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SPOTLIGHT

Classical new wave Kronos shuns formality in favor of avant-garde

By Nathan Deer
Emerald Contributor

The four members of the Kronos Quartet are not your average, staid classical musicians. They don't dress like classical musicians; they don't sound like them.

In one concert they performed James Brown's "Sex Machine" accompanied by an eight-foot tall singing robot. Before a San Francisco Giants baseball game, they performed a soul version of "The Star Spangled Banner."

Their dress is equally outrageous. They have sported clothes wired for sound so that the movement of their zippers, neckties, epaulettes and a balloon head dress provided a comic musical counterpoint to the piece they performed. More often than not, they appear in concert dressed more like punk rockers or space explorers than classical musicians. The quartet members eschew formal dress. They'd rather wear garb reminiscent of beatniks or medieval peasants.

Such offbeat and unconventional aspects have attracted fans who ordinarily aren't interested in classical music. The quartet, which is scheduled to perform at the Hult Center at 7:30 p.m. both Friday and Sunday, performs an eclectic program at its concerts. The repertoire ranges from classical pieces by such renowned contemporary composers as John Cage and Philip Glass, to the be-bop melodies of Thelonious Monk and arrangements of television theme songs, such as "I Love Lucy" and "The Flintstones."

Such incongruity has delighted critics as well. The Kronos Quartet has received accolades from critics across the country who applaud its avant garde sophistication and its performing panache.

The Kronos Quartet (named after the Greek god of time) is composed of David Harrington, lead violinist and founder; John Serba, violinist; Hank Dutt, violist; and Joan Jeanreneaude, cellist. Presently based in San Francisco, Harrington formed the quartet in 1973 in Seattle. Serba, Dutt and Jeanreneaude joined in 1978 when Harrington moved to the Bay Area.

When first formed, the members of The Kronos Quartet were not so hip. They dressed like most classical musicians. They still played almost exclusively avant-garde and modernist classical pieces. But five years ago, the quartet members decided that if they broke some classical conventions, they could enlarge their audience without sacrificing their musical integrity. So the group donned bright T-shirts, gaudy scarves and shades, and posed for publicity shots in black leather. And it worked.

The program for Friday's concert includes pieces by Riley, Witold Lutoslawski and Alfred Schnittke. Sunday's concert features work by Glass, Charles Ives, Bella Bartok and jazz composers.

Tickets are on sale at the Hult Center and its outlets and are \$14, \$12 and \$10, with a limited number of student and senior tickets available at a 35 percent discount.



The Kronos Quartet is scheduled to perform its new wave classical and jazz music at 7:30 p.m. Friday and Sunday in the Hult Center.

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Inventive jazz vocalist set to perform at Hult

By D. M. Holiman
Emerald Contributor

Bobby McFerrin is more than just a talented vocalist. He's one of the most versatile and inventive musical performers working today, according to Bob Johnson, a San Francisco disc jockey and fan.

"He's undoubtedly one of the more unique vocalists I have ever heard," Johnson said. "His range is impressive; his composure on stage is amazing; his improvisational ability is astounding. But what really makes him such a dynamite performer is his ability to communicate the idea that he's having a great deal of fun."

McFerrin, who performs at 8 p.m. Friday in the Hult Center's Silva Concert Hall, comes from a musical family. Both his parents are classically trained opera singers. His sister, who resides in Los Angeles, is a part-time singer.

"Bobby started studying music theory when he was six," Johnson said. "He's extremely well-trained in the theory of music. But what's special about him is his ability to fuse the principles of music with his own zest for singing and performing. He's more than just a singer or a vocalist; he's a consummate professional."

In high school McFerrin concentrated on piano and formed a quartet that played faithful imitations of songs by Sergio Mendes and Henry Mancini. In 1970, however, his musical direction took a severe turn. After hearing Miles Davis' seminal fusion album, "Bitches Brew," McFerrin decided to perform spontaneous solo vocal concerts, a sort of vocal equivalent to the jamming done by jazz artists like Davis in their concerts.

"Bobby's talent is in his improvisational ability," Johnson said. "He has an uncanny ability to create fascinating vocal sounds within a matter of minutes."

In 1979, McFerrin moved to San Francisco where he teamed up with the legendary jazz vocalist Jon Hendricks and his

band. Linda Goldstein, a former jazz singer, became his manager and produced McFerrin's three albums.

McFerrin has attracted considerable attention from not only critics but also from other celebrities. Bill Cosby attended a McFerrin concert and helped him get bookings in Las Vegas and at the 1980 Playboy Jazz Festival in Los Angeles. McFerrin went on to make a show-stopping appearance on a program called "The Art of Jazz Singing" at Avery Fisher Hall in New York.

In 1986 McFerrin gained industry recognition for his talent, when he won the Grammy Awards for Best Male Jazz Vocalist and Best Vocal Arranger for his work on the track "Another Night in Tunisia" from the Manhattan Transfer's "Vocalese" album.

McFerrin has also worked in films. As a boy he dubbed Sidney Poitier's voice in the film version of "Porgy and Bess." Last year he sang the opening and closing themes of Bertrand Tavernier's film "Round Midnight."



Bobby McFerrin, who specializes in spontaneous song, will be performing at 8 p.m. Friday at the Hult Center.

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