

**Apollo's Fire: "O Jerusalem"
at St. Paul's, Cleveland Heights (Nov. 12)**

by David Kulma



Over the course of two weekends from November 10 to 18, Apollo's Fire celebrated the multicultural heritage of the Holy Land with "O Jerusalem!: Crossroads of Three Faiths." This exploration of music of Jews, Christians, and Muslims was conceived and directed by artistic director Jeannette Sorrell as a sequel to their successful "Sephardic

Journey" program first done in 2014. I attended the second concert on November 12 at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Cleveland Heights.



Organized around the geography of the Old City along with sections based outside the city walls and comparing forms of worship, this pageant ranged across secular and religious music with Ladino, Arabic, Persian, Armenian, Hebrew, Spanish, and Latin texts, included a few poetry readings, and featured a multifarious ensemble including the familiar — the usual strings, harpsichord, recorder, flute, guitar, accordion, hammered dulcimer — and the unfamiliar — oud, baglama saz, ney, tanbur, and doumbek.



The captivating result was an often drone-based, ravishing musical landscape presented through the straightforward storytelling mode of song. Surprisingly, maybe the most interesting portions of the evening were when the music stopped for stories told by Daphna Mor (of Jewish heritage) and Ronnie Malley (of Palestinian heritage) about their own experiences of the city.



The many soloists brought a high level of artistry and passionate music-making to the proceedings. Soprano Amanda Powell once again showed off her amazing versatility, switching styles with ease. Her beautiful singing was especially powerful during the

Sephardic lullaby *Nani, Nani*. Tenor Sorab Wadia was a captivating presence whenever he took center stage, most notably in the flirtatious Sephardic song *A la Una yo nací*, while tenor Jacob Perry stopped the show with his gorgeous and stylish rendition of the “Nigra sum sed formosa” from Monteverdi’s *Vespers*.

Soprano Raha Mirzadegan elegantly spun two Persian love songs, accompanying herself on the tanbur, while Dapha Mor made captivating music whether playing joyful recorder, sorrowful ney or even leading the singing of a Hebrew hymn. Ronnie Malley’s masterful oud playing and moody accordion were a highlight of the evening, and Brian Kay held his skillful own whether on lute, oud, or baglama saz.



Other instrumental delights included cellist René Schiffer’s arrangement of *Havun-Havun*, Tina Bergmann’s virtuosic dulcimer playing, Rex Benincasa’s vigorous doumbek solo, and the animated fiddling of Julie Andrieski and Emi Tanabe, who musically sparred with Mor’s recorder. Apollo’s Singers sang beautifully as they created a communal atmosphere of celebration and worship.

Sorrell should be proud of this enjoyable and unity-striving evening in a time when human divisions are regularly stoked to achieve dangerous ends. All the music was beautifully made, and the concert flowed wonderfully from one musical universe to another. The only thing that sounded somewhat out of place was the European Baroque music that represented some of the Christian music, but since this is the wheelhouse of Apollo's Fire, it sparkled with the passion Cleveland's Baroque Orchestra always brings to its music making.

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