

Review**BlueWater Chamber Orchestra with Neil Mueller
and harpsichodist Kenneth Cooper (May 4)**

by Mike Telin



While associate conductor Neil Mueller aptly chose to title last weekend's BlueWater Chamber Orchestra concert *Baroque Reverberations*, Mueller could have also appropriately named it “the many sides of Kenneth Cooper.” On Saturday, May 4th in Plymouth Church, the celebrated American harpsichordist and conductor returned to Cleveland for the first time since he was featured in multiple concerts with the Ohio Chamber Orchestra several years ago — and hopefully a return visit will not take nearly as long. Even better if that visit would reunite him with Mueller and the talented BlueWater players.

The concert featured music of the early 18th century, Handel's *Concerto No. 15 in d minor for harpsichord and strings*, with Cooper in the role of soloist, and Bach's *Orchestra Suite No. 3 in D*, where he displayed his astute continuo playing skills. Music from the 20th century also made an appearance with de Falla's *Concerto for harpsichord, flute, oboe, clarinet, violin and cello*.

Here Cooper became a virtuoso chamber musician.

Opening the concert was a composition from the 19th century, Grieg's *Holberg Suite*. From the opening bars of the *Praeludium*, Mueller drew a full, rich and well blended sound from his players, something he was able to achieve the entire evening. Cellist Kent Collier provided masterful solo work during the *Sarabande*. Mueller's pacing of the *Gavotte* was regal and the *Air* was passionate. In the *Rigaudon*, concertmaster Kenneth Johnston and violist Laura Shuster tossed off their technical lines with grace. This was an exciting performance that set a very high musical bar for the rest of the evening.

Handel appears to have “borrowed” much of the musical material for his concerto from Telemann, but nonetheless this brief two-movement work places numerous technical demands on the soloist. Kenneth Cooper made easy work of even the toughest passages. Mueller and company were attentive collaborators throughout.

Manuel de Falla's *Concerto for harpsichord, flute, oboe, clarinet, violin and cello* is an odd piece that takes the shape of a sextet rather than a concerto for harpsichord. Its three movements, played without pause, incorporate a Castilian folk song (first movement) a

motet by Victoria (the slow ponderous second movement) and then the folk song again (third movement). The piece is full of imaginative playfulness and Cooper, joined by Sean Gabriel, flute, Martin Neubert, oboe, Amitai Vardi, clarinet, Kenneth Johnston, violin and Kent Collier, cello, gave it an energized performance.

Although it's pretty difficult not to like the 3rd Orchestral Suite of Bach, some performances have certainly been challenging to listen to. Luckily, this was not one of them. In fact, this performance was spectacular on every level. Neil Mueller paced each movement with care. The *Overture* was dynamic, the *Air* tender. Truly impressive were the tempo relationships between the 1st and 2nd Gavottes and 1st and 2nd Bourées. The final *Gigue* brought the evening to a rousing conclusion. There were many fine solos throughout, however oboists Martin Nuebert and Cynthia Warren deserve a special mention. And bravo to the very fine trumpet playing of Michael Chunn, Larry Herman and Heather Zweifel.

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