

MUSIC REVIEW

Young Performers Bask in an Old Favorite, at Least Once

Sebastians' 'Bach by Popular Demand' at All Angels'



Jacob Blickenstaff for The New York Times

The Sebastians The group of chamber players at All Angels' Church, performing its "Bach by Popular Demand" program. It included a Bach composition as well as works by Vivaldi, Boyce, Corelli and Handel.

By JAMES R. OESTREICH
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"Though we take our music seriously, we're not afraid of a good pun," the Sebastians proffered in brief program notes for their concert at All Angels' Church on Saturday evening, "Bach by Popular Demand." Well, in this case, a bad pun.

But of the demand for this group, there can be little doubt. The Sebastian Chamber Players, to use their formal name, were opening their second season as artists in residence at All Angels' on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, and the house, small as it is, was full. The Sebastians trail accolades, having won the audience appreciation prize in Early Music America's Baroque Performance Competition in 2012, and

Early Music America presented them in its Young Performers Festival at the Boston Early Music Festival in June.

Last month, they collaborated brilliantly in a production of Monteverdi's "Incoronazione di Poppea" with the Dell'Arte Opera Ensemble. But Bach is their first love, their very name — to stick to

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their proclivity for puns — being an attempt at guilt by association, borrowing cachet from Bach’s middle name.

The only Bach work on Saturday (notwithstanding the program title) was the Orchestral Suite No. 3 in D, the one with the famous Air. The ensemble was larger here than in either the Boston concert or the Monteverdi performance: 10 string players and the harpsichordist, Jeffrey Grossman. Still, as Mr. Grossman pointed out, there were none of the oboes, trumpets and timpani of Bach’s score.

All the notes were pretty much covered without them, as Mr. Grossman noted, though balances were undeniably shifted. Yet the energetic performance here carried all before it, and you had to wonder whether wind instruments could have kept up to the breathless pace of the Bourée.

A near-Bach experience came in Vivaldi’s Concerto for Four Violins in B minor from “L’Estro Armonico” (Op. 3, No. 10), which Bach esteemed so highly that he transcribed it for four harpsichords. The four fine violinists were Daniel S. Lee, Katie Hyun, Vita Wallace and Dongmyung Ahn.

Each also took part in a chamber work, Ms. Ahn and Ms. Wallace in Boyce’s Trio Sonata in A minor (from 12 Sonatas); Mr. Lee and Ms. Hyun in Corelli’s Trio Sonata in E minor (Op. 2, No. 4). Handel’s Concerto Grosso in D minor (Op. 6, No. 10) filled out the program.

A good part of the Sebastians’ appeal stems from their youthful, vigorous performance style. Mr. Lee, as concertmaster, leads with a dancelike bounce throughout his body, utterly appropriate to works that draw so heavily on dance forms in the first place.

And you have to be happy that the group has found a welcoming, intimate space to perform in regularly, though intimate does not mean quiet. The air-conditioning system emitted a constant whoosh and occasional crackles.

More power to the players for making those seem irrelevant most of the time.

The Sebastians perform their Vivaldi Project, with concertos from “L’Estro Armonico” and companion pieces by Robert Honstein on Nov. 13 at the Italian Academy, Columbia University, 1161 Amsterdam Avenue, Morningside Heights, near 118th Street; (212) 854-2306, sebastians.org.

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