

Review Pacific Baroque Orchestra

Thursday night saw the first concert of the 2015-2016 season for KCCA, and if this is any indication of the calibre of featured groups, people might want to get their names on the waiting list soon. The music of the night was Baroque, featuring compositions by 2 of the best known composers of the time, Georg Philipp Telemann and Johann Sebastian Bach, two men described by Artistic Director Alexander Weimann as "friendly rivals" in a time of musical evolution that would have huge effects on European music (and beyond) that are still felt today and an integral part of modern sound.

The Pacific Baroque Orchestra, under the direction of Alexander Weimann, is a large group, consisting of up to 17 members on stage at once. Playing period instruments, they gave us a selection of music which, in spite of being from only two composers, was diverse and entertaining, and sometimes technically stunning. The orchestra was never overwhelming, always supporting soloists (not overpowering them, especially the quieter recorders) and displayed a remarkable precision and dynamic control which I think of when this music comes to mind. The precision is often what impressed me the most, whether it be the flawless staccato on the Adagio of Telemann's Concerto for Trumpet, or the fantastic dexterity shown by Vincent Lauzer (recorder) on the very fast Allegro from the opening of the second half. All the soloists displayed amazing skill with their respective instruments, especially considering that with period instruments there are many compromises to overcome that have been improved with modern designs. (The audience will have noticed that the orchestra spent much more time tuning. I queried Weimann about that and confirmed that those instruments are much more susceptible to shifts in humidity and temperature). A special mention must go to Kris Kwapis, playing trumpet. Baroque style is demanding enough on a modern horn. The Baroque trumpet has no valves, leaving the variation in pitch and range strictly up to the lips and breath control of the player. She did a fantastic job of playing this instrument.

Sometimes classical music scares people. When they hear a term like "Baroque", they imagine pretentiousness, overly intellectual attitudes, or uninteresting music, limited in scope and emotion. Alexander Weimann, (playing brilliant harpsichord) and the other members have crafted a group that has none of that, instead putting forth a welcoming and well balanced program and sound, true to the original yet accessible to all. On their website, they describe it as "early music for modern ears" and indeed, if one closed one's eyes, it would be easy to feel transported to some great European city in another time. What an excellent start to the new season, and hopefully an indication of things to come.

Neville Bowman