

ORION STRING QUARTET

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By Stephen Brookes

**The Orion Quartet**

Any doubts that romanticism still stirs in the modern composer's breast were put to rest at the Library of Congress on Thursday night, when the Orion Quartet and clarinetist David Krakauer turned in a performance of David Del Tredici's "Magyar Madness" that nearly outdid Schubert in lush, sweeping expressiveness.

In fact, the last movement of this engaging new work directly channeled Schubert's own "Divertissement la Hongroise" and gave Krakauer (for whom it was written) a chance to display the technique he's developed as both a classical player and specialist in klezmer music. It's a tour de force that explores every color of the clarinet and then some, with colorful and often antic writing that builds into what the composer describes as "a goulash of musical frenzy." And while the piece is

no stroll in the park -- it clocks in at roughly 40 very intense minutes -- it's so imaginative and unabashedly lyrical that you can't help but be swept up in it: a superb new work, performed with commitment and striking intelligence.

Krakauer and the Orion also shone in Osvaldo Golijov's dark, otherworldly "K'vakarat," exploring its delicate mysteries with a sense of almost religious possession. And although Haydn's String Quartet, Op. 74 No. 1 (which opened the program), just trundled along blandly before clicking into focus in the last movement, the Orion turned in a full-blooded account of Beethoven's String Quartet, Op. 59 No. 3, that was, in a word, stunning. For those who love these "Razumovsky" quartets beyond all sane measure (call me -- let's talk), it was virtually a peak experience.

