

A Festival Celebrates Bach – Among Others

A review by Marc Shulgold

Oh, sure – J.S. Bach was there, represented by three marvelous chamber works. And there was music by his famous old friend Telemann. But so too were deserving pieces by four not-so-familiar names. As much as we revere Johann Sebastian, it's a safe guess that he would have welcomed sharing the bill with this lively gathering of fellow Baroque composers. Give credit to Festival music director Zachary Carretin for assembling such an enjoyable evening of discovery.



J.S. Bach

Don't let the name fool you: The Boulder Bach Festival isn't just about Bach. Simply glance at offerings for the second weekend concert on Friday. In fact, check out each of the four events in the Festival's 41st season, held in the spacious, acoustically warm First Congregational Church. In total, that quartet of concerts provides a vast array of works to satisfy nearly every musical taste (Clara Schumann, at a Bach Festival? Hey, why not?).

Carretin introduced the concert, titled "Voices of Chamber," by offering a few well-chosen words on the importance of chamber music in the 16th and 17th Centuries, noting the distinction between music intended for the church and for the home. He also mentioned Bach's enthusiasm for the music of his contemporaries, notably Vivaldi – plus, he lent his considerable violin skills to several works on the agenda. But he was not the evening's only star. In presenting a number of first-class players and singers, Carretin (now in his 9th season running the Festival) brought a welcome professionalism and consistently high level of musicianship that drew enthusiastic applause from concert-goers.



Mina Gajic and Zachary Carretin



Isabella Leonarda

Even the experienced fan of the Baroque Era will be excused if the names of Dario Castello and Giovanni Legrenzi draw blanks. Some may know Isabella Leonarda and Johann Christoph Bach (a first-cousin-once-removed of J.S.), but it's doubtful those fans were acquainted with the selections presented on Friday. Yet, beyond their sheer novelty, each selection by these four music-makers proved delightful.

The Venetian-based Castello died in 1631, making him the earliest composer on the program (born more than 80 years before Bach). His Violin Sonata in A minor demonstrated his habit of skipping in agitated fashion from fast to slow to fast without warning, as Paul Miller pointed out in his authoritative program notes. But in Carretin's hands, and harpsichordist Christopher Holman's excellent accompaniment, the music held together with deliciously spontaneous interplay.



Dario Castello



Christopher Holman

Carretin was joined by Yu-Eun Kim in a dazzling rendition of a two-violin Sonata by Giovanni Legrenzi,



Yu-Eun Kim

who, like Castello, was based in Venice's St. Mark's. The pair were supported by the continuo of cellist Coleman Itzkoff and Holman (who often accompanied on harpsichord and organ simultaneously). That energetic foursome blended their improvising chops for a Sonata by Isabella Leonarda, whose charming music has lately enjoyed a revival. Equally pleasing was Carretin's big tone and impeccable technique in the first solo-violin Fantasia by Telemann.

As for the Festival's namesake, there were two Bachs on the program. One of Bach's cousins, Johann Christoph, was represented by a touching Lament, *Ach, dass ich Wassers gnug*, in which mezzo Claire McCahan pulled out all of the self-pitying sorrow of a young lass anxious for more tears to flow.



Paul Miller

As for Papa Bach, two rarely heard chamber works opened and closed the first half: a Trio Sonata in G, featuring flutist Ysmael Reyes joined by violinist Kim and the Itzkoff-Holman continuo, and a G-minor Sonata, originally for viola da gamba, but played expertly on viola by program annotator Paul Miller (assisted by the ever-busy Holman doubling on organ and harpsichord).



Claire McCahan

In a grand finale, 10 instrumentalists fit onto the small stage with eight singers for a stirring performance of J.S. Bach's glorious motet, *Komm, Jesu, komm*. Written for double chorus, this reading found each choir reduced to one-to-a-part, the two quartets cleverly positioned facing each other. This reduced ensemble led to an invigorating intimacy, bringing unexpected clarity to the work's rich harmonies. It's likely that no one in attendance missed a larger gathering of singers – judging by the extended ovation that seemed to embarrass the 18 appreciative performers.

Tags: Boulder Bach Festival, Castello, Christopher Holman, Claire McCahan, featured, Isabella Leonarda, Johann Christoph Bach, JS Bach, Legrenzi, Mina Gajic, Paul Miller, slider, Zachary Carretin

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Posted on May 15, 2022

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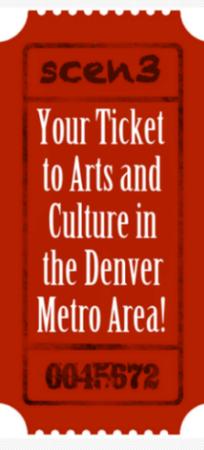
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