

A journey of extraordinary musicianship

January 24, 2008

Bermuda Festival Review by Nancy Acton

It took but moments for Interpreti Veneziani to announce, through its instruments, that its Bermuda Festival debut would be an outstanding and unforgettable event, and so it proved again and again.

It is unusual, particularly in wintertime, for an audience to be held in such thrall that the entire concert is received in utter silence, uninterrupted by a single cough, sneeze, dropped program or premature exit, so in this, and all senses of the word, the opening night of this splendid group was rare indeed.

Preceded by a reputation for "youthful exuberance and all-Italian brio", the Venetian nonet, each member of which is a virtuoso in his own right, presented a fast-paced program of works by Corelli, Paganini, Vivaldi, Handel, Germiniani and Sarasate, each of which was more beautiful and exhilarating than the last. From start to finish, this was a journey of extraordinary musicianship, where each work was addressed not only with freshness and clarity but also immense passion. Every nuance, texture, variation in color and emotion was explored to perfection, the sum total of which was pure gold. Corelli's 'Concerto Grosso Op. 6 no. 4' for two violins, cello, strings and harpsichord got the program off to a sizzling start, and set the pace for all that followed. Kreisler's arrangement of Paganini's 'Prelude and Allegro' for violin and strings is a sensuous blend of intensity, fire and playfulness, and here violinist Pietro Talamini gave new meaning to the word 'passion' in his brilliant reading of this work. Vivaldi's works are well known for their likeability and universal appeal, and his 'Concerto for Two Violins, Strings and Harpsichord, Op. 3 No. 5' is no exception. In the hands of Interpreti Veneziani, its patina was polished to new and glorious luster. Norwegian composer and violinist Johann Halvorsen's arrangement of Handel's 'Passacaglia' is filled with virtuosic variations. Who better, then, than this superlative group to meet its challenges? Not only was the ensemble playing impressive, but violinist Guglielmo De Stasio and cellist Davide Amadio addressed its blistering passages with deceptive, joyous ease. Germiniani's 'La Follia' for violin, cello, string and harpsichord, based on a 27th Century melody and imbued with dance influences, concluded the first half of the program in fine style. It is not often that one encounters a cellist who is so immersed in his music that his head becomes a frenetic metronome, and he appears to be in constant pain — but looks are deceiving, for Davide Amadio is without doubt an extraordinary talent whose technique and musicianship are thrilling. Teamed with Mr. De Stasio for the opening work of the second half, Vivaldi's 'Concerto for Violin, Strings and Harpsichord, RV.546', he too fulfilled every expectation the score demanded, as did the rest of the ensemble, leading to a truly inspired reading. Sarasate's 'Zingaresca', described as a 'bravura piece' because of the demands it makes on the soloist, found violinist Giuliano Fontanella at his glittering best. This is a work which tugs at the heartstrings with its combination of passages, some of which are light, shimmering, zephyr-like and playful, while others are deeply emotional, tension-building and occasionally melancholic. In the hands of Interpreti Veneziani, the work made a stunning finale — or so we thought, but there was more to come.

Rapturous applause brought the group back to the stage for not one, but three incredible encores: the lovely 'Summer' movement from Vivaldi's 'Four Seasons'; a captivating, all-pizzicato performance of Vivaldi's Concerto originally written for two mandolins; and Marin Marais' 'Folies d'Espagne' in which David Amadio took centre stage for a final, mesmerizing performance. All in all, this was a dream evening of exquisite music and musicianship, the awakening from which was reluctantly undertaken. Certainly, the return of the nine musicians playing on original instruments cannot come too soon.