

Apollo's Fire: Winter Sparks from Bach & Vivaldi in Rocky River (Feb. 1)

By Daniel Hathaway



Apollo's Fire runs on a steady supply of 17th- and 18th-century music, but when artistic director Jeannette Sorrell is really out to fan the flames, her accelerant of choice is inevitably the music of Antonio Vivaldi.

On Sunday afternoon, February 1, at Rocky River Presbyterian, in a program curated by associate artistic director and concertmaster Alan Choo, Cleveland's Baroque Orchestra featured members of the ensemble and guests in "Winter Sparks," three of the 500-some concertos Vivaldi wrote for the orchestra of young

abandoned women over the three decades he served as music director of the Ospedale della Pietà in Venice.

For a warmup, Choo led the ensemble in Vivaldi's *Sinfoni in g*, RV 157, which began with a cheerful allegro featuring the percussive articulation that a band of Baroque violinists can achieve. By way of contrast, the following Largo received lovely, lyrical treatment from Choo, his second violinist Emi Tanabe, and violist Nicole Divall. The concluding Allegro was punctuated by bursts of sonic thunder.



Oboist Debra Nagy and Apollo's Fire founding flutist Kathie Stewart moved downstage for two solo concertos, re-establishing their creds as premier masters of their instruments.

If Nagy found her reeds acting up during the extreme temperature and humidity variations in Northeast Ohio last weekend, she gave no indication of that in her flawless and truly enjoyable performance of Vivaldi's *Oboe Concerto in a* RV 461.

In the opening Allegro non molto, Nagy and Choo agreed in setting a stately tempo, and the soloist made easy work out of the composer's long-spun, note-filled phrases. The Larghetto sang lyrically, and the Allegro was redolent with emotion. Again, Nagy made the difficult sound effortless.



Kathie Stewart's performance of her solo *flauto traverso* role in Johann Sebastian Bach's Orchestral Suite No. 2 in b — a French Overture followed by a string of dance movements — was simply stunning.

Soloist and orchestra achieved a beautiful blend in which the solo flute was always prominent (not always the case with period flutes, which can disappear in their lower register). The transition into the fugal Allegro was seamless and abounded in forward-moving lines.

The Rondeau and Sarabande were each expressive in their own way, and the two lively Bourées were full of character. A charming menuet separated the sharply-articulated Polonaise, its change of texture providing a nice *Concerto a piu Istrumenti in e*, Op. 5 No. 3 — brought Nagy and Stewart bacontrast, and Stewart and the ensemble tossed the final Badinère off with complete abandon.

After intermission, Evaristo Felice Dall'Abaco's Vivaldi-inspired dck in front of the ensemble for a relatively simple but enjoyable piece in which the wind soloists exchanged beautiful lines, and indulged in something resembling a Baroque hoedown. Stewart provided plenty of sparks in the pair of concluding Passepieds.



Sunday's performance brought a personnel and repertoire change to the Winter Sparks program. Stepping in for ailing cellist HyunKun Cho, Sarah Stone joined Alan Choo, theorbist William Sims, and harpsichordist Jeannette Sorrell — now taking on the role of emcee — in Marin Marais' representation of the bells of the Parisian Church of Sainte Genevieve du Mont. Sorrell made a little joke about the repeated notes played by the theorbo before a lovely performance of the *Sonnerie*.

But there was more Vivaldi waiting in the wings. The Red Priest's fiery *Ciaconna* from the g-minor Concerto, RV 107 — replacing the composer's Concerto "Il Mondo al Rovescio" — led to a more Wintry finale than had originally been programmed.

Alan Choo returned to lead a positively inflammable performance of *Winter* from *The Four Seasons*, whose poetic description by the composer may have resonated almost too perfectly with the audience's experience enroute to the parking lot:

*We tread the icy path slowly and cautiously, for fear of tripping and falling.
This is winter, which nonetheless brings its own delights.*

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