

August 2013

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Morningside Heights Life

The key to your community



Making Music

Harlem Chamber Players Present Affordable Local Concerts

Morningside Heights Life

The key to your community

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The Harlem Chamber Players is a nonprofit group that brings classical music to Harlem and Morningside Heights. Left to right are: Maurice Belle and Anthony Morris, double basses.

Photo by Bob Curtis



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Photo by Eric Walton



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Photo courtesy Corbin Hill Farm



Do you want to contribute? We welcome your submissions.

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 classical music 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 Grecian Festival for flute, clarinet and strings, featuring flutist Lisa Arkis and clarinetist and founder Liz Player. The composer will be present at this concert. The finale of this concert will be the beloved masterpiece, Mendelssohn’s Octet in E-flat Major, Op. 20, for four violins, two violas and two cellos, featuring violinist Joyce Hammann, concertmaster of the longest running show on Broadway, Phantom of the Opera. This concert will

be hosted by Eric K. Washington, local journalist, historian and author of “Manhattanville: Old Heart of West Harlem.”

On Tuesday, Oct. 22, at 6 p.m. at St. Paul’s Chapel, located on the campus of Columbia University, Columbia University and The Harlem Chamber Players will present a concert of music by the African-American composer Ulysses Kay (1917 – 1995). Columbia University recently inherited a collection of journals, programs and more from the family of the composer, and this concert will be in conjunction with an announcement of this historic acquisition.

Next The Harlem Bach Project continues on Sunday, Nov. 17, at 3 p.m. back at St. Mary’s Episcopal Church, featuring violinist Ashley Horne, whom filmgoers might have seen in “Le Mozart Noir,” the PBS documentary of violinist and composer Chevalier de Saint George, as well as in Eddie Murphy’s “Coming to America.” Members of The Harlem Chamber Players will join in an accompany string orchestra. The Harlem Bach Project, conceived by associate director and clarinetist Carl Jackson, is an ongoing work in progress dedicated to bringing Bach’s most inspirational and soul-stirring works uptown to the Harlem community. The Harlem Chamber Players’ “Bach Unit” is an offshoot group solely dedicated to the music of J.S. Bach. The Harlem Chamber Players will continue to bring 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



While striving for excellence and cultural diversity, the organization’s goal is to make great music accessible and affordable. Pictured above is Monica Davis.

Photo by Bob Curtis

Terrance McKnight of WQXR. This event will feature “Calvary” 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 Makell.

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 Episcopal 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 collective 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 organizations, schools and cultural institutions.

The Harlem Chamber Players not only bring live chamber

Continued on next page



Pictured above are Liz Player, Harlem Chamber Players, founder, artistic director, clarinetist and Carl Jackson Harlem Chamber Players associate director, clarinetist.

Photo by Bob Curtis



Top photo: Ashley Horne, solo violin. Middle photo: Vita Wallace, violin; Eric K. Washington, host; Monica Davis, violin; Maurice Belle, double bass; Adam Hill, viola; Aundrey Mitchell, viola; Lawrence Zoernig, cello. Bottom photo: bassoonist Amy Fraser, cellist Melvin Greenwich, violinist Ashley Horne, Janet Wolfe. Photos by Bob Curtis

Continued from previous page

music to the Harlem community, but also create opportunities for classically trained musicians of color.

The organization brings the great works of the classical chamber music repertoire uptown to those in the community who love classical music as well as to those who might like to be exposed to and enjoy live chamber music for the first time. The group's work goes hand in hand with the rich cultural landscape of Harlem, which includes jazz, dance, theater, literature, the visual arts, contemporary pop culture and so much more. While striving for musical excellence and cultural diversity, the group's goal is to make great music accessible and affordable in a variety of unique and intimate urban settings—whether it be in churches, schools, libraries or other public or private venues. By presenting memorable concerts for audiences and by engaging in educational outreach activities in schools and other venues, The Harlem Chamber Players reaches a diverse audience, young and old, who will hopefully become engaged in and inspired by this enriching and uplifting musical art form.

Home Base

The Harlem Chamber Player's home base is at the intimate and historic St. Mary's Episcopal Church of Manhattanville. This an all-inclusive church with an eclectic congregation of career professionals, scientists, political activists, artists and people of all backgrounds and races. Established in 1823, St. Mary's Episcopal Church is among the oldest churches in Harlem. For more than 180 years St. Mary's Church has been an important part of the West Harlem community, inspiring

and responding to the needs of its people. St. Mary's Church calls itself the "Do not be afraid" church, standing up as a community of faith to pursue justice and peace for the poor and oppressed, to pray for those at risk, and to put into practice the message of the Gospel.

The home base of the Harlem Chamber Players is the intimate and historic St. Mary's Episcopal Church of Manhattanville.

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

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 Cohn's A 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 Concert. The Harlem Bach Project continues with this live performance, which will feature the Bach Concerto for

oboe and violin and more.

- **Feb. 9, 2014** – 6th Annual Black History Month Celebration. This eclectic celebration will feature Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson's Calvary Quartet and the Ravel String Quartet.
- **Spring 2014** - The Harlem Chamber Players join Opera Ebony in presenting a concert featuring the Mozart Requiem.
- **April 1, 2014** - The Harlem Chamber Players join the NYC Housing Symphony Orchestra in celebrating founder Janet Wolfe's 100th birthday at Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall.
- **May 2014** – Spring Finale Concert. Program to be announced.



Ashley Horne, solo violin; Maurice Belle, double bass; Adam Hill, viola; Aundrey Mitchell, viola; Lawrence Zoernig, cello; Amadi Azikiwe, conductor. Photo by Bob Curtis

- **June 2014** – Members of The Harlem Chamber players will give a free community outreach concert featuring Mozart's "Gran" Partita.

For updated information, see harlemchamberplayers.org.
– compiled by Marilyn Holstein

\$15

The general admission price for all "Music at St. Mary's" concerts is \$15. \$10 for students and seniors.

THE HARLEM BACH PROJECT

• **The Harlem Bach Project:** Music for the Soul and for the Spirit is a work in progress dedicated to bringing Bach's most inspirational works uptown to the Harlem community. The Harlem Chamber Players' "Bach Unit" is an offshoot group solely dedicated to the music of J.S. Bach. The plan is to bring Bach's greatest works to various venues (indoors and out) throughout the

Harlem community and beyond.

This latest initiative was conceived by associate director and clarinetist, Carl Jackson, who is an avid Bach aficionado. Jackson has transcribed more than 90 works by J.S. Bach for two clarinets and double bass/bassoon/bass clarinet in two volumes. These will soon be available for purchase on bigbachbook.com.

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 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.



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

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 arena. Black and Latino groups such as Imani Winds, 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 wealthy, white audience that is shrinking while only a small chunk of money goes to emerging art groups that serve poorer communities that are more ethnically diverse." This article also pointed out that attendance at these traditionally well-funded institutions is declining while more people are showing interest in community-based groups.

While the organization is committed to maintaining a multi-ethnic roster of musicians, they have been attracting a diverse audience as well. When the chamber music series first started, the founders had no idea how this undertaking would resonate with the Harlem community that is already rich with culture. It was very important for the founders to create a down-to-earth community environment that would be welcoming

to everyone in the neighborhood regardless of their background. After every concert at St. Mary's Church, the group has a "Meet the Artists" wine and cheese reception, supplemented with fried chicken, potato salad and Korean noodles proudly provided by the 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 openly 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.

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