

## Dalí Quartet

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### Dalí Quartet presents a warm Latin afternoon

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By David Patrick Stearns, Inquirer Music Critic

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With the tardy arrival of spring, the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society had to present a lot of indoor sunshine Sunday to lure people from the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art inside to Van Pelt Auditorium.

But the Dalí Quartet's Latin American program alternately glimmered and blazed. Longtime concertgoers might wonder whether Latino string quartets exist at all. Well, yes, though the beautifully prepared program was largely unfamiliar, except perhaps to jazz fans who know Paquito D'Rivera, represented by two short pieces.

Though the vast output of Heitor Villa-Lobos often seems like a daunting, uncharted rain forest, his *String Quartet No. 1* from 1915 was a confident if middleweight piece that, like Bach, looked to popular dances of his time (even Brazilian polkas) for a musical floor plan. But the heart of this six-movement work was subtitled "Melancholia" and boasted a muted cello solo, gorgeously phrased by Jesus Morales. How could such a work be neglected?

Two themes ran through the program, telegraphing the seriousness beneath the genial surfaces: Bach-like counterpoint with a Latin accent plus stories and painting projected in music - with a strong expressive impetus that made the pieces' mechanics secondary.

Juan Bautista Plaza's 1931 *Fuga Criolla* did not seem out to prove anything about the composer's prowess but simply rethought received techniques as the optimum vehicle for what he needed to say. Elsewhere, fugal moving parts became opportunities for juxtaposing opposed emotions. Efrain Amaya's 2000 *Angelica* had an easily grasped scenario about out-of-sync lovers, but you didn't need to know that to enjoy the purely musical narrative of this fine miniature.

The one piece that often lost me was Luis Enrique Juliá's *Quintet for Clarinet and Strings* (1998) with the Philadelphia Orchestra's Ricardo Morales. Each movement had an intriguing subtitle (Example: "Crystallized Nakedness") though the music has much off-putting crosscutting (just because Villa-Lobos did it doesn't mean that everybody should). The one entrancing movement was based on John Dowland's "Flow My Tears" with cello and viola recalling English 17th-century viol consorts. The final-movement clarinet flourishes showed how Morales can play simple, scalelike passages with great beauty and meaning.

Only at the end did it hit you: "Where's Astor Piazzolla?" That Argentine icon wasn't needed. But there was a fun nod to kitschy tango, *La Cumparsita*, whose lyrics speak of "the little parade of endless miseries." This concert was the opposite of that.

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[dstearns@phillynews.com](mailto:dstearns@phillynews.com)