

 Click to Print[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Blossom review: Guest conductor brings out Baroque brilliance

Sunday's performance tops Saturday's 'Midsummer Night's Dream,' Elaine Guregian says

By Elaine Guregian
Beacon Journal arts and culture

POSTED: 12:31 p.m. EDT, Jul 28, 2008

On the second night of a two-day appearance at Blossom Music Festival, guest conductor Nicholas McGegan did what he does best: conduct music of the Baroque.

On Saturday night, he had led the Cleveland Orchestra in attractive performances of music related (directly or indirectly) to Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Sunday night's playing rose a notch, with details snapped into crisp focus for vivid performances. Balances and blends came together just a little better, and the results were terrific.

The mission of McGegan's own group, the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra in the San Francisco Bay area, is to give historically informed performances on early instruments. It's a switch for him to lead an orchestra of today's instruments, which produce louder, heavier sounds, but McGegan and the players translated the principles of brightness and sharply defined lines into Sunday's concert.

There's one big upside to a modern orchestra: increased accuracy of the wind instruments. Fewer wind players than usual were used for this selection of works by Vivaldi, Haydn, Mouret, Leclair and Handel, but they added appealing layers of colors and textures, with none of the rough or out-of-control sounds that can creep into early-music performances.

Michael Sachs and Jack Sutte, from the orchestra's trumpet section, were perfectly matched soloists in Vivaldi's Concerto for Two Trumpets. Whether playing in harmony or chasing one another's lines in Baroque style, their singing tones and flashing colors were a delight.

McGegan made himself the amiable host of the evening, announcing at the beginning that he would be providing walking, talking program notes. He was eager to give the audience a laugh, and he succeeded with quips like calling Venice (where Vivaldi worked) the Las Vegas of 18th-century Europe. He worked hard to quickly establish the cultural scene for each composer. It's not easy to reduce entire eras or careers to a couple of sentences, and the comments were sometimes disjointed, but McGegan set a friendly, jovial tone.

This concert might have been best taken in from the lawn, where you could eat and drink while listening to pieces such as Vivaldi's Concerto for String Orchestra ("Alla rustica") or Haydn's Symphony No. 30 ("Alleluia"), which is agreeable music, agreeably played. Music like the two suites from Handel's *Water Music* (originally played on a boat floating down the Thames River to entertain King George I) is light, featuring plenty of dance music from Handel's era. Sitting silently in a chair, focusing on each note, is probably too formal a way to listen, but the orchestra and McGegan gave polished performances that withstood the scrutiny.

Also up to close listening was the preceding work, Jean-Marie Leclair's suite for string orchestra from the opera *Scylla and Glaucus* (not *Glaucus and Scylla*, as printed in the program). The opera is not played much, if at all these days, although its Overture is known as the theme from the PBS show *Masterpiece Theatre*.

Besides working as a composer, Leclair danced professionally at the Lyon Opera. The orchestra did justice to the dance rhythms of Leclair's opera. Conductor and players whipped up excitement in the final movement, sweeping through the showy runs to bring things to a buoyant and flamboyant end.

Elaine Guregian can be reached at 330-996-3574 or eguregian@thebeaconjournal.com

Find this article at:

http://www.ohio.com/news/break_news/25988389.html

 [Click to Print](#)

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

Copyright © 2008 Ohio.com