

## Dalí Quartet

### San Jose Chamber Music Society

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### Dalí Quartet with Clarinetist Ricardo Morales

#### Peninsula Reviews

By Roger Emanuels

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Opening the season of the San Jose Chamber Music Society at the Trianon Theater in San Jose, the Dalí Quartet presented a spirited program of European classics and Latin American works for string quartet. The Dalí has devoted its efforts to introduce music of Latin America that is seldom found on concert programs while pursuing the classical traditions.

Spanish composer Joaquín Turina composed his *Oración del Torero* (Bullfighter's Prayer) in 1925 for a quartet of lutes, but the versions for string quartet and for string orchestra are performed these days. The work is an impressionistic description of the bullfight arena in Madrid as the *torero* (bullfighter) prepares himself and his soul for the event. Opening tremolando, or with rapid and short bow strokes, the Dalí created lush waves of sound. Often played by a string orchestra with

double bass, the string quartet version provides a more intimate setting for the story. The Dalí took advantage of this by emphasizing the rhythmic accents, infusing the performance with energy worthy of Spanish spirit.

The Quintet for clarinet and string quartet K.581 is a gem among many in Mozart's chamber music, and this performance delivered with excellence of expression and ensemble.

Clarinetist Ricardo Morales holds the principal chair in the Philadelphia Orchestra and also had the same position at the Metropolitan Opera for many years. His brother is the cellist of the Dalí Quartet, Jesus Morales, and they are from the remarkable Morales family of Puerto Rico. Along with four other siblings, all are distinguished musicians. Ricardo has worked with instrument makers to improve the mechanism and design of the clarinet. He has been a leading figure for many years, as evidenced by a large number of clarinet players in the audience who

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consider Morales a model of elegant and beautiful playing. This was a rare opportunity to see and hear this highly respected musician.

The Quintet is a late work of Mozart that distributes the activity equally among the instruments, rather than an emphasis on the first violin as in earlier works. This well-balanced and blended performance was further enhanced by the lovely acoustics of the Trianon Theater, the finest small performance space in the county and beyond. A great challenge for the clarinet in this piece is to rapidly run up and down scales and arpeggios without a break between registers, and so it was gratifying to hear seamless passagework from Morales. Another fine point is that he is able to create expressive phrasing without distorting the rhythm with uncharacteristic rubato.

The Latin American part of the program included composers from Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina and Cuba. Efraín Amaya's *Angelica* has become a signature piece for the Dalí, a lively and well-developed composition that incorporates characteristic dance rhythms of Venezuela and colorful sounds including snap pizzicato in the cello. This is a way to pluck the string with a percussive sound and was first used in the string quartets of Bartok.

Heitor Villa-Lobos was the most recognized composer of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Latin America and probably the most prolific. His interest in his native Brazilian culture led him to draw on European, African and indigenous sources for his music. Having spent many years in Paris, his early style reflects much of what he heard there in the 1920s. The String Quartet No. 1 from 1915 and revised in 1946 has a more French sound than Brazilian.

The six short movements reflect a variety of fast and slow movements. The character of each movement was clearly presented, even eliciting giggles from the audience after the *Brincadeira* (Joke) movement. Violist Adriana Linares opened the third movement with glowing warmth in the slow and tender melodies. Cellist Morales played the *Melancolia* with expressive vocal style in this impressionistic movement. The work concludes with a fugue, not unusual in this composer's work, as he had great respect for the music of J.S. Bach, the greatest fugue composer. The balance here was superb and each line was clearly heard.

It was a surprise to see a song by Carlos Gardel on the program. Active in the 1920s and 30s, Gardel was born in France but moved to Buenos Aires

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where he became the most prominent figure in the history of Argentine tango. The arrangement of Gardel's *El Día que me Quieras* (The day that you love me) was very effective and tasteful, played with controlled sentimentality, and appropriate saucy or cheeky style.

The *danzón* evolved from European and African elements to become the official musical genre and dance in Cuba. Abelardo Valdés was a Cuban dance bandleader and composed *Danzón Almendra* in 1938. The arrangement for string quartet was very appropriate and was played with character. The concert came to a lively close with a wonderful arrangement of Paquito D'Rivera's *Prelude and Merengue* for clarinet and string quartet. D'Rivera is a composer and performer who escapes labels and excels in different genres. The musicians are comfortable with typical Latin and jazz rhythms, and the improvised solos in the clarinet were played with ease and beautiful sound. Especially effective were the percussive sounds in the violin that were first used by Astor Piazzolla in his compositions.

The very familiar *La cumparsita* was played as an encore, in an arrangement of the 1916 tango by Uruguayan composer Girardo Matos

Rodríguez. Another signature piece of the Dalí Quartet, it leaves the audience almost dancing in the aisles. San Jose Chamber Music Society presents six concerts by national and international artists. The second in the series brings a return of Imani Winds on November 15, and will be joined by pianist Jon Nakamatsu in Mozart's Quintet for piano and winds.

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