

## IN PERFORMANCE

### CLASSICAL MUSIC

#### Virtues of Persistence, Persistently Applied

Juilliard Orchestra  
Juilliard Theater

Richard Wernick's music, which once appeared a reconciliation of modernism with the mainstream, now seems positively defiant in standing up for dissonant chords and melodies that have no obvious tonal home. Monday night's first performance of his Second Cello Concerto, at the Juilliard Theater, brought out the virtues of persistence.

The work was commissioned by Mstislav Rostropovich, but no performance ensued. Joel Krosnick had the honor, and the challenge, of this premiere. The challenge he answered consummately, filling the often declamatory solo part with persuasive intensity, closely observant phrasing and aptness of color. Alongside him, his longstanding Juilliard Quartet colleague Robert Mann conducted the Juilliard Orchestra in a beautiful and vivid performance.

The orchestra's role in this concert is generally secondary to the cello's strains of recitative and song. An exception comes right at the start, where a furious outburst of snap pizzicatos from the orchestral cellos pushes the soloist into action. More characteristic of the orchestration are gentle solo phrases and harmonic underpinning from small ensembles, finely imagined. (A combination of low flutes and vibraphone produced one lustrous effect.)

Toward the end, strings with flutes and piccolo come forward with a tune. It is as if the cello is being maneuvered into a quiet close, and a bed of soft harmonies is prepared for

it by wind instruments. But it leaps away to end the work impulsively with a defense of the individual voice, a defense the piece was making all along. *PAUL GRIFFITHS*

### WORLD MUSIC

#### A Sicilian Group With Medieval Sounds

Al Qantarrah  
Washington Square Church

One of Sicily's most popular traditional songs, "Abballati," has a twin in Persian folklore, a tune called "Parandoush." Wherever it originated, it is a musical souvenir of Sicily's many visitors, conquerors and settlers through the centuries: Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Normans. The song, in both its versions, is central to the repertory of Al Qantarrah ("bridge" in Arabic), a Sicilian group. It performed medieval music at the Washington Square Church on Friday night in a sold-out World Music Institute concert.

Like some other early-music researchers, Al Qantarrah has concluded that European and Arabic music had no distinct boundaries. The six-member group deliberately combines far-flung instruments: a Provençal fiddle (the *vielle*) with an Arabic oud; a *symphonia*, or hurdy-gurdy, with Persian lutes, *tar* and *setar*. Farzaneh Joorabchi played the Persian *tar* and sang in a quavery, gruff-edged Persian style; Roberto Bolelli sang with the reedy purity of a European monk. There was no amplification.

Most of the program was drawn from a collection of traditional songs and a 12th-century manuscript of sacred music, and appears on Al Qantarrah's album, "Abballati, Abballati" (Fonè, Italy). There were vigor-



Mitsuyuki Ito

Robert Mann conducting the Juilliard Orchestra in Richard Wernick's Second Cello Concerto.

ous carnival songs and liturgical songs in austere parallel harmony, as well as one of the earliest surviving fragments of vocal polyphony. The music glimpsed an old world that was anything but provincial.

*JON PARELES*

### DANCE

#### A Family Affair Of Flying Feet

Dance Theater of Harlem  
City Center

The Friday night performance by Dance Theater of Harlem at City Center became a family reunion, featuring former members of the company, among them Virginia Johnson, who danced with the troupe from its founding in 1969 until 1997. She appeared in Billy Wilson's "Ginastera." Although the ballet is a choreographically amorphous suite, its epi-

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OFF THE WALL