

This review is as it exactly as it appeared as a forum topic on Saxontheweb.net.. Written by Ian O'Beirne. Concert done on 6/26/05 by New York Saxophone Quartet.

I went to see the NYSQ at the Weill recital hall in Carnegie Hall this past Sunday night. The performance was breathtaking. For those of you who don't know, NYSQ features some of New York's woodwind legends: Dennis Anderson on soprano, Ralph Olsen on alto, Ken Hitchcock on tenor, and newest member Lino Gomez on bari. Dennis played alto with the group for some years before moving to the soprano chair.

The concert was all premieres, featuring the following newly commissioned works in this order: Three American Dances by Edward Paul Mascari; Mosaic by Michael Holober; Market Forces (2005) by Eric Moe; Canzona Corrente by Dennis Anderson; Rhapsody for Saxophone Quartet by Eric Ewazen; and Drift by Dorothy Hindman.

Most of the composers were present, and the theme was of a contemporary nature. For you composers out there or those interested, here's an overview. Mascari's piece played like a suite with lively, exotic themes throughout. Holober's piece was particularly grabbing and insightful, making excellent use of the colors in the various saxophones. Moe's three movement work was extremely violent and awe-inspiring in the fast movements ("Volatility" and "The Bottom Line"), heavily contrasted to the appropriately titled "The Sad Story of the Prodigal Princess", a melancholy ballad strikingly moving in and out of dissonant harmonies. Anderson's work was reminiscent of Bob Mintzer's works for sax quartet, though with a more thoroughly permeating jazz style. The three movements used various degrees of layering and the harmonic motion was quite breathtaking. Ewazen's Rhapsody would have to be my favorite, making use of more new-age harmonies in a contemporary texture. His use of minimalist repetitious rhythms paired with fast-paced modal shifts was very impressively done with only four voices. Drift was similar in texture to the faster movements of "Market Forces"—heavy bari sax staccatos with the other instruments layering over top. This palette was contrasted with a wavelike tradeoff occurring toward the end of the piece, and the abrupt ending in harmonic ascension, though expected, was very pleasing. This was the most poetic of the pieces.

The quartet really had a unique sound. Gomez's bari playing was particularly striking and present: his sound is huge, and he is equally

comfortable laying down the pounding bass lines and playing sensitive, delicate melodies. Hitchcock I would call the most unique-sounding player in the group. His concept is of a bright, soaring nature, very pleasing and different! Olsen I would describe as the most "personal" player. His tone is very liquid, dark, and rich, something like Desmond meets Hodges with a pronounced classical mastery mixed in. Anderson's soprano playing is very impressive. His tone has a complexity to it that I'm not used to in a soprano: rich, lively, and light.

The overall impression was this: a mastery that sounds effortless; a concept that bridges stylistic boundaries. Basically, these are musicians, not just saxophonists, and you can hear it. At times I forgot I was listening to a saxophone quartet and felt that I was hearing a symphony orchestra. The palette of tone color is amazing. The blend is unified and the highly stylized playing of each member contributes to the blend rather than breaking it down. The most surprising aspect of the performance was the huge, resonant sound produced by these four players. Much BIGGER than any other sax quartet I've heard. The mix of classical sensitivity and downright ATTITUDE was amazing. I really loved this performance!!

Fantastic concert, I really enjoyed it. Not quite standing O, but we clapped enough to have them come back out and play some sort of short Rag. We then clapped again to have them come out again, and take another bow. I could tell these are some really humble musicians, and from talking with Ken, he seems like a great guy.

-Ian O'Beirne