

# The New York Times

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## CLASSICAL MUSIC

Anthony Tommasini

Symphony Space is trying to become a hotbed of contemporary classical music. On Thursday night, for example, the **YING QUARTET**, a dynamic ensemble of young sibling string players, in the midst of its fifth and last season in residence, presents an adventurous program. The concert stands out all the more because the first week of January is typically a slow time in the classical music season.

The quartet will present the New York premiere of **TOD MACHOVER**'s "... but not simpler ..." which alternates movements played traditionally with electronically generated interludes. Though Mr. Machover, a professor of music and media at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has a sophisticated knowledge of electronic resources, he brings a childlike enthusiasm to his multimedia experiments. The Ying Quartet's eclectic program will include works by **ELLIOTT CARTER**, the Renaissance master William Byrd, Beethoven, the Beatles and that pioneer of musical invention and experimental instruments, **JOHN CAGE**. 7:30 p.m., Leonard Nimoy Thalia, 2537 Broadway, at 95th Street, (212) 864-5400.

CLASSICAL MUSIC REVIEW

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SATURDAY, JANUARY 7, 2006

## Weaving the Acoustic and the Electronic

By ALLAN KOZINN

The Ying Quartet has staked out an extended residency at Symphony Space in recent seasons, and the relationship has clearly worked out for everyone. For the quartet, the arrangement provides a place to play new works and to try unusual programming projects. For both the players and their listeners, the attractively revamped Leonard Nimoy Thalia has proved an ideally intimate chamber hall. And Symphony Space not only wins points for adventurousness but also fills seats. For the group's latest adventure, on Thursday evening, the Thalia was packed.

The Yings — they are siblings, Timothy and Janet on violins, Phillip on viola and David on cello — have built some of their programs around combinations of the musical and the nonmusical. Some of their ideas have been sensible if commonplace (music and poetry); others have been a bit daffy (music and Chinese noodle-making). This time, with help from the composer Tod Machover, they hit on a fantastic (and entirely musical)

*The Ying Quartet is scheduled to play children's concerts at Symphony Space today at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. It repeats Tod Machover's work at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester on Feb. 12.*

notion.

First, they commissioned Mr. Machover, who is best known for electronic works, to write them an almost entirely acoustic quartet, the only electronic aspect being light amplification to allow for spatial effects. Then they gave Mr. Machover a free hand to choose the companion works.

Being a composer, Mr. Machover was not content merely to select works by his colleagues, antique or modern. Mainly, he arranged pieces

*A string quartet builds a program around a composer known for his multimedia work.*

from outside the quartet repertory. Among them were a straightforward rendering of Bach's chorale setting "O Mensch, Bewein' Dein' Sünde/Gross" and a more freehand arrangement of a Bach organ prelude on the same hymn. A deferential transcription of an Agnus Dei by William Byrd preceded a wild, electronically augmented version of a Lennon-McCartney classic, "A Day in the Life." Mr. Machover provided a

### Ying Quartet

*Symphony Space*

handful of electronic interludes to link these pieces.

Music originally written for quartet was included as well. The Yings moved with agility and precision through Elliott Carter's compact, ethereal "Two Fragments" (1994, 1999) and John Cage's more meditative "Quietly Flowing Along" (1949-50). Mr. Machover's new quartet, "... but not simpler ..." is a vigorous, exciting study in speediness, full of tremolando figures, racing lines and iridescent passages that move too quickly to grab onto but eventually dissolve into sweetly lyrical phrases.

In a way, this was the perfect program for the age of the iPod shuffle. Yet the leaps were more purposeful than random. The Yings opened their program with the first movement of Beethoven's last quartet, in F (Op. 135), and closed it with the same work's finale. The music was performed without pause, even for applause, and instead of program notes, terse but incisive comments on the works were projected briefly on a screen behind the players. It was as if the musicians and the audience were eavesdropping as Mr. Machover free-associated, starting with Beethoven and moving far afield before finding his way back.