

Apollo's Fire: Vivaldi at Cain Park (July 29)

by Robert Rollin



Apollo's Fire performed an outstanding early music concert at Cleveland Heights' Cain Park Amphitheater last Saturday night, July 29. Outside the venue, wine tastings, accompanied vocals, and a lively barbershop quartet set a relaxed mood.

The core of the program was the ensemble's performance of Antonio Vivaldi's complete *The Four Seasons*, with the four separate concerti spread throughout the evening. Each soloist performed from memory, and the orchestra, fresh from Ravinia and Tanglewood tour performances, performed with great flair and enthusiasm.

Violinist Alan Choo tossed off *Spring (La Primavera)* with remarkable dexterity and lightness. Principal violins Olivier Brault and Susanna Perry Gilmore supported him with wonderful birdcall twitterings in the Allegro.

The ensemble's soft murmurings accompanied Choo's expressive lyrical lines in the gentle Adagio where Kristen Linfante and Cynthia Black provided the bass lines. The closing Allegro sped through threatening weather and a violent rainstorm, depicted by the group's powerful tremolos.

Susanna Perry Gilmore's performance of *Summer (L'Estate)*, was equally stunning. Her first movement solos were fervent, graceful, and impeccably accompanied by cellist René Schiffer and director Jeannette Sorrell's sparkling harpsichord. Perry Gilmore played the Largo beautifully. The Presto, marked *impetuoso*, gave her another virtuosic solo which she performed with flawless tone color and technique.

Concertmaster Olivier Brault was soloist in the remaining two *Seasons*. The first Allegro of *Autumn (L'Autunno)* begins with the festive good cheer of harvest celebrations, segueing to some tipsy moments. Brault's sound was gracefully expressive.

The Largo's pleasant, almost sleepy moments lead to the closing Allegro's loud hunting scene, complete with the sounds of guns and barking dogs. In the final section, Brault's long impassioned solo, accompanied by cello and harpsichord, was a delight.

The opening Allegro of *Winter (L'Inverno)* depicts howling winds with dizzyingly fast sixteenth notes. Brault played them with remarkable dexterity. In the Adagio his elegant solo joined with a pizzicato accompaniment to produce a wonderful sound, and the final Allegro raced to a scintillating conclusion.

Cellists Schiffer and Mimé Yamahiro Brinkmann shone in Vivaldi's *Concerto in G Minor*, RV 53, negotiating the Allegro's intricate stops and starts with surprising grace and attractive dark timbre. The second movement Largo begins with a lyrical duet accompanied by double bass and harpsichord. Schiffer and Brinkmann dug into the powerful closing Allegro vigorously.

Flutist Kathie Stewart was radiant in Marco Uccellini's *Il Gardellino* (arranged by Sorrell). Guitarist John Lenti provided continuo for her solo in the lilting second movement Andante. The rapid last movement sparkled with many sequential passages.

At the end of the concert the group improvised variations on the Portuguese *Folia* theme. To the audience's delight, the piece got faster and faster. Lenti provided lively percussive effects by tapping on the front of his guitar. The encore was a traditional American fiddle tune, and here, as elsewhere, the violin unisons were remarkably pure.

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