

## SAN DIEGO ARTS

### Interpreti Veneziani Makes Its La Jolla Debut at Sherwood Auditorium

By [Kenneth Herman](#) • Mon, Nov 14th, 2011

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**Italian ensemble Interpreti Veneziani**

If the Italian instrumental ensemble Interpreti Veneziani were a movie plot pitched to a cabal of producers, it might sound something like this: marauding gang of commedia dell'arte players infiltrates a goth-dressing troupe of performance artists in order to kidnap a cadre of talented conservatory music students. The Stockholm syndrome kicks in; the musicians adopt the actors' personae and turn staid chamber music concerts into punk raves.

Saturday (Nov. 12), the La Jolla Music Society presented Interpreti Veneziani as the opening program on the Society's fall chamber music series at Sherwood Auditorium. The visiting Venetians unleashed anything but a business-as-usual evening of chamber music. Aside from their all-black informal attire and rambunctious, soccer-team antics on stage, these nine musicians represent a radically disparate approach to playing 18th-century music in historical perspective.

In a word, Interpreti Veneziani always chooses panache over precision and flair over fastidiousness. Yes, they play on period instruments and employ many of the stylistic techniques early music geeks have espoused for some time. But these Venetians are after raw passion, overt displays of emotion, and a hyperactive embodiment of the physical demands of virtuoso performance.

Saturday's all-Italian program (with the exception of an odd, Baroque-like pastiche by the Norwegian composer Johann Halvorsen) covered the gamut from Corelli to Paganini, a multi-course banquet of bravura instrumental music that graced the halls and churches of Venice in the 18th century and later. Violinist Sebastiano Maria Vianello set the bar for velocity and flash in the opening Antonio Vivaldi "D Minor Concerto," Op. 8 No. 7, although his eerily quiet cadenza in the

final movement proved he had a reserve of introspective sensitivity for which his colleagues had but modest use.

No one came close, however, to the flamboyance of cellist Davide Amadio in the Giuseppe Tartini “Cello Concerto.” Adept at tossing off complex figurations at breakneck speed only to downshift into abrupt ritardandos, Amadio trademarked the concerto’s every phrase. Cellists tend to be a demure lot, but he whipped his bow around like Errol Flynn in “The Adventures of Robin Hood.” Inasmuch as Tartini’s biographers aver that the composer became skilled at fencing long before he mastered the violin, perhaps such exuberance is justified. In any case, Amadio’s deep but not overly burnished timbre proved ideal for his lithe, athletic phrasing, and his use of vibrato was telling as it was sparing. In Nicolo Paganini’s “Variazioni di Bravura” on a theme from the opera “Moses” by Rossini, Amadio relished every technical challenge, especially harmonics at lightning speed, in an extravagant concerto that prefigures Tchaikovsky’s “Variations on a Rococo Theme.” The audience’s enthusiastic response was quite vocal, more rousing than the typical polite La Jolla applause.

Harpichordist Paolo Cognolato’s fleet scales and articulate flourishes made the best possible case for Domenico Cimarosa’s “Harpichord Concerto in B-flat Major,” although those who treasure the harpichord concertos of J. S. Bach may feel that Cimarosa’s rococo ramblings don’t amount to much. Cognolato’s services were unnecessary in Halvorsen’s “Passacaglia for Violin, Cello and Strings,” even though the early 20th-century Norwegian composer based his odd pastiche on one of Handel’s harpichord suites. The “Passacaglia” allowed the soloists to engage in rhapsodic duos that verged on good-humored competition. Understandably, Halvorsen is little known outside of Norway.

I was most impressed with Interpreti Veneziani’s account of Vivaldi’s “Concerto for Two Violins in A Minor” (RV 523) featuring violinists Paolo Ciociola and Nicola Granillo. Their timbres and phrasing were ideally matched, and between the animated bravado of the outer movements they were able to find a mystical stillness in the composer’s soulful Largo.

I would be the last person to question the authenticity of this ensemble’s approach to 18th-century music, much as it may differ from current performance standards. We have no DVD’s or You-Tube clips from the era, so although we have notes scribbled on paper, exactly how they were performed is only conjecture. That some performers of that era sounded like Interpreti Veneziani is entirely possible, and that such an extravagant style flourished in Venice—a city renowned for its byzantine intrigues and lascivious parties in the pre-Lenten carnival season—strikes me as quite likely.