

String Quartet No. 9 Reviewed by Lawrence Budmen

A strikingly beautiful, emotionally probing new string quartet received its première on 26 August 2008 by the stellar Amernet String Quartet at the intimate auditorium of the Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts. Stephen Dankner is a prolific composer whose catalogue includes numerous orchestral and chamber music scores. Dankner has been composer-in-residence for the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra in New Orleans and is a faculty member at Williams College. His String Quartet No 9 is both lyrically effusive and astringent; a skillful confection of modernist techniques tempered by an outpouring of lyrical melodies in the vein of Samuel Barber.

High drama pervades Dankner's elongated opening *Allegro molto appassionato*. The Gallic spirit of Ravel infuses the elegantly tailored *Tempo di valse lent*. A lively *Vivace* (third movement) is enchantingly light as a feather. None of the preceding movements prepares the listener for the moving, autumnally sad *Adagio* finale. Dankner has fashioned music of tremendous strength and emotional power. The composer was present to acknowledge the audience's enthusiastic response.

The Amernet Quartet (resident ensemble at Miami's Florida International University and former faculty quartet in residence at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music) has played many of Dankner's chamber music scores. Their intense, smoothly coordinated performance was a composer's dream.