

entertainment

Baroque orchestra brings long-lost gems into delight

By Kyle MacMillan
Denver Post Fine Arts Critic

Article Last Updated: 02/17/2008 12:15:18 AM MST

Besides the simple enjoyment of hearing the Baroque Chamber Orchestra of Colorado perform, there are two other reasons to be thrilled about the addition of this first-rate ensemble to the area's classical scene.

The first is the many potential collaborations its presence makes possible, and the second is the opportunity to hear a repertoire that would unlikely be programmed by anyone else locally.

Both such benefits were on display to advantage Friday evening at Bethany Lutheran Church, as the Baroque Chamber Orchestra teamed for the first time with the St. Martin's Chamber Choir, a leading vocal ensemble in the region.

The concert culminated with one of the first, if not the first, American presentations of the Requiem, K. 51-K. 53, (Kaiserrequiem), by Johann Joseph Fux (1666-1741), and the unknown funeral mass proved to be a stirring revelation.

During his life and for at least a century afterward, Fux was admired as one of the giants of Austrian music, but he later fell into virtual obscurity and is now remembered almost exclusively for "Steps to Parnassus," a still-definitive treatise on counterpoint.

The rise of period-instrument ensembles in recent decades has stimulated renewed interest in forgotten composers, and in the case of Fux and this piece, such attention seems wholly justified.

Unlike certain other requiems, which are larger in scale, more overtly dramatic and even fear-inducing in certain ways, Fux's take on the venerable form is more subtle, meditative and inward-looking. But it is undeniably powerful and memorable in its way.

The focal point is the kaleidoscopic Dies Irae, with its constant shifts in mood and texture, from the full choir to a range of smaller ensembles and soloists, most notably alto Danielle Reutter-Harrah.

The choir and orchestra, which immediately came off as a perfect match, made a strong case for the piece with a highly focused and wonderfully energetic interpretation.

Also on the program was a striking version of Palestrina's Stabat Mater and a joyful take on Corelli's Concerto Grosso in F major, Op. 6, No. 6.

The program will be repeated 7:30 tonight at St. Elizabeth's Church on the Auraria campus.

Kyle MacMillan: 303-954-1675 or kmacmillan@denverpost.com

[http://www.denverpost.com/search/ci_8284037]