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Rites of String

Invert turns chamber music on its head

Percussive rhythmic patterns and a wild mix of musical influences—rock, jazz, Philip Glass, and movie music by such composers as Fred Katz (the jazz cellist in *Sweet Smell of Success*) and Bernard Herrmann (*Psycho*)—drive the music of Invert, a New York-based ensemble. “It’s chamber music meets the Velvet Underground,” says Chris George, 36, the group’s founder. A former rock bass guitarist and sitarist, George, now a cellist (who toils by day in *V.F.’s* production department), took out ads in New York alternative newspapers two years ago to find other adventurous souls; in the classic manner of like-seeking-like personal ads, he netted another rock bassist turned cellist, 33-year-old Steve Berson. Within a year they added two musicians who have brought along an increasing amount of jazz improvisation: Helen Yee, 36, a violinist, and Asha Mevlana, 25, a classical violinist. The group’s name derives from their inversion of the traditional string-quartet format—they use two cellos instead of the usual two violins.

This year, Invert has met with great success on the New York club circuit, particularly at Brooklyn’s Galapagos, a venue at the forefront of the emerging Williamsburg arts scene. The ensemble, which is currently at work on its debut album, has been surprised by the intense response of its listeners. Galapagos owner Robert Elmes says there is always a deep pause among the audience after each number. “You can tell from the body language that they’re reflecting about what they just heard.”

—DOUG STUMPF



ENSEMBLE REQUIRED

From left, Steve Berson, Chris George, Asha Mevlana, and Helen Yee of the string quartet Invert.