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CLASSICAL REVIEW

Music of the Baroque's Handel reviewed

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Handel's "Acis and Galatea" can't be easily categorized (opera, cantata, serenata, masque?), and it survives in multiple competing versions. The plot is simplicity itself, condensed to its barest bones by the composer from characters in Ovid's "Metamorphoses." But historical baggage was far from the minds of the audience at Harris Theater on Friday, treated as they were to a stylish and vivid performance by Music of the Baroque under the baton of music director Jane Glover.

The first part, a collection of irresistible bonbons of unsurpassed lyrical charm, was delivered with supple grace and an easy lilt. The conductor's pacing was judiciously varied, and Julia David's chorus served as a finely honed complement to the soloists' amorous exchanges. Glover deftly switched gears at the opening of the second part, coaxing a palpable sense of foreboding from her vocalists and accentuating Handel's ghostly counterpoint and vivid text painting.

Elizabeth Futral was a dazzling Galatea, the goddess who falls hard for mortal shepherd Acis. The soprano was in top form, effortlessly spinning gorgeous lines with a creamy, pure legato and vigorous diction. Tenor Thomas Cooley as the amorous Acis was equally authentic, boasting a pure, expressive tone that easily filled the hall.

Benjamin Butterfield as Damon was the loquacious mediator, dispensing advise to the warring parties with warm, dulcet pronouncements. Only Christopheren Nomura felt miscast as Polyphemus, the monster who competes with Acis for the goddess' affections. His portrayal had the requisite dramatic bluster, but he was no match for Handel's cavernous low notes.

High points from the orchestra included luminous pastoral musings from the woodwinds and steady, incisive support from the continuo.

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