

Erie Times-News

Sirius Quartet rocks classical instruments at Behrend

eEdition

By John Chacona | January 21, 2016

It might be instructive to note the exact name of the ensemble that will inaugurate the 2016 portion of "Music at Noon: The Logan Series at Penn State Behrend."

It's the Sirius Quartet, not the Sirius String Quartet, though the ensemble has the instrumentation -- two violins, a viola and a cello -- established by Joseph Haydn 260 years ago. But in spirit, Sirius might be closer to a rock band or a jazz quartet, a fact that is proudly acknowledged by the group's violist, Ron Lawrence.

"In the classical string quartet tradition, there's an emphasis on having smoothness of sound, timbre and articulation, but aesthetically, we come from a different place," he said. "In a jazz quartet, the trumpet and tenor sax don't play the same articulations when they play the melody. They're showing you their own individual take on the material. We do that, too."

This could sound like a gimmicky bid for crossover attention, but Lawrence, who is twice as old as his colleagues, said that the eclecticism of the group is inevitable given the background of the players.

"One of our violinists, Fung Chern Hwei, is Chinese but grew up in Malaysia," he said. "(Violinist) Gregor Huebner's family came from Czechoslovakia, and he plays with a lot of jazz players. Jeremy (Harman), our cellist, is from Kansas City, and played in metal bands when he was younger, and still does."

Lawrence has rubbed musical shoulders with just about everybody, including the late David Bowie at a recent recording session for Daphne Guinness, a friend of Bowie's whose producer Tony Visconti, was behind some of Bowie's greatest records.

Expect no crazy costumes or invasions by spiders from Mars when Sirius performs, but don't expect the usual chamber music recital, either.

