

PERFORMING ARTS

Monday, October 13, 2003; Page C05

Imani Winds At the Clarice Smith Center

Imani Winds is a group on a mission. Its goal is nothing less than to change the face -- literally -- of the classical wind quintet.

"We are people you don't normally see playing this music," bassoonist Monica Ellis said Friday night at their Clarice Smith Center performance, explaining that it was Imani flutist Valerie Coleman's brainchild to assemble a "quintet of musicians of color."

Another Imani tenet is to bring music of African and Latin roots into the quintet repertoire. Conveniently, two Imani members are also composers. Horn player Jeff Scott's

"Homage to Duke" was a densely textured celebration of Ellington's "Come Sunday," while Coleman's "Steal Away" blended instruments orchestrally for a deep meditation on the traditional spiritual.

The longest piece, but not necessarily the meatiest, was Miguel del Aguila's Wind Quintet No. 2. The Mexican composer employs extended techniques -- blowing over mouthpieces, vocalizing, offstage playing -- to achieve cinematic effects. Opening with ritual-like chants, hummed under a flute melody, the quintet morphed into a rum-soaked calypso bar, a subterranean cavern of ghostly wails, and a Moroccan market buzzing with fluttering arpeggios (impressive in Toyin Spellman's oboe and Mariam Adam's clarinet). The performance, and the composition, stirring as they were, had a few rough edges.

Imani Winds also made room for what's been called "dead-white-guy" repertoire: a crisp performance of Alexander Zemlinsky's "Humoresque," and John Cage's Music for Wind Instruments in which the group (at the composer's instruction) attacked the notes mechanically, like a percussion ensemble.

Classical music has been stubbornly resistant to an increasingly multicultural world. Imani Winds represents nothing less than the future of the once-quaint notion of the wind quintet.

-- Tom Huizenga



The quintet Imani Winds, which specializes in classical music with African and Latin roots. (Jeffrey Horstein)