

## Apollo's Fire: "Mediterranean Roots" at Avon Lake UCC (June 11)

by Daniel Hathaway



For its annual plunge into the non-Baroque, Apollo's Fire took its early summer audiences on a cultural excursion around the Mediterranean, a journey resembling the travels of Ziryab, a 9th-century African troubadour who was the Johann Gottlieb Goldberg of his era,

the favorite oud player for the insomniac kalif of Baghdad.

Ziryab's musical skills launched his wanderings — he was kicked out of the palace by its jealous regular minstrel — as well as inspiring co-curators Amanda Powell and Brian Kay to gather fifteen songs and dances from Medieval and Renaissance Spain, Cyprus, Italy, and Greece into an engaging program.

The performers on Sunday afternoon were the best of the best: Kay, who played oud and other plucked instruments, joined Powell to sing rivetingly in a variety of vocal styles. Daphna Mor pulled a host of recorders and end-blown flutes out of her satchel and played them expertly. Tina Bergmann, a summer Apollo's Fire regular, drew a colorful palette of sounds from her hammered dulcimer. Violinist Susanna Perry Gilmore covered a vast range of fiddle styles, joined by bassist Dave Morgan at the low end of the string spectrum. And Rex Benincasa, his trunk packed with exotic percussion instruments, added just the right rhythmic underpinning to each piece.

Kay and Powell split up duties as the afternoon's emcees, bringing their engaging personalities to the fore, but always stepping back to become integral members of the

ensemble. Other performers came forward to tell personal stories, participate in a little enactment of the traditional Sephardic tale *Tres Hermanikas*, or take a turn as featured soloists — as Benincasa did in *Pizzica di San Vito*. Two show-stopping duos featured Powell and Morgan (*To Yasemi*) and Gilmore and Morgan (*Tres Hermanikas*).

Early on, Powell and the ensemble invited the audience to be part of the fun — to dance in the aisles if they were so inclined. The listeners were obviously moved by the performance but not quite to the point of active participation. Finally in the traditional Spanish song *Con Que La Lavare?*, Powell got the crowd to join in the singing, call and response style.

Following on the heels of its earlier Appalachian-themed programs, Apollo's Fire has developed yet another summertime winner in "Mediterranean Roots." This production would have only gained in impact by avoiding the two-hour-concert-with-intermission pattern of classical music events. This is really a cabaret show that should build in intensity over a 75-minute period. There was nothing for the audience to do between halves, and it was a challenge to rev up the listeners' energy again for part two.

*Photo: an earlier performance at the Baroque Music Barn in Hunting Valley.*

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com June 20, 2017.*

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