

Tuesday Musical: Imani Winds at E.J. Thomas Hall (Jan. 25)

by Daniel Hathaway



The Imani Winds returned for their third appearance on the Tuesday Musical Association series in Akron's E.J. Thomas Hall on Wednesday evening, January 25. Their exuberant performance of brightly-hued works by Elliott Carter, Paquito D'Rivera, Ruth Crawford Seeger, Simon Shaheen, and the quintet's own Jeff Scott and Valerie Coleman proved that two decades

on the road together has only added depth and sheen to their distinguished reputation.

In a pre-concert interview with three of the players, flutist Valerie Coleman talked about how unlikely the very idea of a wind quintet was. How can you meld five instruments that produce their sounds by such various means into a viable ensemble?

Unlikely or not, the Imani have succeeded in gathering those disparate elements into a finely-blended group that ends up being far more than the sum of its parts, while celebrating the individual tone colors of its members. That paradox was worked out all evening in a program that was pure Imani both in its planning and execution.

"Considered Modern" was the title, and the quintets by Carter and Seeger were the elder statesmen. Carter wrote his in Paris in 1948, dedicating it to his mentor Nadia Boulanger. Motif-driven and mildly dissonant — this was the composer before his radical transformation away from vocal lyricism — the two-movement quintet ends with an attractive, chattering Scherzo.

Seeger, whose music had influenced Carter, wrote her *Suite for Wind Quintet* in the early 1950s for a competition — and she won. Replete with ostinatos, intense recitatives, and complex unisons, the work dabbles agreeably with twelve-tone technique. It kept the Imani Winds busy and the audience engaged for all ten minutes of its life span.

Hornist Jeff Scott's *Startin' Sumthin'* provided a lively overture to the concert with its tossed-around phrases, bassoon groove (Monica Ellis), energetic thematic cells, and bluesy ending. At the other end of the proceedings, Palestinian oud virtuoso Simon Saheen's *Dance Mediterranea*, in Scott's arrangement, brought the evening to a thrilling conclusion with quarter-tone passages, Middle Eastern scales, and virtuoso oboe licks from Toyin Spellman-Diaz.

"Kites Over Havana" and "Wind Chimes" from Paquito D'Rivera's *Kites* take their inspiration from an anonymous poem that was spoken during the performance, alternating with free, swirlings gestures, clarinet and oboe wails, and a bassoon cadenza. The second movement began in a calmer mood, but eventually, after the last poetic line, a rhythmic lick infected the whole ensemble.

Valerie Coleman's *Rubispheres*, for flute, clarinet, and bassoon, is an ode to urban life in Manhattan, specifically to the Lower East Side and to Washington Heights at night. Monica Ellis's big bassoon solo energized the first movement ("DROM"), while the ensemble gently cradled a 3-month-old child in the second ("Serenade"). "Revival" had the ensemble tooting out jazzy, New Yorkish chords.

The high energy of the concert was crowned by a Klezmer encore, featuring the Imani's brilliant new clarinetist, Mark Dover. Dover's parents are recent transplants to Cleveland, and the valedictory piece not only gave him a special moment in the spotlight, but also inspired an acknowledgement of his mother, who was in the audience on Wednesday.

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