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Interpreti Veneziani brings baroque music to life

Published: Monday, Jan. 12, 2009 11:14 a.m. MST

By **Edward Reichel**, Deseret News

INTERPRETI VENEZIANI, Allred Theater, Weber State University, Jan. 10

If ever there is an ensemble that can make baroque music fun, it's the Italian group Interpreti Veneziani. They bring humor and exuberance to their concerts that is infectious and delightfully appealing.

But don't sell them short. They are consummate artists who play with virtuosity and wonderful musicality. They are masters of the baroque — and beyond.

The Interpreti Veneziani, as the name implies, makes its home in Venice, but they tour frequently. This month, nine members are on an extended tour of the United States. Saturday, they stopped in Ogden, where they played a mesmerizing concert in Allred Theater on the Weber State University campus.

And baroque music will never be heard in quite the same way again.

The musicians bring passion to their playing. They infuse their interpretations with vibrancy and they capture the music's rhythmic vitality with an ease and naturalness that is rare. This is quite honestly how baroque music needs to be played. In their hands, and through their instruments, this music came alive.

The program the group played favored Vivaldi. But that's understandable given the fact that Vivaldi spent the better part of his life in Venice. Among the four concertos by Vivaldi on the program, two especially stood out: the Concerto for Violin, op. 8, no. 5 ("La Tempesta di Mare") and the Concerto for Two Violins, RV. 523.

Soloist, and the ensemble's leader, Paolo Ciociola, dazzled the audience with his facility in the outer movements. The first movement in particular, which he took at breakneck speed, was simply astonishing. But there was much more to his playing than just mere technical display. He also brought wonderful expressiveness to his interpretation, and the slow movement was beautifully crafted with tender lyricism.

In the Concerto for Two Violins, the two soloists, Ciociola and Nicola Granillo, had a glorious time pretending that their playing was a competition. And the cellist, Nazzareno Balduin, got into the act as well, with his facial expressions and gestures. But once again, this was all in fun, as both Ciociola and Granillo showed off their astounding mastery of the violin. Granillo also exhibited his chops in Paganini's "La Campanella," which closed out the concert. His account of this tremendously demanding piece was worth the price of admission alone. He made the numerous rapid runs, arpeggios, harmonics and double stops look easy. It was a performance worthy of the piece.

Also on the program was Geminiani's "La Follia" variations that the ensemble played with a fine sense of nuance and tonal shading; Vivaldi's Concerto for Violin, op. 7, no. 4, and his Concerto for Four Violins, op. 3, no. 10 (a concerto that J.S. Bach transcribed for four harpsichords); and Boccherini's "Fandango," in which cellist Balduin displayed his virtuosity and dexterity.

As if this wasn't enough, the group rewarded the audience for the well-deserved standing ovation they received with three encores: movements from concertos by Corelli and Vivaldi.

Only one question remains to be answered: When will the Interpreti Veneziani return to Utah?

E-mail: ereichel@desnews.com