

## Burning River Baroque: “A Voice in the Wilderness” at Trinity Lutheran Church, Ohio City (October 17)

by Daniel Hathaway



On Friday, October 17, Burning River Baroque — Peter Lekx, violin, Malina Rauschenfels, soprano and cello & Paula Maust, organ — presented the first of three performances of sacred German baroque music in an especially appropriate venue. Trinity Lutheran Church, a 19th century Gothic edifice in Ohio City, was built by a German congregation and houses a distinguished 1955 Rudolph von Beckerath neo-baroque organ.

The program, dubbed “A Voice in the Wilderness” after a line in Telemann’s cantata, *Die Kinder des Höchsten*, also included music by such well-known composers as Dieterich Buxtehude, Johann Sebastian Bach, Johann Kuhnau and Heinrich Ignatz Franz von Biber, plus one obscure Dutch figure, Jacob Klein. In the small world of eighteenth-century German protestant church music, most of these composers crossed paths. Buxtehude mentored Bach, who succeeded Kuhnau in Leipzig — winning that post when Telemann became unavailable. Biber, the only non-Lutheran, worked in Catholic Austria. Klein seems to have slid onto this program of sacred music because his cello sonatas are in the “da chiesa” style.

Paula Maust opened the concert with Buxtehude’s *Praeludium in C*, also known as the *Prelude, Fugue and Chaconne*, a work that departs from the composer’s “fantastic” or improvisatory style in the direction of three more balanced “movements.” Maust played it gracefully and with an unusual sense of intimacy.

Performing from the organ loft, Rauschenfels appeared first as a vocalist in a bright performance of Buxtehude’s *Singet dem Herrn* adorned with a lively violin obbligato by Lekx, then took up her cello for Klein’s *Sonata No. 6 in c*. Here, balances were skewed by the cello’s position behind the gallery rail and the more prominent placement of the organ. A lot of detail in the solo line went missing.

Kuhnau's *Und ob die Feinde*, a dissertation on God's protection against enemies, was transcribed by Paula Maust from a microfilm of the composer's manuscript (she also wrote the extensive and informative program notes). A striking chorale early in the work, percussive text declamation in the recitative and a gavotte-like ending lent special interest to this little cantata.

Peter Lekx moved downstairs to the altar area for an entralling performance of the *Passacaglia* from Biber's "Rosary" sonatas for solo violin. Rauschenfels ventured downstairs next, moving slowly down the middle aisle while singing Buxtehude's beautiful little aria, *Salve Jesu*, perfectly in sync with Maust in the organ loft.

Telemann, who reportedly wrote some 1700 cantatas, was represented on Friday's program by *Die Kinder des Hochsten* (one of the mere 1400 that survive!). Back in the organ loft, the three musicians collaborated in a winning performance that boasted such striking effects as violin pizzicatos in the final aria.

Finally came Bach. The music for the aria, "Jesus soll mein erstes Wort" from Cantata 171 was poached from the secular cantata, *Der zufriedengestelite Äolus*, but as so often happens in Bach's oeuvre, it suits a sacred text for New Year's Day just as well as it fit words about the gods of classical antiquity. Rauschenfels sang it boldly and stylishly in happy collaboration with Lekx and Maust.

This interesting program will be repeated on Saturday, October 18 at 8:00 pm at St. Alban's Episcopal Church in Cleveland Heights and on Sunday, October 19 at 3:00 pm at Peace Community Church in Oberlin. The Oberlin performance is part of the FIRST•music Concert Series of First Lutheran Church in Lorain, whose Brombaugh organ was tragically consumed by fire late in August.

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