

## Imani Winds make music from the heart in CCMS season opener (Oct. 5)

by Stephanie Manning



Midway through a recent concert by the Imani Winds, the group's newest member, hornist Kevin Newton, stepped up to the microphone. Introducing a piece by Henri Tomasi, Newton highlighted a particular quote attributed to the French composer: "Music that doesn't come from the heart isn't music."

Who better to embody this quote than all five members of Imani Winds, whose passion for what they do imbues every aspect of their music-making. On Tuesday, October 5 in CIM's Kulas Hall, this enthusiasm was on full display from the renowned wind quintet.

Marking the beginning of the Cleveland Chamber Music Society's 72nd season, the group came out onstage, all smiles, to a relatively full house. "We are back," bassoonist Monica Ellis proclaimed after the opening *Scherzo* by Eugene Bozza. For multiple members of the quintet, the Cleveland area is full of familiar faces. Ellis pointed out the large group of Oberlin Conservatory students in attendance — she and two other members are graduates — as well as Oberlin's professor of horn, former Imani Winds member Jeff Scott.

The flying chromatic runs and rolling dynamic swells of the Bozza, all executed with clarity and precision, were just a taste of the technical prowess that was to come. The program, which the group has dubbed "Considered Modern," covered a wide variety of styles with no shortage of virtuosic moments. Elliott Carter's *Quintet for Winds*, although written in 1948, sounded new in the hands of the Imani, who injected vibrancy into every note. Confident and communicative, the five players displayed an impressive balance and blend.

Much of the unrestrained energy of the Carter was also reflected in Tomasi's *Cinq danses profanes et sacrées* ("Five Dances"). The group's calm demeanor belied the intense and difficult writing characteristic of the composer. In the third movement, however, the tempo slows. That set the stage for Ellis' light and airy bassoon solo, which floated above eerie, menacing chords.

It can be hard to take your eyes off Ellis, who sat front and center and whose playing is characterized by her expressive movement. The following piece, Anders Hillborg's *Six Pieces for Wind Quintet*, was her time to shine. Covering six movements in under ten minutes, the piece moves at a brisk pace and includes a wild fourth-movement bassoon solo. In our [conversation](#), Ellis said that clarinetist Mark Dover has frequently compared the moment to "a Jimi Hendrix solo" — this proved to be an apt comparison, as she absolutely shredded.

Last on the program was Valerie Coleman's *Afro-Cuban Concerto*, which Brandon Patrick George (who succeeded Coleman as the group's flutist) described as "signature Valerie." Full of bouncy Afro-Cuban rhythms, it's almost impossible not to bob your head to — as was the case with oboist Toyin Spellman-Diaz. Though the work was initially intended as a concerto with orchestra, the Imani's assertive sound easily filled the hall and made them an orchestra of their own.

An enthusiastic ovation quickly prompted an encore: *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, here performed in a bold, jazzy rendition that may well have left many audience members humming the tune on their way out the door.

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