

The Philadelphia Inquirer

Wednesday, November 12, 2003

Review *Music*

Rossetti Quartet aligns two ideals

By Peter Dobrin
INQUIRER MUSIC CRITIC

Every string quartet — the ensemble, not the piece of music — has its own concept of overall sound.

And each string quartet — the piece, not the ensemble — has a unique sound universe in which it most obviously thrives.

When the two ideals align, as they did Monday night in the hands of the Rossetti Quartet, it makes for a potent experience.

No doubt part of what was adding to the quartet's vivid sonic presence in the Convention Center was the spare crowd. Fewer bodies usually means more reverberation, and since the Rossetti was a late substitute for the Zehetmair Quartet (which canceled its entire tour), some Philadelphia Chamber Music Society subscribers opted out.

Their loss. The Rossetti is not of the steely-edge-exactitude brand of string-quartet playing. The members are not yet together long enough to be reading one another's minds. But the glow of their sound was a wondrous thing. Nothing special about the instruments themselves, I am told, except that their violist, Thomas Diener, uses a cello bow — rare but not unheard of.

The peak in their program of Haydn, Schumann, Ravel and a Mozart encore came in the third movement of Ravel's famed *String Quartet in F major*. Here, Ravel used so many inven-

tive string techniques that the quartet starts to morph into an orchestra. The Rossetti carefully realized all of them, bringing out some striking effects. And yet, for all those varied timbres, when it was time to match sounds, they fell into line like a school of fish.

The rest of the piece, especially the first movement, often lacked flow; each section arrived like a new sentence rather than an elongated stream of naturally occurring thoughts. First violinist Timothy Fain, a Curtis Institute of Music graduate and the only Philadelphian in the group, was an expressive standout — in the Ravel, and here and there in the other works.

The first half of the concert was spent on a stylish Haydn *String Quartet in G minor (Op. 20 No. 3, Hob. III: 33)* and a Schumann *String Quartet in F major (Op. 41, No. 2)* that made a fairly good case for this piece as something other than a shrunken-down and paler version of a Schumann symphony.



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