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MUSIC REVIEW

MIRÓ QUARTET At Weill Recital Hall

By Steve Smith
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All-American concert programs are commonplace, but the Miró Quartet, an adventurous group based at the University of Texas in Austin, took liberties in defining the term on Friday night at Weill Recital Hall. Alongside pieces by native composers, it offered Dvorak's String Quartet No. 12, called "American" not only because Dvorak wrote it in Spillville, Iowa, but also because he drew inspiration from what he heard during his American sojourn of the early 1890s.

Dvorak's quaint melodies and jolly dances could easily have originated in Eastern Europe, but the music does seem to evoke the mix of pluck, play and piety Dvorak observed in the United States. A rougher vision of the American spirit was demonstrated with Ives's String Quartet No. 1 ("From the Salvation Army"), a shaggy concatenation of Protestant hymn tunes, based on organ improvisations from Ives's undergraduate years at Yale.

In the opening section of Kevin Puts's "Credo," a 2007 work heard in its New York premiere, snatches of Bach, Sibelius and Prokofiev surface amid tuning sounds and finger exercises. Commissioned to produce a work, as Mr. Puts said, "exploring the lighter side of America" during a time of war and crisis, he focused on everyday inspirations: a Westchester County violin shop, urban infrastructure and the sight of a neighbor teaching her daughter to dance. An 18-minute sequence of misty ruminations and Minimalist-derived bustle, "Credo" mixed Dvorak's polish with Ives's quirky individuality.

Throughout, the Miró Quartet played with explosive vigor and technical finesse. Its encore, well earned, was a silky medley of Jerome Kern's "Yesterdays" and "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes."