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CONCERTS

NEW YORK

Brian Wise's month spanned a mixed array of concerts, from a 9/11 commemoration to solo Bach

If there's one memorable sound in WTC 9/11, Steve Reich's latest work written for the **Kronos Quartet**, it may be the beeping tone the phone company torments us with when we leave a landline off the hook. But what's usually just annoying becomes more unsettling in the context of this three-movement piece, which received its New York premiere at Carnegie Hall on 30 April. It was part of a 75th-birthday concert dedicated entirely to the composer's music.

As Reich discussed in the April issue of *The Strad*, the theme of the work is the destruction of the World Trade Center in the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The beeping tone alludes to the fact that Reich's son, granddaughter and daughter-in-law were all living in his apartment four blocks from the towers that day, and they kept a phone connection open with the composer for

six hours. Violinist David Harrington opens by sawing on a repeated F, doubling the warning beep. The piece then moves quickly onward through a procession of sampled lines taken from the voices of fire department workers, air traffic controllers and neighbourhood residents.

At 15 minutes, WTC 9/11 is not a grandly scaled requiem like John Adams's *On the Transmigration of Souls*, but a hectic clash of conflicting emotions and reactions to the attack. As for Kronos, it plays a largely textural role, particularly as the live audio mix at this performance placed the taped sounds in the foreground. Still, the piece's almost documentary-style soundscape carries plenty of impact on its own.

The **Orchestra of St Luke's** ended its spring season with 'Bohemian Rhapsodies', a chamber programme that focused on unabashedly steamy Romanticism. First up was Mahler's single-movement Piano Quartet in A minor, written when the composer was 16. So much is said in this work without any real resolution, yet the ensemble, led by violinist Naoko Tanaka,

dived fearlessly into the maelstrom, the four musicians spinning an impassioned and at times elegiac story.

Because of its unusual scoring, Arensky's seldom-heard Quartet no.2 for violin, viola and two cellos was the most interesting offering here. The performance by Tanaka, violist David Cerutti and cellists Myron Lutzke and Daire FitzGerald, had fleeting moments of shrillness, but for the most part the players blended well and gave the music a warm, carefully shaped performance. Schumann's Piano Quartet, which completed the concert, enjoyed a vigorous give and take.

New York's **Momenta Quartet** frequently specialises in works that cross cultural boundaries, and for an appearance at the Museum of Chinese in America (13 May) the focus was five recent works by the under-50 generation of Asian composers. Up first was Melissa Hui's *Map of Reality*, a quiet, airy piece containing no notation – just a set of written instructions that called for some whispers and other spoken sounds. The Momenta players brought delicacy and understated confidence to that, as well as to Chon Kee Yong's *Silence Cosmos* and Yun Yong, two works focusing on nature and the universe.

The players picked up tiny bells, which they rang and occasionally played with their bows in Huang Ruo's *The Flag Project*, a colourful piece that was inspired by Buddhist prayer flags. The most readily appealing work of the night was Jason Kao Hwang's *If We Live in Forgetfulness, We Die in a Dream*, which had moments of Berg-like rumination and a lush, arching climax. It suited the Momenta too, and the musicians played with a burnished tone and judicious vibrato.

A more traditional Chinese focus came when the **Shanghai Quartet** arrived at Bargemusic on 21 May. Mozart's 'Hunt' Quartet in B flat major K458 requires an



Impact: the Kronos Quartet with Steve Reich (seated left)