

Mark Kaplan, violin
Yael Weiss, piano

Mendelssohn Double Concerto with conductor Uriel Segal

'An impassioned, hold-nothing back performance' of young Mendelssohn

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Until recently, Felix Mendelssohn's Double Concerto for Piano and Violin was performed with string orchestra. Someone then discovered a score in the Bodleian Library at Oxford with parts added for wind instruments and timpani. On Wednesday evening in Auer Hall, a venue-filling audience had an opportunity to hear one of the first performances of that Double Concerto in its enhanced form, a work written by the composer when he was all of 14. The Jacobs School faculty duo of Yael Weiss, on piano, and Mark Kaplan, violin, in collaboration with the IU Chamber Orchestra and conductor Uriel Segal, offered up the piece in an impassioned, hold-nothing-back performance that deservedly earned cheers.

The precocious Felix, in creating this flamboyant piece, might well have said to himself: "I'm going to prove to my family and friends that I'm pretty darned good at composing. I'm also going to enjoy myself because I'll be playing with the toys I like best, musical instruments." He might have gone on to ask himself, "What can I do to show off the violinist and the pianist, make them do really difficult things, excite them, make them sweat?"

Young Mendelssohn didn't seem to make Wednesday's Kaplan-Weiss team sweat, but he surely did require the soloists to work through some awfully fancy exercises: to play as loud and fast as they could, to play as softly, too, and sometimes with the lightest touch of fingers or bow, so to handle the array of ornaments the teenager tossed into that music way back in 1823. For them, the concerto was a showpiece and a challenge.

The orchestra had far less to prove in an unusual work one might fairly describe as a duet with accompaniment. The accompaniment came along principally in the climaxes. Meanwhile, the soloists did a lot of seesawing between the sweetest, gushiest melodies imaginable, which they had to ease and squeeze out of their instruments, and hair-raising, decibel-laden feats of derring-do.

One can only praise Weiss and Kaplan, she for the power and clarity of her pianism, he for the flexibility in his technique and ability to project colors and conviction.

Segal and the Chamber Orchestra, after intermission, received their share of plaudits for a reading of Beethoven's Fourth Symphony that was endowed with persuasive authority. Berlioz rated this symphony as "lively, nimble, joyous, or of heavenly sweetness." It also contains, at times, a harsh, even angry, undercurrent, reflective perhaps of the composer's reaction to fast-encroaching deafness. The maestro and his musicians pulled in and exploited all the moods. They did so with excellent results, proving cohesive as a team and impressive in passages that called for evocative solo treatment.

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