



Argento Chamber Ensemble



Photograph: John Gurrin

Italian Academy at Columbia University; Wed 12

Now that up-and-coming classical composers are daring to bare their alt-rock inclinations, pledging allegiance to rigorous modern styles almost seems like an act of defiance. Most of the music that the Argento Chamber Ensemble plays is in little danger of being viewed as fashionable, but Michel Galante, a composer and conductor currently pursuing his doctoral degree at Columbia University, has a passion for taking up works that emphasize virtuosity and sonic innovation.

Recognizing that dedication and ample preparation are key to bringing out the passion in modernist works, Galante assembled the Argento Chamber Ensemble, a group of exceptional freelance musicians, in 2000. Argento has played relatively infrequently, but its concerts have been genuine events. Modern masterpieces by senior figures such as Schoenberg, Carter and Boulez are endowed with a finesse and fire that deliver revelations. The group has also championed artists of later generations, such as Tristan Murail, Gérard Grisey and Helmut Lachenmann, as well as newcomers whose works might otherwise remain unknown in New York.

On Wednesday 12, Galante and his players launch a three-concert series at Columbia University's stately Italian Academy. The first program offers the world premiere of Lachenmann's revised *Mouvement (vor der Erstarrung)*, solo pieces by Lachenmann and Giacinto Scelsi, and a commissioned work by young Italian composer Valerio Sannicandro. The concert is a strong calling card for the group; don't be surprised if you're compelled to come back for more.

—Steve Smith