

Music School Founder Says Imani Winds' Musical Diversity Helps Study Classical Instruments

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Music school founder Brian Eliason is encouraging music students to emulate Imani Winds penchant for blending classical music with world music and jazz.

To learn more about Eliason School of Music, click here.

"Imani Winds' eclecticism breaks the mold of the classical music ensemble," said Eliason. "They show how classical music instruments can be utilized in so many ways."

Imani Winds is the resident ensemble of Portland classical music presenter Chamber Music Northwest. They will hold a series of concerts, dance performances and educational and outreach programs next week.

Two of Imani's upcoming concerts will be held in Oregon Museum of Science and Industry's Kendall Planetarium. In Portland, the ensemble is appearing with Bravo Youth Orchestras and Portland Youth Philharmonic, at two schools and at p:ear, a nonprofit serving homeless youth, as part of an initiative to share chamber music with young musicians.

Imani Winds is composed of bassoonist Monica Ellis, hornist Jeff Scott, flutist/composer Valerie Coleman, oboist Toyin Spellman-Diaz and clarinetist Mark Dover will appear at Chamber Music Northwest's annual summer festival.

Since Imani Winds' founding in 1997, it has cultivated a diverse and enthusiastic audience. The musicians' skill plays the biggest role, of course -- they're among the finest of all chamber ensembles -- but their refreshingly un-canned stage presence and their audience-conscious programming encourage broader listenership than at most classical concerts.

Imani Winds has worked with jazz musicians like Jason Moran, Wayne Shorter and Edward Simon and world music performers like Simon Shaheen and Paquito D'Rivera, and other non-classical composers. They also Imani Winds join forces with Portland dance company BodyVox.

The OMSI concerts and another at Hillsboro's Walters Cultural Arts Center display Imani's celebrated eclecticism. There's an arrangement of a popular classic -- this time Gustav Holst's "The Planets" -- and a pair of contemporary works. Miguel del Aguila's whirling four-movement "Wind Quintet No. 2" employs percussive and other unusual techniques yet remain as tuneful as the Seattle composer's other music. Reena Esmail's "The Light Is the Same," based on the Sufi poetry of Rumi, uses Indian scales and rhythmic devices. It emerged from Imani's Legacy Commissioning Project, which has spawned 20 works so far.

"That's what Imani Winds is most proud of," Spellman-Diaz says, "expanding the repertoire by adding new sounds."

Imani is also working to widen its audience through outreach and education programs, its annual chamber music festival and other residencies and appearances.

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Eliason School of Music

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