

Apollo's Fire: "Allure" at First Baptist (Nov. 8)

by Daniel Hathaway



You'd be fortunate enough these days to be able to field three sopranos who could successfully channel the celebrated singing of the Three Ladies of the Court of Ferrara, but to find a trio of singers who all happen to be named Amanda would really be pushing your luck.

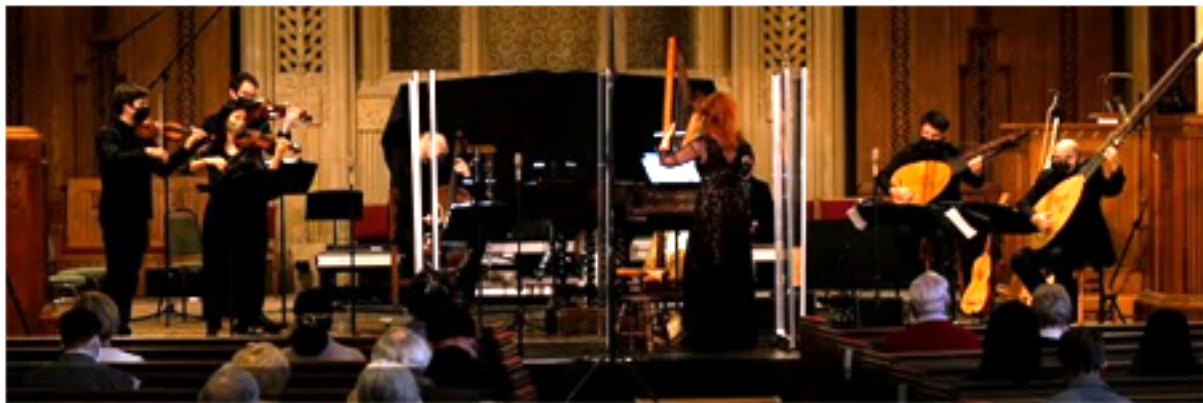
Jeanette Sorrell did just that for Apollo's Fire's "Allure" programs earlier this month, and the results are stunning. Sopranos Amanda Forsythe and Amanda Powell and mezzo-soprano Amanda Crider deliver the kind of jaw-dropping performances of virtuosic works that might well have landed them jobs at the 17th-century Ducal court.

The original *Concerto di donne*, Laura Peverara, Anna Guarini, and Livia d'Arco, were among the first female professional singers and their vocal prowess inspired such composers as Luzzascho Luzzaschi, Benedetto Ferrari, Barbara Strozzi,

Claudio Monteverdi, and Virgilio Mazzocchi to write groundbreaking music for them to sing at the Duke's private concerts.

After a prelude that includes the traditional Catalan *Song of the Birds* and a *Passacaglia della Vita* attributed to Stefano Landi, the first of several Chaconnes (a spirited one by Andrea Falconeri) accompanies the Amandas to their individual plexiglass compartments for a vocally distanced performance of Luzzaschi's *Dolcezza amarissime*.

"Who needs the three tenors?" Sorrell asks rhetorically in her opening remarks. The ladies seem to answer, "Not us!" as they effortlessly negotiate Luzzaschi's fluttery melismas and ornaments.



Delightful accompaniment is provided by three violinists (Francisco Fullana, Emit Tanabe, and Andrew Fouts), cellist René Schiffer, harpist Parker Ramsay, lutenists William Simms and Brian Kay, and percussionist Anthony Taddeo.

On either side of the madrigal, Ramsay and Simms take solo turns on a harp toccata by Luzzaschi and a theorbo passacaglia by Alessandro Piccinini, followed by a Biagio Marini passacaglia featuring Fullana and Tanabe.

The first half of the program ends with *O Felix Jucunditas* by the Bohemian-born composer Samuel Friedrich Capricornus.



“Love is Too Much” and “Disdain” are the titles of two sets that follow intermission — picking up prominent themes from the madrigal tradition and giving each Amanda a solo work.

Forsythe leads off with Benedetto Ferrari’s *Amanti, io so vi dire*, followed in the “Disdain” section by Powell singing Strozzi’s *Che si può fare*, and Crider performing Monteverdi’s more lighthearted *Quel sguardo sdegnosetto*. Forsythe ends the set with Virgilio Mazzocchi’s *Sdegno, campion audace*.

In between, the instrumentalists play a Marini sonata, and the three ladies join forces for Luzzaschi’s *Troppo ben può questo tiranno*.



For the last set, we’re suddenly and a bit unaccountably swept away to Spain for a pair of Recercadas by Diego Ortiz and a typically effervescent Apollo’s Fire finale, a “Chaconne Party” by Juan Arañes. A long way from Ferrara, but great fun.

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