

Benjamin Hochman

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Moody Scores, Fueled With Fire

By ALLAN KOZINN

The Jerusalem Quartet opened its concert at the 92nd Street Y on Saturday evening with an American work, the Barber String Quartet (Op. 11), and filled out the first half of the program with a recent score by Avner Dorman, a 31-year-old Israeli composer who has been turning up on programs frequently.

One thing the Barber and Dorman scores share, at least in their opening pages, is a vigorous, dark quality. That seems to suit these players, who are at their best when the music demands that they dig in and produce an assertive, tactile sound.

In the Barber the opening movement, and its echo at the end, had an unusually brisk, fiery reading that gave the music an edge not often associated with Barber. By contrast in the famous Adagio the quartet took a more conventional approach, using a warm tone to compensate for the comparatively astringent textures of a movement now best known in its lush orchestral version.

Mr. Dorman, who is completing his doctorate at the Juilliard School, writes in an eclectic, essentially neo-Romantic style that combines strik-

ing melodies, free dissonance and occasional effects (tapping on the instruments for example) to create picturesque textures.

The outer movements of his String Quartet No. 2, "Mirage" (2004), evoke the Israeli desert, with a "Prayer for the Innocents" as the haunting slow movement between them. The score's most arresting moments are in its finale, "Ruchot," in which hard-driven counterpoint and rapid bowing, offset by calmer moments, describe the changeable desert winds.

After the intermission, the ensemble was joined by Benjamin Hochman, an Israeli pianist, for the Brahms Quintet in F minor (Op. 34). As in the Barber and Dorman works, the playing had about as much energy as the music could sustain, but with room for gracefully introspective passages as well. The quartet and Mr. Hochman, who work together regularly, played with unity and precision, and produced a memorably heated, electrifying sound in the opening movement and the Scherzo.

