

Jazz Meets Classical XVII by Curtis Calderon

I always enjoy being a part of the *Jazz Meets Classical* (JMC) series. I love the sheer dynamic variances and tonal qualities that the strings can offer. The trumpet offers many shades too, but there has always been something so lovely and powerful about live strings. Jazz is an incredible vehicle for the artist to express him/herself. Combining the studied, controlled and beautiful classical experience keeping the sometimes uncontrolled, unique personalities and wildness of jazz to make for a great listening and playing experience.

The theme of JMC this April was the music of Latin American, with a focus on Cuba. The perfect opener was *Metro Chabacano* by **Javier Alvarez**, a rhythmically syncopated and driving work. It was followed by the hauntingly beautiful *Pacific Serenade* for clarinet and string quartet by the talented composer, **Miguel del Aguila**. The clarinetist on this piece, **Stephen Girko**, did a fabulous job.

Among the highlights were two works by **Paquito D'Rivera**, another made-for-Jazz-Meets-Classical-composer. His writing is very much like his playing, full of passion, excitement and musical genius. *Preludio y Merengue* is filled with twists and turns and expressive writing that make Paquito such an interesting arranger. **Brent Watkins**, our pianist for this piece was the foundation and steadiness for this tune and made it sound so much easier than it is to play. *Afro*, a unique journey of rhythm established a real groove at the deft hands of **Kyle Keener**, **Sherry Rubins**, **Marilyn de Oliveira**, **Brent Watkins** and myself, your friendly jazz trumpet reporter, **Curtis Calderon**.

At this point I must make mention of our phenomenal cellist, **Marilyn de Oliveira**. The energy that radiated from each and every note of her cello gave each tune a deeper meaning and feel. Of course, when you have such great musicians playing a concert like this, each one brings their own magic, but she was our anchor and soul.

After intermission, we started off with *Se Fue y No Vuelve Mas* by **Ignacio Cervantes**, intelligently arranged by our sax/clarinetist, **Jim Balentine**. I consider Jim among the best and we are fortunate to have him writing for *Jazz Meets Classical*. The next piece was just the opposite in terms of quality of arranging. It was a piece by **Dizzy Gillespie** titled *Con Alma* and arranged by me. It was my first ever arrangement for *Jazz Meets Classical*. Enough said! Our string section of **Joan Christenson**, **Matthew Diekman**, **Marilyn de Oliveira** and **Zlatan Redzic** were excellent on this piece. There were also world class solos by **Matthew Dunne** on guitar and **Heinz Frommeyer** on piano. What a pleasure to arrange for this group!

We continued on with two rambunctious pieces by New Yorker, **Oriente Lopez**, especially arranged for this concert. They were titled *Mamita* and *Bachiana Chorada*. These arrangements were full of life and energy and the audience enjoyed them.

Our outstanding rhythm section made up of **Kyle Keener** and **Sherry Rubins** really made the next piece, my arrangement of *Tico Tico*. The two were doing the job of four and did it with great fun! Next up was a **Dizzy Gillespie** staple titled, *A Night In Tunisia*. superbly arranged by **Matthew Dunne**. In the middle of the song, everyone in the band grabbed a percussion instrument and began to join in with our rhythm section in what became a grand finale of sorts with the trumpet soaring over the top.

We would like to thank the **Russell Hill Rogers Fund for the Arts** for their generous support, and the venues: the **Witte Museum**, **SAMA** and the **Instituto de México** for offering support, space, staff and other critical assistance. *Jazz Meets Classical* has become a San Antonio tradition and we hope it continues on well into the future of this great city. Thank you all and we look forward to seeing you next year!



Jazz Meets Classical: L to R: Kyle Keener, drums; Matthew Dunne, guitar; Stephen Girko, clarinet; Joan Christenson, violin; James Scott Balentine.
Photo by Susan Riley