

Burning River Baroque: “Suppressed Voices” at Lakewood Congregational (March 23)

by David Kulma



A stylish concert of Baroque music called “Suppressed Voices: Music of the Banished” took place in the intimate Chapel at Lakewood Congregational Church on Friday night, March 23. Burning River Baroque’s program featured music by three banished composers little performed today — and the ubiquitous Handel, represented by his cantata about a Roman political exile.

There is a frisson between its artistic directors that makes Burning River Baroque’s concerts fascinating. Paula Maust is an unflappable harpsichordist who plays with vibrancy, elegance, and studied restraint, while soprano Malina Rauschenfels is bountifully theatrical and unpredictable amidst her excellent direction and fioritura. Their excellent guest artists for this concert were Baroque violinists Sarah Elizabeth Cranor and Reynaldo Patiño and Baroque cellist Jessica Korotkin.

The opening *Nisi Dominus* by Johann Rosenmüller, a German who escaped to Italy after being imprisoned for homosexuality, was both a dramatic setting of Psalm 127 and an object lesson in tone painting. The extended beauty ravished on the word *blessed* (beatus) was almost mystical, while the ensemble reached a full, glowing glory in the ending “Gloria Patri.”

Maust followed with two solo works by Peter Philips, who was imprisoned as a Catholic in Anglican England, then later fled to the Spanish Netherlands. *Pavana* and *Galliarda Dolorosa* are fine examples of English keyboard music of the time — full of melodic

filigree and surprising harmonic twists. Maust played this music of fidgety dignity with controlled virtuosity.

The Italian Evaristo Felice Dall'Abaco followed his war-defeated Bavarian employer in flight around Europe. His *Trio Sonata in A*, Op. 3 showed off the beautiful sounds of Baroque instruments in five short dance-inflected movements. Cranor and Patiño were vivacious and sprightly as they passed ideas back and forth. Korotkin played with a smooth lightness, and Maust gave this sunny music tasteful elaborations.

Handel's cantata *Agrippina condotta a morire* featured Rauschenfels at her best. Agrippina, a conniving Roman empress has been banished by her son, the Emperor Nero. Through sixteen sections, Handel shows her torment as she both condemns and defends her son. Rauschenfels' portrayal was musically engaging, emotionally direct, and worthy of the stage. Her Agrippina was gripped by anger and sorrow. She screamed at the heavens, but also with a nod of her head guaranteed that the constant changes from recitative to aria and arioso were absolutely together.

Rauschenfels' ability to express three emotions during one held note was staggering. She started slowly without vibrato, crescendoed as the character perceived a problem, then moved to a fast vibrato and shifted to a full angry tone that slammed into the next florid burst of rage. Her ability to turn notation on a page into fully realized human emotion was a feat of the imagination.

After this rush of passion, the concert ended with two bouncing miniatures. Rosenmüller's *Das ist meine Freude* on a section from Psalm 73 was joyful, while their encore — the sephardic tune *La Comida La Mañana*, in recognition of the expulsion of Jews from Spain — brought this compelling concert celebrating exiles to a snappy close.

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