

ANTHONYMCGILL

Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)
November 8, 2005

Edition: CITY-D
Section: FEATURES MAGAZINE
Page: C01

KEYED UP

A medley of music personalities and performances in the city.

From a Metropolitan Opera clarinetist, a tone that's refreshingly traditional.

Author: *Peter Dobrin* *INQUIRER MUSIC CRITIC*

There's something so charmingly old-world about **Anthony McGill's** tone, so message-from-another-era, that his recital Sunday afternoon could have been accompanied by the atmospheric crackling of 78 r.p.m. black shellac. **McGill** played at the Curtis Institute of Music on the alumni recital series, and you might say he hasn't done too badly for himself since graduating from the school in 2000. At 26, **McGill** is one of two principal clarinetists of the Metropolitan Opera orchestra, often referred to as the best opera orchestra in the world. (His brother, Demarre **McGill**, a 1996 Curtis graduate, is similarly successful: He is acting principal flutist of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. The two grew up in Chicago.) The Met orchestra suffered a loss when Ricardo Morales, formerly a principal, left to become principal clarinetist of the Philadelphia Orchestra. While I can't attest to **McGill's** work in the opera pit, on this afternoon in Curtis' Field Concert Hall he was as compelling a solo personality as has come through Curtis on any instrument. **McGill** is mellow through and through. In Andr Messager's Solo de concours especially, his sense of sound was highly polished, thoroughly refined. The way he matched pianist Reiko Uchida, note for plummy note, was an exercise in absolute sensitivity (not to mention dead-on intonation). What exactly is old-world about his sound is hard to pin down. But you hear this approach in early orchestral recordings and film scores. It has something to do with warmth. Where does a 26-year-old get a mid-20th-century sensibility? He does come out of Curtis, one of the keepers of decades-old performance traditions. And he studied with Donald Montanaro, whose own sense of gorgeous clarinet sound has been heard in the Philadelphia Orchestra for almost half a century. **McGill** straddles seamlessly his instrument's distinct registers - in Debussy's Premire rapsodie, where Uchida emulated orchestral colors wondrously, and in Bernstein's Sonata for Clarinet and Piano, a piece that starts out as faux-Hindemith and ends up somewhere in the vicinity of West Side Story. Brahms' Sonata in E flat major (Op. 120, No. 2) presented no technical challenges to either player. Even if, interpretively, it could benefit from deeper thought, with a sound like that, another Brahms by **McGill** promises to be worth the wait.

Contact music critic Peter Dobrin at 215-854-5611 or pdobrin@phillynews.com. Read his recent work at <http://go.philly.com/peterdobrin>.