

## Entertainment

### Concert review: Harlem Quartet as part of Newburgh Chamber Music

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For the Times Herald Record

February 20, 2008 2:00 AM

NEWBURGH — Newburgh Chamber Music opened its new concert series with a remarkable group, the Harlem Quartet, only in its second year of existence yet already making its place on the musical map.

Sunday afternoon's concert at St. George's Church featured music with an international and ethnic flavor, ranging from Spain and France to Harlem itself. The four string players — violinists Ilmar Gavilan and Melissa White, violist Juan-Miguel Hernandez and cellist Desmond Neysmith — are virtuoso performers each in their own right, with on-target technique, boundless energy and contagious enthusiasm. Their enjoyment in playing the music with one another communicated directly with the large and responsive audience. It was a fun afternoon for everyone fortunate enough to be there.

"La Oracion del Torero" ("The Bullfighter's Prayer") by Joaquin Turina is an impressionist piece with swirling Andalusian passages and Spanish hymnal choruses. It begins with a passionate string cadenza, yields to quiet recitatives as each string takes its turn in restating the theme, and ends on the highest register of appealing prayer.

Turina's evident debt to Ravel led directly to the next selection, Ravel's own String Quartet in F major, one of the masterworks in the genre. Its opening measures are unforgettable: The four-note motif, plaintive and heartfelt, sets the tone for the other movements, a quickened pizzicato allegro, a soulful adagio and a turbulent finale full of metric shifts and exuberant rhythms. The manner in which the simple theme resurfaces in peaceful acceptance and pained cries of the heart touches on music too deep for words and must be heard to be appreciated. The quartet played with sensitivity and an esprit that demonstrated their understanding and love of the work.

After intermission, the players brought listeners back down to earth. Their versatility was challenged by Wynton Marsalis' String Quartet No. 1 (1980), written when he was only 20. Inspired by his childhood memories of New Orleans octoroon balls and city life, the work is in multiple parts, four of which the quartet performed: "II. Mating Calls and Delta Rhythms"; "III. Creole Contradanzas"; "VII. Rampart Street Row House Rag"; and "V. Hellbound Highball." From slurred phrases and strident scales of the opening movement to the jazz upbeat and dissonant romp of the middle, the closing is a tour-de-force of sound effects with train engines, bells, horns and speeding wheels spinning to a mind-boggling racing finale as the express for hell heads relentlessly to disaster when all four players walk off stage while playing full blast. It was a hoot.

"Take the 'A' Train," the Duke Ellington signature tune by Billy Strayhorn, arranged by Paul Chihara, made for the perfect farewell with the four strings engaging in an intricate exchange that exercised exact timing and alert response. For an encore, the group offered "My Little Conga," with tempo plucked on strings, stretched out by bowing and drummed on their instruments into a weaving conga line.