tension so obviously a part of the typical Beethoven theme.
This inadequacy, in terms of sonata form, is critical, since it is the pitting
of the tension in one theme against the tension in another that creates the conditions under which development sections flourish. There is contrast in Mendelssohn's works but it is not of such violent or dramatic character as those found in the works of Beethoven. The established methods of achieving contrast will now be assessed in terms of Mendelssohn's use of them.

**Motive versu line**

*Opus 44,* Number 3:I commences with the statement of a motive which could have led to the thematic requirements mentioned above. Unhappily, Mendelssohn does not create an entire first theme from this motive, but instead, divides the first theme into two sections, the second of which is constructed on a contrasting idea. It would have been far more appropriate to continue the expression of the initial motive to its logical conclusion as a theme. The use of the same motive as transition material from the second idea to the opening of the second theme and further use of the motive as an accompaniment to the second theme weakens any sense of contrast between themes. By placing two contrasting ideas within the first theme Mendelssohn presents himself with an almost unsolvable dilemma in terms of sonata form. The change of role of the motive, from thematic to accompanimental serves only to ensure monotony. *Opus 80:*I suffers from the same weakness although to a lesser degree since the motive is only one of the elements contrasted. Once again the first theme is in two sections. The opening scalar expression is interrupted by a motive in contrasting intervallic and rhythmic shape. This motive returns as the basis of the second section of the theme. The very linear second theme can be considered adequate contrast to the two opposing ideas of the first theme.
Scale versus arpeggio

In the first movement of the Octet, Opus 20, the scalar second theme contrasts visibly with the arpeggiation of the first theme. That contrast is heightened by the presence of the first theme's opening motive between statements of the second theme. The first theme of Opus 44, Number 3:III is primarily scalar in content while the second theme is based on the dominant arpeggio. In this, the most traditional of the works in sonata form, Mendelssohn achieves the greatest success at presenting the thematic elements of sonata form.

Registral contrast

Growing out of the scale versus arpeggio contrast is contrast in terms of register. The terraced arpeggio of the first theme of Opus 20:I spans over three octaves while the second theme occupies a more limited area – a diminished fifth, placed almost in the middle of the extreme registral limits of the first theme. Sectional contrast within the first theme of Opus 80:I also lies within this registral realm. Even discounting the range of the interrupting motive of the first theme area, the range of the first section is almost two octaves as opposed to the single octave compass of the second section of the second theme. In the fourth movement of Opus 80, the first theme is slightly lower in register than the second.

Directional contrast

Themes set in contrary motion to each other occur in Opus 20:II. The downward thrust of the first theme offsets the upward thrust of the second. The tonal climb of the first theme and the contrapuntal sliding accompaniment of the second serve to confirm the contrast theoretically, although they may confuse the listener as to the true direction of the themes. A veiled hint
of directional contrast occurs in Opus 20:III but it is not clearly enough
defined to warrant further comment.

**Tremolo versus ordinario**

The use of *tremolo* contrasted with *ordinario* bowing helps to create the
conditions from which sonata form springs in Opus 80:1 and IV. In the first
movement the first portion of the first theme is stated *tremolo*. The fact
that the second portion of the theme is to be played *ordinario* weakens the
contrast with the second theme. However, as mentioned above, other elements
are contrasted in this movement. The fourth movement is more successful in
terms of this type of contrast in that there is a firmer declaration of the
style of the first theme area. The *tremolo* is maintained in the accompaniment
whereas in the second theme area all instruments are to be played *ordinario*.

**Rhythmic contrast**

Rhythm seems to be the basis of contrast most widely used by Mendelssohn
in the sonata form movements of the works studied. Opus 20:1 opens with an
eighth-note pattern that is contrasted with the quarter-note pattern of the
second theme. Also, the eight-measure presentation of the first theme runs
counter to the four measure presentation of the second. The smoothly flowing
second theme of Opus 20:II effectively opposes the more jagged rhythmic
cutting of the first. The same applies in reverse to Opus 20:III. The
eighth-note fugal exposition character of the first theme of the fourth
movement is pitted against the half-note durations of the notes of the second
theme, but because of the fact that similar half-note patterns were heard
previously in the bridge section, in the Handel theme, and in the counter­
point to the fugal exposition, the effectiveness of the contrast is somewhat
dulled.
The opening sixteenth-note motive of the first theme of Opus 44, Number 3:I and its subsequent eighth-note motive are in contrast to the quarter-note presentation of the second theme. Unfortunately, the persistence of the sixteenth-note motive through the early portion of the second theme tends to disguise this opposition and the movement from sixteenth to eighth to quarter gives more a sense of progression than contrast to this exposition.

In Opus 80:I, the restless eighth-note pattern of the first theme gives way to the more restful quarter-note statement of the second while in the third movement of this work the eighth-note motion of the first theme is in direct opposition to the quarter- and sixteenth-note rhythm of the second theme. The uneven gallop of the first theme of the fourth movement presents a strong contrast to the smooth flow of the second.

The effectiveness of these methods of achieving contrast cannot be measured in terms of their individual merit but must be taken in the context of all the methods present in the exposition section of the movement in which they appear. The effectiveness of registral contrast in Opus 20:I is heightened by the fact that rhythmic contrast and the use of scale versus arpeggio are also present. In Opus 20:II, directional contrast in the melodic line is negated to some extent by the opposition of the direction of the harmonic and contrapuntal lines within each thematic statement. Internal thematic contrast presents a problem for the composer, in that, regardless of his technical skill, further contrast with another theme will become weak. Mendelssohn is guilty of this practice in Opus 44, Number 3:I and in Opus 80:I. The most successful instances of contrast are in Opus 20:I in which
scale is pitted against arpeggio, expansive register against a diminished fifth, and an eight measure eighth-note rhythm against a four measure quarter-note rhythm. Also successful is the scale versus arpeggio contrast of Opus 44, Number 3:III.

The Development

After Beethoven's practice of dissecting themes into their component motives and pitting those motives against each other, thereby creating long, intense development sections, Mendelssohn's corresponding sections seem short and dull. In most instances he merely repeats themes at a different tonal level. In Opus 20:III, lines loosely related to the established themes constitute the development. The development section inserted within the recapitulation section of Opus 20:IV contains more of the expected confrontation than the traditionally placed development sections of other movements. In maintaining the integrity of the themes in his development sections Mendelssohn betrays his reverence for the early classical traditions and his fondness for long smooth-flowing lines.

The Recapitulation

Mendelssohn presents more innovations in the recapitulation section of his sonata form movements in the works under scrutiny than in any other section. This is perhaps because of the difficulty he seemed to encounter in attempting to bring long smooth lines to successful dramatic endings.
Success in these innovations seems to be directly related to whether or not they threatened the structural pillars of sonata form.

**The inserted development**

This practice of Mendelssohn's is difficult to rationalise in terms of the requirements of sonata form. Hitherto, the recapitulation restated the themes of the exposition either verbatim or with slight embellishment, signifying the importance of their content. Extraneous material was removed and the bridge sections were adapted to allow for the return of the second theme in the tonic. Such practice was intended to show the resolution of the differences between the themes. The distance separating first and second theme return in the fourth movements of Opus 20 and Opus 44, Number 3, prevents the listener from recognising this resolution of conflict. In fact, one is left with the feeling that a true sense of return is absent. The other example of inserted development, Opus 80:III, is not as blatant since the insertion is so short in length that its presence is almost unnoticed and therefore does not upset the traditional balance of the section.

**The recapitulation countermelody**

This device is very cleverly employed by Mendelssohn and acts as a means of continuing the long beautiful lines so often present in his works. It is fortunate that the countermelodies used in the works studied are not so powerful or contrasting that they obscure the thematic returns. Instead, they add charm.

**The tonic in inversion in the recapitulation**

Possibly in an effort to maintain the smooth-flowing style that is recognizably his, Mendelssohn tended to avoid the root position tonic that
is traditionally found at the beginning of the first and second theme return. However, in Opus 20, this avoidance has the effect of lessening the harmonic impact of the start of the recapitulation, thus weakening one of the structural pillars of sonata form. It is fortunate that Mendelssohn abandoned this practice in the later movements.

The Coda

Since these sections are generally based on combining one or more of the ideas of the first theme of the exposition with brilliant scale or arpeggio passages, they are generally successful. However, they suffer from a lack of the dramatic quality associated with the close of a typical Beethoven movement. This defect is less noticeable in the slow movements.

Other general considerations of sonata form

Thematic leakage

The unifying tendency of this device and its progression into a structural signpost as shown earlier makes it, probably, the most successful of the innovations attempted by Mendelssohn. By Opus 80, its presence seems to assist in making the form accessible to the listener with the most rudimentary knowledge of the structure of sonata form. To the more sophisticated, however, it is unsatisfying in this instance since it removes the need for intellectual discovery so necessary at higher levels of appreciation.
Harmonic language

Mendelssohn's harmonic language is typical of the period in which he composed. The sonorities of the ninth, eleventh and thirteenth, had already become accepted, as had all of the augmented sixth chords and the neapolitan sixth. Chord functions in the three works remain within the traditional boundaries. The vocabulary, grammar and syntax employed by the composer are proof of his comprehensive knowledge of the materials of music but they do not present any indication of the composer's concern with the further expansion of their then current limits.

The major-minor interchange via the Tierce de Picardie and its reverse exhibited in Opus 20:II seems to be melodically generated as is the semitone fluctuation in the first theme of the movement. The reappearance of the fluctuation in Opus 80:IV is clever but not of any great significance.

The most distant modulation occurs in Opus 20:IV when, in the inserted development, Mendelssohn wanders into the key of the flat dominant. However, the process is so smoothly achieved through sequential activity that its effect seems merely that of being another step on the way back to the second theme return.

The traditional nature of the harmonic relationships between the various sections of sonata form as exhibited in the works analysed leaves little room for comment.

From the foregoing, it can be recognised that Mendelssohn's approach to sonata form composition was based on respect for the traditional structural boundaries and the traditional tonal concepts which had crystallized in the
works of his classical predecessors. The relative closeness in procedure between the fourth movement inserted developments of Opus 20 and Opus 44, Number 3 and the sonata rondo form could suggest that even in these somewhat experimental movements the composer's intent was not to destroy the essence of the form but to perpetuate it.

The Scherzo-type movements

In the three works under scrutiny, the scherzo-type movements show Mendelssohn's greatest success in his formal experiments. The light, airy feeling inspired by the scherzi of Opus 20 and Opus 44, Number 3 tend to make formal content a secondary consideration. The exhibition of some sonata form characteristics within the traditional scherzo form of Opus 80:II is an indication of Mendelssohn's intimate knowledge of both forms and of his subtlety in exploiting their common characteristics. It is interesting to trace the formal succession from the sonata form scherzo, Opus 20:III, to the traditional scherzo with sonata form characteristics, Opus 80:II, via the free form of Opus 44, Number 3:II.

An evaluation of each complete work

Microscopic examination of individual movements is valid in terms of the discovery of the elements which combine into themes and the devices which contribute to or detract from the coherence of each movement. It is necessary now to examine each complete work on a larger scale to determine whether
there is overall coherence within each work.

Opus 20

It has been previously stated that the Octet, Opus 20, seems to mark the end of the juvenile and the beginning of the adult period of Mendelssohn's artistic life. This is reflected in the polished nature of this work, regardless of the flaws which are introduced in the structure of the individual movements. Early awareness of the movement components of such works is evident in the tempo relationships and in the tonal relationships of the four movements. There seems to be a half-hearted attempt to consolidate the thematic material of the work in the closing movement, but this is abandoned after the inclusion of only the first theme of the third movement in the inserted development section. Rich harmonic texture and restlessness are characteristic of the entire work, even in the slow second movement.

The fact that this work was composed for eight instruments in double string quartet proportions is unique. Even more unique is the absence of any antiphonal use of individual quartets but rather a more orchestral approach to the sonic design of the work.

The success of Opus 20 lies in its largely traditional basis in terms of forms and the formal arrangement of its movements and the unique nature of its instrumentation. That success is tarnished to some extent as a result of the lack of coherence of the closing movement's inserted development section.
Regardless of the success in detail of this work, it is denied overall success because of Mendelssohn's seeming failure to assert the experiments he attempted. The lack of success of the sonata form movements can be attributed partly to the politeness of their expression. To Mendelssohn's upbringing, excesses of emotional expression were anathema. The opening motive of the first theme of the first movement promises the kind of rough dramatic development reminiscent of Beethoven, but the promise is not fulfilled since Mendelssohn seemingly apologises for the tension of the motive by turning it into a recurring accompaniment to the second theme. The apology seems to carry over into the third movement which is the most traditional of the sonata form movements studied, and, because of that fact, the most successful.

The fourth movement of this work detracts significantly from the successes of the second and third movements. The exposition contains too many thematic ideas, each of which could lay claim to precedence over the others in spite of the order of their appearance. Although each theme returns in the order of initial presentation, internal contrast within the first theme and the derivation of the first statement of the second theme from the closing portion of the first theme tend to weaken the opposition of the main thematic areas. Further weakening of this principle of contrast occurs in the development section where the two ideas of the first theme are pitted against each other. All other thematic ideas are ignored until the inserted development section in which they are merely restated in the original order of presentation in the dominant or related keys.
The success of the inner movements, the free-wheeling second-movement scherzo and the traditional sonata-form third movement, are not enough to negate the disappointments of the opening and closing movements.

Opus 80

The circumstances surrounding the composition of Opus 80 are the first ones which shatter the image of emotional security in Mendelssohn's life. This work is his response to the sudden tragic loss of his very dearly loved sister. The restlessness is still present, but the dramatic interruption of the first theme by the stark canonic motive seems to express vividly the feelings of unease which, for the first time in his life, could not be overcome by the beauty of his environment or by a change of that environment. In this work he abandoned most attempts at experiment but was still concerned with the beauty of the melody. What prevents this work from being monumental is that it is still too polished an utterance despite the surprise of the first theme interruption. It is interesting to speculate on the possible properties of later works had he survived the traumatic experience of his sister's death. Unfortunately, his experiential background did not equip him for such survival.

Conclusion

Mendelssohn's early training and his contact with professional musicians in the pleasant surroundings of the Sunday home gatherings deepened his knowledge of traditional forms, especially sonata form. His earliest works,
the twelve string symphonies, will attest to this. His studies with Zelter at the Berlin Singakademie presented him with the materials of music and the methods of their manipulation. The development of his musical taste, however, was greatly influenced by the conservative views of both his father and Goethe. Manipulation of the materials of music, therefore, became the pleasant, genteel and polished quality apparent even in his earliest works.

Comparison with Beethoven, an occurrence in almost every study of Mendelssohn's works should take into consideration, but seldom does, the differences in the experiential backgrounds of the two composers. Beethoven was engaged in a constant struggle for economic and social survival and sonata form is an ideal vehicle for the reflection of such an existence. In contrast, Mendelssohn's economic and social survival were never in question. The fact that he was so prolific a composer was the result of a restless nature inspired by a parental admonition to be productive, rather than the necessity to survive on commissions or on gratuities from teaching. Small wonder them, that his works are replete with beautiful harmonies and melodies and show that sense of restlessness. On the other hand, it is impossible to conceive of Mendelssohn writing as Beethoven did in his Heiligenstadt Testament:

"I will take my fate by the throat".

In terms of his formal experiments, Mendelssohn failed to influence the course of musical composition in the years that have followed his death. Sonata form, however, did remain a viable vehicle for the expression of musical thought. Even some twentieth century composers have employed the form. It is impossible to determine whether the combination of Mendelssohn's
popularity and his use of sonata form may have had any effect on the retention of the use of the form, especially in the chamber works of Brahms et al in the second half of the nineteenth century. Given the plethora of "modernisms" entering the craft of musical composition during the first half of that century, the question of Mendelssohn's influence does arise. Would sonata form have survived regardless of, or in spite of, his unsuccessful experiments, or did it survive because of those experiments?
1. **Introduction.**

Books:


Essays:


Dictionaries:


4. **Evaluation.**

Books:


Periodical Literature:


Appendix

Figure 1. Generalised diagram of sonata form p. 4
Figure 2. Formal diagram of Opus 80:II p. 20