

Letter V

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Review: Interpreti Veneziani Baroque Ensemble

By Clarke Bustard

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The eight string players and harpsichordist of the Interpreti Veneziani Baroque Orchestra of Venice put on an exceptional half a program of Italian and French baroque music – concertos by Corelli and Vivaldi and "Les Folies d'Espagne" by Marin Marais, with two movements from Vivaldi's "Four Seasons" as encores.

The ensemble – violinists Giuliano Fontanella, Paolo Ciociola, Guglielmo De Stasio, Pietro Talamini and Federico Braga; violist Alessandro Curri; cellist Davide Amadio; double-bassist Angelo Liziero and harpsichordist Paolo Cognolato – established their stylistic bona fides more or less instantly in Corelli's Concerto Grosso, Op. 6, No. 4, amplifying the piece's thin musical content with rhetorical flair and rhythmic energy.

The group's expressive vocabulary – whiplash accents, austere lyricism, emphatic and propulsive bass lines – was applied to even better effect in Vivaldi's Concerto for two violins, string and continuo, Op. 3, No. 5, from the collection "L'Estro Armonico," with Ciociola and De Stasio as the featured duo, and the Concerto, RV 575, for two violins, viola, cello, strings and continuo. Cellist Amadio, the high-octane driving force of the ensemble's rhythm section, was showcased at speed and with an almost frenzied brilliance, in Marais' set of variations on a folia, a Portuguese dance, which the French composer mischaracterized as Spanish.

The balance of the program was, for some reason, given over to one of Fritz Kreisler's mischievous closet-compositions (a Preludio and Allegro that the early 20th-century violin virtuoso passed off as the work of the Italian baroque composer Gaetano Pugnani), Johan Halvorsen's hoary arrangement of Handel's Passacaglia for violin and cello (and, here, accompanying strings) and Pablo de Sarasate's 1878 gypsy fantasy "Zingaresca." All were well-played, although the Sarasate would have benefited from sharper rhythmic inflection.

The real-baroque half was a useful object lesson in the high spirits, and a rhythmic character not unlike that of 1920s-vintage "hot" jazz, that music of this era needs to really come alive.