

**Apollo's Fire: "Classical Sparks"
at St. Raphael, Bay Village (Feb. 28)**

by Kevin McLaughlin



Three composers whose lives intertwined and whose music inspired one another — Wolfgang Amadé Mozart, Joseph Bologne, and Joseph Haydn — were the subject of Apollo's Fire's latest series of concerts, "Classical Sparks." I attended the performance on Friday, February 28 at St. Raphael Catholic Church in Bay Village, for which artistic director Jeannette Sorrell had assembled a full classical orchestra of period instruments.

Mozart was represented with a delightful overture from his three-act opera *La Finta semplice*

("The Fake Innocent"), plus an aria from *Don Giovanni*, and the supreme Violin Concerto no. 3 in G, K.216.

The performance of Mozart's overture was so buoyant and pleasing it was almost a letdown not to be able to hear the whole opera (a frothy Italian comedy based on a play by Goldoni). The three linked sections are full of airy ebullience and charm. Mozart's father Leopold scrapped the premiere of the opera after some scurrilous charges that he plagiarized his own son. Not until the 1980s was there a premiere performance and recording.

In Mozart's Third Violin Concerto, concertmaster Alan Choo exuded easy virtuosity and a contagious pleasure in making music with his colleagues. As promised in his excellent

program note, Choo emphasized the work's operatic qualities, subtly differentiating themes as if they were characters in a drama. In the middle movement, he avoided vibrato and romantic intensity in favor of undecorated phrases, borne aloft like pale balloons suspended in midair.



Joseph Bologne was a true eighteenth-century renaissance man who composed, conducted, performed as violinist, and fenced. He is also the first known classical composer of African ancestry, and, as Sorrell asserted, a true rival to Mozart. His accomplishment as a composer was reflected in part by Valcour's aria from the opera *L'Amant antonyme*, sung with a handsome tenor voice and believable emotion by Jonathan Pierce Rhodes.

In Mozart's aria from *Don Giovanni* ("Il Mio Tesoro"), we watched Rhodes as Don Ottavio working out twin impulses — revenge toward Don Giovanni and consolation for Ottavio's girlfriend, Donna Anna. Rhodes' voice here was warm and buttery on top, although some of his lower range resonated less well.

Sorrell fully drew out Haydn's humor and personality in his Symphony No. 8, "Le Soir," the third installment of a trilogy of programmatic symphonies referring to times of the day. Haydn kept the audience guessing with uneven phrases, unexpected key changes, and solos for rarely featured instruments.



Flutist Kathie Stewart, who started the concert with welcoming remarks, showed herself to be as graceful and articulate on the flute as she is in speaking. Sue Yelanjian also exhibited brilliance in her smooth, extended double bass solo. The finale, titled *La Tempesta*, offered ample tumult. Here Choo had another opportunity to show his nimbleness on the violin, with octave leaps and furious runs, answered by descending figures in the strings, like falling rain.

Photos by Malcolm Henoach, Gates Landing Photography

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