

Music in the Galleries: Altius Quartet

Program Notes

Andrew Giordano, violin
Hannah Kennedy, violin
Allyson Stibbards, viola
Erin Patterson, cello

Caroline Shaw: “Valencia”

There is something exquisite about the construction of an ordinary orange. (Grocery stores around the country often offer the common "Valencia" as the standard option.) Hundreds of brilliantly colored, impossibly delicate vesicles of juice, ready to explode. It is a thing of nature so simple, yet so complex and extraordinary. Valencia is an untethered embrace of the architecture of the common Valencia orange, through billowing harmonics and somewhat viscous chords and melodies. It is also a kind of celebration of awareness of the natural, unadorned food that is still available to us.

Credit: Caroline Shaw

Antonín Dvořák: String Quartet No. 12 in F major, Op. 96, “American” II. Lento

Many commentators have singled out the nostalgic Lento as the crowning movement of the Quartet, and Dvořák scholar Michael Beckerman has drawn attention to the Schubertian quality of its endless melody. Unfolding in a broad arch that comes to one of chamber music's most exquisite climaxes, the movement relies primarily on the simple texture of the violin or cello carrying the melody with constant undulating support from the other instruments. Occasionally the second violin joins the first in a melodic role, as at the poignant climax. The final keening of the main theme by the cello against simple repeated chords rather than the former busy accompaniment lends an air of tragedy. *Credit: Jane Vial Jaffe*

Libby Larsen: “Sorrow Song and Jubilee”

During Antonín Dvořák's years in America (1892-1895) as director of the National Conservatory of Music of America in New York City, composer Henry Thacker Burleigh, who was enrolled in the school at the time, introduced Dvořák to African American spirituals and dances, deeply influencing Dvořák's American works. Just as Dvořák used “Going Home” as the basis for the largo theme in his symphony From the New World, Libby Larsen based the music on the “sorrow song” (now known as spiritual) “Swing Low Sweet Chariot”. Larsen noted, "It's a short piece, a miniature dumka and furiant or introduction and dance, composed as an homage to the creative partnership of Burleigh and Dvorak."

Florence Price: String Quartet No. 2 in A minor, II. Juba and movement III

The second movement begins with a gentle, rocking ostinato in the second violin, which controls the flow of the movement. This simple ostinato is full of possibilities, and transitions to a more urgent feeling over the course of the movement. The second movement is also full of melodic and harmonic turns that bring the melancholy beauty of Black idioms into the tradition-bound stylistic vocabulary of the mid-twentieth-century string quartet.

The main theme of the third movement is in the style of a Juba dance or hambone, a patently African lively dance that involved body-slapping, foot-stomping, and hand-clapping; this section frames a more relaxed allegretto that is likewise based on African American dance idioms. *Credit: John Michael Cooper*