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**TimeOut**  
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## Music: Classical & Opera

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### Roots music

#### Classical players pitch in for a pretty park.

By Marc Geelhoed

Classical ensembles struggle with fund-raising as much as they do rehearsing, so it's a little surprising that the Wicker Park Garden Club is tapping them for their fund-raising potential. The Club, looking for cash for new benches and amenities to spruce up the park, has held two concerts so far. This Sunday 13, the Fifth House Ensemble will perform chamber music to attract parkgoers to WPGC's park-improvement project, and another concert is planned for late September. You can either look at it as the latest sign of Wicker Park's gentrification, or as something that naturally appeals to Wicker Parkers. Doug Wood, of the WPGC, takes the second perspective.



WINSOME FOURSOME The Symphony Sounds String Quartet (from left Bernardo Arias, Sorah Myung, Nikki Shorts and Nazar Dzhurnyn) played to benefit Wicker Park in June.

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Wood, a Wicker Park resident, works at Northwestern University as a molecular biologist and studied music composition at the University of Iowa. "I did science to keep my family happy," he says, but his passion was music and the arts. He believes the people who moved into the neighborhood in the '70s are his demographic. "They go to the symphony, they go to the opera," he says. The young people who have colonized Wicker Park since the 1990s are the newbies. While they help define the neighborhood, they aren't the entire population. Wood's main goal had been the restoration of the park's Victorian-era fountain, which was completed in 2002. Since then, he's worked on making the park appear to be "composed together." While the fountain was finished, "everything around it was a disaster," he says. "That's why we need benches." He's raising funds for seating to complement the fountain's period style. Enter classical music, which conveniently existed in the Victorian era and can also reflect it.

Wood included Schubert and Dvorak in the first two concerts by other ensembles, which were held earlier in the summer. Schubert died in 1828, one decade before the Victorian era kicked in, and the Fifth Housers will perform woodwind music from the early 20th century, which is also just outside the era, but close enough. Few concertgoers will make such fine distinctions.

Since the park lacks a stage, Wood has had to be innovative to create a place where music can be heard. The musicians use the back of the park's field house and face west toward Damen Avenue. "People are walking by, some of them with babies, and they'll stay for ten minutes or as long as the babies are with it," Wood says. The residents of a retirement home on the other side of Damen also appreciate the music. "You have all the old Polish people [who don't speak ] English but they'll hug you and say, 'Schubert, Schubert!,' like they're totally grooving on it," he says appreciatively.

Melissa Snoza, the Fifth House Ensemble's executive director and flutist, isn't fazed by such an arrangement. "We're used to playing in very strange places," she says, and mentions relationships with Children's Memorial Hospital, the Chicago Photography Center and CircEsteem, a group that builds kids' self-esteem through circus exercises. An outdoor concert in a park is comparably tame. Since Snoza knew of the WPGC's efforts to renovate the existing structures, she looked for music that "mixed old and new." By looking back to the turn of the century, she found Hindemith and the French works, and settled on Barber's *Summer Music* and Eric Ewazen's *Roaring Fork* to represent the new. "It's been my dream to do *Summer Music* outside," she says.

So far, Wood says he's handed out about 500 flyers at each concert and thinks residents are happy someone's trying to spruce things up. "They tell me they really like it, so they'll give me some money," he says. All those parents—and, why not, the hipsters—could use some benches, after all.

*The Fifth House Ensemble plays Sunday 13.*

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