

Apollo's Fire: cheerful collaboration and "Virtuoso Brilliance" (Feb. 9)

by Stephanie Manning



On Super Bowl Sunday — a day that brings out plenty of competitive spirit — spending the afternoon with Apollo's Fire felt like the perfect balance. In the few hours before "The Big Game" on February 9, those of us listening to the music in St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Cleveland Heights were all rooting for the same team.

The Baroque chamber orchestra performs in a way that values collaboration over competition, especially in a conductorless outing like this one. "Virtuoso Brilliance," a program heard in Akron, Rocky River, and Cleveland Heights, united both

musicians and audience in concertos by Antonio Vivaldi and Georg Philipp Telemann.

The afternoon's only selection without soloists — Vivaldi's Sinfonia from *L'Olimpiade* — served as a characteristic example of the eye contact, smiles, and coordinated movement that makes this group so cohesive. Dramatic dynamic changes and an extra-joyous finale set the tone for a program that embraced the fun of performing.

As concertmaster, Alan Choo directed via cues from his violin, which were consistent and easily received. He was also featured in three pieces as one of the program's many virtuosos. Vivaldi's *Concerto for Four Violins in b minor* provided one of the most familiar melodies of the evening, in a spirited performance from Choo, Edwin Huizinga, Emi Tanabe, and Carrie Krause.

In Vivaldi's *Ciaconna in C* from RV 114 (arranged by artistic director Jeannette Sorrell), Choo and fellow violinist Emi Tanabe traded notes with a playful ferocity, creating a sense of inside jokes shared between them. In Vivaldi's lesser-known *Concerto for Two Violins in c minor*, the duo of Choo and Chloe Fedor flowed more like a volley of

questions, answers, and eventually solemn agreement at the end of the second movement.

The clarity of tone here from both performers stood out, and the ferocious finale had the duo backing up each other's musical points via repetition.

Daphna Mor, the ensemble's principal recorder, was the other virtuoso featured more than once. Telemann's rarely-heard *Concerto for Recorder and Gamba in a minor* paired her up with guest musician HyunKun Cho for a fun and lighthearted work. Cho proved an elegant partner to Mor's vibrant playing.

The standout work of the night was Telemann's *Overture-Suite in a minor*, a seven-movement journey led by the recorder and featuring various types of dances. French musical styles abound in sections like the Overture, where Mor's smooth tone blended seamlessly with her colleagues, and in "Les Plaisirs," where she gently emerged from the texture to shine in solo material.

A relaxed and effortless presence on stage, Mor would often mouth the beats and nod to the music. A few overblown notes and one accidentally early entrance were tossed off with good humor. The second Menuet featured some lovely, clean descending scales, and after her plaintive, singing lines in the "Air l'Italien," the urge to clap was almost palpable.

Plenty of applause followed this work and all the others, including from those onstage. No doubt many football fans in the crowd then split off to don opposing team jerseys — but we celebrated the music as one.

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