

## Rebel: “Barocco” at Oberlin (November 23)

by Daniel Hathaway



The baroque ensemble named after the innovative eighteenth-century composer Jean-Féry Rebel took a rapt, mid-sized audience through a breezy, one-hour survey of “Musical Treasures of the 17th and 18th Centuries” early Sunday afternoon in Kulas Recital Hall at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music.

Born in the Netherlands but later transplanted to New York, Rebel was represented on Sunday by its core group of two violins (Jörg-Michael Schwarz and Karen-Marie Marmer), cello (John Moran) and harpsichord (Dongsok Shin). Small but powerful, the ensemble revealed the vibrant and sometimes edgy character of seven well- and lesser-known works by French, Italian, German and English composers.

As Moran reminded us in his informative program notes, “Baroque” comes from the Portuguese word for “a pearl of wildly irregular shape...the name was borrowed to describe an aesthetic stance which valued eccentricity over regularity and exuberance over reserve.”

That aptly described the two wildest pieces on the program: Marini’s *Sonata sopra la Monica* (based on a popular tune about a young woman forced into a nunnery) and Vivaldi’s *Sonata*, op. 1, no. 12, “La Follia” (a set of variations over a bass line frequently used for improvisations). Both pieces inspired Rebel’s violinists to furious flights of fancy, and in both, the ensemble’s rhythmic energy was reinforced by percussive attacks and accents.

Other works were more well-behaved. Leclair’s *Overture II in D* featured flexible rhythms and elegant transitions. Its final *Allegro* might have been a bit mannered, but

Rebel can change styles instantly, and its tour of European baroque music paid close attention to national accents and inflections. Here, they really sounded French.

Corelli established a model for the baroque trio sonata which was widely imitated by other composers. Rebel paired Corelli's op. 4 no. 8 with Telemann's *Sonata Corellisante V in g*, providing a case in point, though the German composer added spicy harmonies and expressive silences to Corelli's matrix. With its fugal gestures and British emotional restraint William Boyce's *Sonata V in D* brought a touch of academia to the program.

Moran, an Oberlin graduate who noted that the last time he had played on the Kulas stage was at his senior recital, changed things up with a stunning performance of Domenico Gabrielli's *Sonate in G* midway through the recital.

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