

Lawrence Budmen Music News

Is **Stephen Dankner** the most underrated composer in America today? A resident of the Berkshires, Dankner is a prolific creative artist with a large catalogue of chamber music, solo and orchestral works. His musical voice is highly distinctive. While many compositional influences of the past century find space in Dankner's oeuvre, his music speaks in original modes. The lyricism of his String Quartet No.9 (heard at its premiere in Williamstown last summer) is deeply affecting; an emotional catharsis of beauty and poignancy. The superb **Amernet String Quartet** has been his collaborator of choice in most of his chamber works. On January 6, 2009, the Amernet players concluded their string seminar at Miami's Florida International University (where they are quartet in residence) with a gala concert featuring Dankner's Cello Quintet – *fun unser miolin zu Gotts oiren*. Originally commissioned by stellar Israeli born cellist **Yehuda Hanani** for his Close Encounters with Music series in the Berkshires, the quintet channels klezmer influences through the sensibility of Janacek or Kodaly – vibrantly mixing indigenous World Music and folk influences with modernist classicism. Vigorous rhythms, yearning melodies, astringent textures, foot stomping shouts of Hey! by the five musicians all combine for a heady, joyous musical brew. Beneath the music's festive aura, Dankner's mastery of instrumental timbres and formal rigor shine with abundant panache. Hanani (Professor at the University Of Cincinnati College Conservatory Of Music) joined the Amernet foursome for a performance rich in zesty panache and subtly haunting colors. Hanani's effervescent musicianship was contagious in a rendition both fiery and mellow.