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Harlem Chamber Players Present Affordable Local Concerts
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Liz Player is the co-founder of Harlem Chamber Players. Learn more about this classical music group by reading Player’s article, which begins on page 17. Our magazine is about the community; by the community. Email articles and ideas to the email address shown below.

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The Harlem Chamber Players

This nonprofit group brings classical music to Harlem and Morningside Heights.

by Liz Player
Community contributor

Since 2008 The Harlem Chamber Players has been bringing live musical culture uptown to the Harlem community and beyond. Artistic director and clarinetist Liz Player founded the now-ongoing chamber music series “Music at St. Mary’s” with the late violist Charles Dalton, whom she met while performing at an annual Gala Concert at Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall to benefit the New York City Housing Symphony Orchestra, also known as the NYC Housing Authority (NYCHA) Symphony Orchestra. Inspired and encouraged by founding board member 99-year-old Janet Wolfe, founder of the Housing Symphony Orchestra and long-time patron of minority musicians, Player and Dalton created a summer music festival that featured many of New York City’s finest African-American classically trained musicians. The former rector of St. Mary’s Episcopal Church of Manhattanville, Rev. Dr. Earl Kooperkamp, enthusiastically welcomed and supported the creation of an ongoing music series and invited The Harlem Chamber Players to make St. Mary’s Church its home. The 2008–2009 season marked the first full season of Harlem’s only chamber music series that actively features a multi-ethnic collective of seasoned professional classical musicians.

The Opening Concert of The Harlem Chamber Players’ upcoming season begins on Sunday, Sept. 15, at 3 p.m. at the historic St. Mary’s Church at 521 W. 126th St., between Broadway and Amsterdam. Joining as special guest artist will be Monica Ellis, bassoonist of the Grammy-nominated group Imani Winds, in a performance of the Mozart Bassoon Quartet (arranged from the Oboe Quartet in F Major). Next on the program will be a New York premiere of James Cohn’s A Gre- cal Project, conceived by associate director and clarinet- ister Carl Jackson, is an ongoing work in progress dedicated to bringing Bach’s greatest works to various venues (indoors and out) throughout the Harlem community and beyond. The Harlem Chamber Players’ signature event is the annual Black History Month Celebration, and its 6th annual celebration will take place on Sunday, Feb. 9, 2014 at 3 p.m. with host Terrance McKnight of WQXR. This event will feature “Cal- vary” Quartet by Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson (1932 – 2004), a composer who used to live in the neighborhood, as well as the classic Ravel String Quartet in F Minor. Also on the program will be spoken word poetry and some blues music.

Plans for the spring of 2014 include a joint concert with Opera Ebony, the longest surviving African-American opera company in the U.S., which will feature the Mozart Requiem Mass in D Minor with conductor Tali Makel.

On the evening of April 1, 2014, The Harlem Chamber Players will join the NYC Housing Symphony Orchestra in celebrating the 100th birthday of Janet Wolfe, founder of the Housing Symphony Orchestra and the inspiration behind the creation of The Harlem Chamber Players. This concert will take place at Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall.

The Harlem Chamber Players return to St. Mary’s Episcop- al Church on 126th Street on Sunday, May 4, 2014 at 3 p.m. for their own Spring Finale Concert. During the spring and summer The Harlem Chamber Players will also present free outdoor concerts featuring The Harlem Bach Project and more. Visit harlemchamberplayers.org to sign up for the e-mail list to receive concert announcements and other updates.

Mission

The Harlem Chamber Players is an ethnically diverse col- lective of professional musicians dedicated to bringing high- caliber, affordable and accessible live classical music to people in the Harlem community and beyond. In addition, The Harlem Chamber Players seek to build an audience for classical music in general through community and educational outreach, as well as through collaborations with Harlem’s other arts organi- zations, schools and cultural institutions.

The Harlem Chamber Players not only bring live chamber...
Upcoming Season

The Harlem Chamber Players is presenting eight concerts as part of the 2013-2014 concert season.

- **Sept. 15** – Season Opening Concert. This concert of classics will feature the Mozart Bassoon Quartet, James Cohr’s Grecian Festival, and the Mendelssohn Octet.
- **Oct. 22** – Ulysses Kay Concert. Columbia University recently acquired a collection of works and diaries by the African American composer Ulysses Kay. The Harlem Chamber Players will give a concert of Kay’s works in collaboration with the university to announce this historic acquisition.
- **Nov. 17** – Bach Concerto. The Harlem Bach Project continues with this live performance, which will feature the Bach Concerto for oboe and violin and more.
- **Feb. 9, 2014** – Annual Black History Month Celebration. This eclectic celebration will feature Coleridge-Taylor’s Lyrical Quartet and the Ravel String Quartet.
- **Spring 2014** – The Harlem Chamber Players join Opera Ebony in presenting Mozart’s “Gran” Partita.
- **April 1, 2014** – The Harlem Chamber Players join the NYC Housing Symphony Orchestra in celebrating founder Julian Wolfe’s 100th birthday at Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall.
- **May 4** – Spring Finale Concert. Program to be announced.
- **June 4** – Members of The Harlem Chamber Players will give a free community outreach concert featuring Mozart’s “Grande” Piano Trios.

For updated information, see harlemchamberplayers.org.

- **The Harlem Chamber Players continues to perform in schools and other venues. Above: Maurice Bells, double bass; Adam Hill, viola. Photo by Bob Curtis.**

Among the services the church provides are the St. Mary’s Food Pantry, the Homeless Hunger Outreach, the Prison Ministry Outreach Program and an internship for young theological students. St. Mary’s Church continues to be a vital hub in the West Harlem community. St. Mary’s Church burned to the ground at the turn of the 20th century but was quickly replaced with the present Neo-Gothic structure built in 1909. In 1998, the New York City Landmarks Commission designated the church a New York State landmark. The Harlem Chamber Players is proud to call St. Mary’s Church its home.

The group’s target audience includes anyone in Harlem who loves classical music and those within the community who do not regularly listen to live classical music because it has not been accessible or affordable. Since they started the series of concerts, attendance has steadily grown, mainly through word of mouth. The organization ensures maximum participation and community access by making concerts very affordable and accessible. The Harlem Chamber Players brings high-caliber classical chamber music to the people of Harlem for only $10 – $15 a concert as an alternative to having to go to the more expensive venues downtown. If anyone is unable to afford the ticket price, they are always allowed to come in for free and listen. The doors are open during rehearsals, and they welcome kids and anyone else from the neighborhood to come inside and experience the works in progress. The organization is actively working with various partners to bring more free concerts and outreach programs to the community. Concerts are programmed in ways that help audiences enjoy them more, taking into account that many people who attend the concerts either rarely attend or have never attended classical music concerts before. The organization always invites a knowledgeable host to talk about the music, or they provide educational program notes, researched for each concert, to help audiences better understand and enjoy the music they will be hearing.

Promoting Diversity

The roster of musicians is and has always been ethnically and culturally diverse. The organization maintains a diverse collective of musicians even though there is an assumption that most organizations automatically practice diversity today. However, the fact is that African-American and Latin-American musicians are still grossly underrepresented in the classical music world, although the Ritz Chamber Players and the Sphinx Organization arose as a collective of musicians even though there is an assumption that most organizations automatically practice diversity today. However, the fact is that African-American and Latin-American musicians are still grossly underrepresented in the classical music world, although the Ritz Chamber Players and the Sphinx Organization arose as a result of this lack of opportunity. As of 2008 black members make up 2.4 percent of U.S. major orchestras, which is an increase from 1.14 percent in 1998. Historically Blacks and Latinos together have constituted 4 percent or less of major symphony orchestras in the United States. The Harlem Chamber Players provides opportunities for minority musicians who are underrepresented in this field and who mirror the Harlem community in addition to bringing programs to the neighborhood. The Washington Times reported in 2011 that “Billions of dollars in arts funding is serving a mostly white audience that is shrinking while only a small chunk of money goes to emerging arts groups that serve poorer communities that founder’s mother, Rose Player. The first time Terrance McKnight of WQXR attended the annual Black History Month Celebration in February 2010, he was so impressed by the down-to-earth atmosphere that he later remarked “it felt like home.” It is precisely this type of open warm and inviting community setting in addition to the efforts to present the most beautiful music in the chamber music repertoire that attracts people to the concerts.