

Gabriele Cassone takes keyed trumpet to new height

Joshua Kosman, Chronicle Music Critic
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Everyone knows what a trumpet sounds like - except that they don't. During Saturday's engrossing concert by the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, the Italian trumpeter Gabriele Cassone introduced most listeners to a new sound, one related to the familiar clarion blare but different.

Cassone joined the orchestra and music director Nicholas McGegan for Hummel's Concerto in E, a showpiece written for the keyed trumpet that is usually performed on a modern instrument. Cassone's elegant, mellifluous performance was a spellbinding affair.

Unlike the valve trumpet, which came along soon afterward in the early 19th century, the keyed trumpet uses keys to cover holes in the instrument's tubing (like a modern clarinet or oboe). The result is a much mellower and more liquid tone - although, as Cassone demonstrated, the instrument can also produce a piercing sound.

Cassone brought tenderness and effortless virtuosity to his assignment. As a beautiful encore, there was Verdi's brief Adagio for keyed trumpet and orchestra from the 1830s - a limpid early-style aria without words.

The rest of the program, in Berkeley's First Congregational Church, was devoted to symphonies of the early Romantic era, done with gusto and charm. Louis Spohr's Symphony No. 2, even in an impassioned and committed performance, sounded somewhat generic (aside from a striking passage in the slow movement where Spohr sets the woodwinds in dialogue with the low strings).

But Mendelssohn's Symphony No. 1 in C Minor, the startling product of the 15-year-old boy genius, emerged as exciting as ever, from the hyperactive fury of the first movement to the final Beethovenian burst into the major key.

Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra: 8 p.m. Tues. Center for Performing Arts, Atherton. \$25-\$85. (415) 252-1288. www.philharmonia.org.

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