LAST NIGHT

Unconventional quintet in fashion at the Gladstone

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CLASSICAL MUSIC CRITIC

I keep hoping the current trend in Europe to present classical music in pubs, lounges and clubs is going to catch on in Toronto. Perhaps the full house at last night's concert by the Network Winds at the Gladstone Hotel Ballroom was a promising sign.

There were new, young faces alongside veteran classical concert-goers at the informal affair. A hip tango-trance hybrid played on the sound system before the concert, as people bought drinks at the bar next door. There was a fashion show at intermission — featuring the feminine creations of Magpie Designs, who outfitted the female members of Network Winds with their unorthodox fusions of fabric, colour and texture.

The program was also an unorthodox fusion of modernism, melody and Latin American rhythms, which flutist Leslie Newman, oboist Kathy Halvorson, Micah Heilbrunn on clarinet, bassoonist Nadina Mackie Jackson and Wendie Limbertie on French horn carried off with verve to spare.

The pieces — by Heitor Villa-Lobos as well as living composers Jean-Michel Damase, Bill Douglas and Paquito D'Rivera — demanded tremendous tonal and rhythmic skill.

Although Libertie scattered about some wrong notes here and there, the combined effect was always beautifully shaped.

We don't hear music for winds often in Toronto, so it's easy to forget that, along with learning the notes, the players also have to find places to breathe in the music. In the *Bachiana Brasileira No. 6*, by Villa-Lobos, Newman and Jackson somehow managed to find time to gasp the right amount of breath to take them through the seemingly endless cascades of notes.

The mood onstage was as enthusiastic as the crowd's reception. Even occasional bursts of noise from other parts of the building couldn't quell the high spirits. Classical music and cool venues should — and can — get along.

Network Winds' intermission featured a fashion show by Magpie Designs.