

"All the News
That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

Late Edition

Today, bitterly cold, brisk, mix of clouds and sun, high 21. Tonight, frigid, light winds, low 16. Tomorrow, not as cold and partly sunny, high 31. Weather map, Page B20.

VOL. CLVIII . . No. 54,577

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NEW YORK, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2009

\$1.50

THE Arts

THE NEW YORK TIMES, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2009

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A Christmas Present From Mendelssohn, Delivered at His Birthday Celebration

The Lyric Chamber Music Society of New York began its celebration of Mendelssohn's 200th birthday last season, when it included a handful of rarities in its programming. It has a few more up its sleeve too, including a reconstruction of an unfinished piano concerto. But for the actual birthday, on Tuesday, the society presented a salon concert of the sort that was common in Mendelssohn's day, bringing together vocal works and piano music.

The main attraction of its program at the Kosciuszko Foundation was the "Liederbuch für Cécile," a collection of 17 songs Mendelssohn gave to his wife as

a Christmas present in 1845. The performance was listed as a world premiere. Introducing the work, R. Larry Todd, the Mendelssohn scholar and biographer, suggested that this "Liederbuch" could be considered a song cycle, given that most of the texts (by different poets) are about spring.

Both claims demand an asterisk. Mendelssohn had published several of the songs before he compiled them in this set, some as early as 1839. Others were published later, and most have been performed and recorded. These were premieres in a limited sense: because Mendelssohn revised his works frequently, they are not identical to the standard versions.

Whether they constitute a cycle, given their disparate origins, depends how loosely you define the term. To be anachronistic, the "Liederbuch" is more like a mixtape, a collection of favorite songs, assembled for a friend.

Ying Huang, a soprano with an attractive, flexible sound, phrased these shapely songs as emotionally pointed snapshots — and occasionally, miniature dra-



JULIETA CERVANTES FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Lyric Chamber Music Society of New York The pianist Thomas Bagwell and the soprano Ying Huang performed works by Mendelssohn and Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel at the Kosciuszko Foundation Tuesday.

mas — with solid, colorful support from Thomas Bagwell, at the piano. There were few surprises in the songs themselves, but Mendelssohn's gift for graceful, chromatic melodies is heard in full flower. The "Rheinisches Volkslied" (Op. 57, No. 4) and the three final songs — "An dem Wind," "Nachtlied" and "Frühlingslied" (all from Op. 71) — were particularly alluring.

On the second half of the program Mr. Bagwell played four brief, appealingly melodic piano pieces by Mendelssohn's sister, Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, and six of Mendelssohn's "Songs Without Words," including two new additions to the canon. One, a D major work composed in 1843, has a playful melody dancing over a fiery, perpetual-motion accompaniment. That one is a keeper. The other, a fragment in E flat completed by Mr. Todd, has considerable charm but is less memorable.

Ms. Huang and Mr. Bagwell closed the concert with two hauntingly beautiful songs by Hensel.

The next concert by the Lyric Chamber Music Society of New York is on Feb. 25 at the Kosciuszko Foundation, 15 East 65th Street, Manhattan. Its next Mendelssohn concert is on March 18 at the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue, 30 West 68th Street, Manhattan; (212) 239-9190, lyricny.org.