

Mendelssohn String Quartet

Philadelphia Chamber Music Society

Quartet's personalities emerge

by Peter Dobrin, January 10th, 2006
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For pure atmospheric, the string-orchestra version of *Transfigured Night* is a wonderfully immersing experience. But the original medium for Schoenberg's long sigh of a piece, string sextet, reveals more about the personality of the players, as the Mendelssohn Quartet and two guests thrillingly argued Sunday afternoon at Curtis' Field Hall in a Philadelphia Chamber Music Society/Musical Fund Society concert.

The Mendelssohn's Fried has something of a grand-dame-of-the-violin aura. Her solo career started in 1968, by winning first prize in the Paganini International Competition and then the Queen Elizabeth International Competition. (Today she might be pleased to be known as the mother of the impressive and suddenly major pianist Jonathan Biss, who will be hosted by the Chamber Music Society in recital Feb. 28.)

Not a routine phrase passed from Fried's hands Sunday. Her expressive devices were pronounced without becoming vulgar; her molten-liquid tone came across even in soft passages; and she shaped phrases specifically as compelling narrative in sound.

The Schoenberg uncovered other strong personalities in the group - most notably cellists Marcy Rosen, who seemed to take inspiration from Fried, and stalwart Timothy Eddy.

The Mendelssohn also played two startlingly different takes on dissonance: Ligeti's *String Quartet No. 1* from 1953-54 and Dutilleux's *String Quartet, Ainsi La Nuit (Thus the Night)* from 1976-77. Dutilleux's work suggested that the French composer's charms are more evident in his orchestral works.

The Ligeti, however, was strong emotional commentary, with his trademark upward chromatic runs (anxiety), taut rhythms (nervousness), and a boozy waltz that induced pleasant disorientation.