

# A marathon of opera in Mount Vernon

This past weekend, I was able to hear a concert of chamber music in West Harlem and an operatic marathon in Mt. Vernon featuring Black and other minority artists, as well as many of the big names who appear downtown in such venues as Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts.

On Friday evening, the final event in the Music at St. Mary's summer concert series took place in the lovely sanctuary of St. Mary's Episcopal Church at 521 West 126 Street. The program was devoted to works for woodwinds by Milhaud, Miles Davis/Olin, William Grant Still/Lesnicks, Gershwin/Skir-

row and Dvorak, the latter, adding cejjo and double bass.

Of special interest was the world premiere of an



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arrangement for woodwind quintet by Tom Olin of Miles Davis' "So What." Yes, the classically trained players could really "swing." Other novelties included Still's "Folk Suite No. 4," arranged by Adam Lesnick, and "Scenes from Porgy and Bess," arranged for wind

octet by Andrew Skirrow.

Milhaud's "Le Cheminee du Roi Rene" and Dvorak's "Serenade in D minor" (Opus 44) were played lovingly by the absolutely first-rate wind players, assisted in the latter work by cellist Seth Woods and double bassist Robert Anthony Bellamy. A large audience rewarded the ensemble with a well-deserved standing ovation.

The wind players who participated in this concert included Liz Player, Lisa Arkis, Megan Weiss-Maroff, Marshall Sealy, Amy Fraser, Dana Frobig, Christa Long, Deryck Clarke, David Miller, Maria Fulgieri and Jeff Wilday. This event was a fitting climax to the Music at St. Mary's summer concert

series.

On Saturday evening, Opera Noire of New York offered an alfresco concert that included opera, Broadway and African-American religious folksongs on Roosevelt Square in Mt. Vernon as part of the 2008 Summer Breeze Concert Series. It attracted a large and very enthusiastic audience.

The operatic material included works by Puccini, Mozart, Donizetti, Bizet and Delibes, sung in Italian and French. The Broadway section included works by "Fats" Waller, Gershwin, Kern, Bernstein, Arlen and Flaherty. The spirituals were arranged by Florence Price, Craig Bohmler and Hall Johnson.

I doubt if one could hear bet-

ter performances of this material anywhere. The artists included Noah Stewart, Shannon De Vine, Audrey DuBois, Marti Newland, Barry Robinson, Robert Mack, Mae Carrington, Melissa Cintron-Gabriel, La Toya Lain, Sabrina Carten and Taiwan Norris. Jennifer Peterson provided excellent support at the piano.

Opera Noire of New York was founded by Robert Mack, Barron-Coleman and Kenneth Overton to provide a place where outstanding African-American singers could network and to utilize their professional resources to strengthen and facilitate a distinguished and prolific operatic career. The program is now in its third year.