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May 9, 2010

Concert review: Bach Festival opener 'Bach and Mary, Mother of God' performed lovingly

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Posted by **Jodi Duckett** at 11:15:15 PM on May 9, 2010

By Steve Siegel Special to The Morning Call

I recall a ring of my mother's, a basket-weave pattern of strands of silver and gold, the two metals intertwined in a tight embrace. That's the best way I can describe the melding of the voices of countertenor Daniel Taylor and soprano Agnes Zsigovics in Giovanni Battista Pergolesi's "Stabat Mater." It was performed Friday at Packer Memorial Church, in the second half of the Bethlehem Bach Festival's two-part program entitled "Bach and Mary, Mother of God."

The "Stabat Mater," in its festival debut, was for me the highlight of an entire evening of lovingly performed music.

The concert's first part featured Bach's cantata BWV 147, "Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben," Cantata BWV 158, "Der Friede sei mit dir," and the "small" Mass in A Major, BWV 234.

The second part, in addition to the "Stabat Mater," featured Bach's joyous Magnificat.

Pergolesi's sacred masterpiece is a work of great tenderness and somber beauty. Conductor Greg Funfgeld coaxed a lovely, rich chamber orchestra sound from the Bach Festival Orchestra strings, enhanced by the light touch of Charlotte Mattax Moersch on organ. The hauntingly beautiful voices of Taylor and Zsigovics — she in her festival debut — melted together like two precious metals.



ABOUT THIS BLOG

From Musikfest to Riverfusion ... Croc Rock to Godfrey Daniels ... Mayfair to the Allentown Fair — welcome to the Lehigh Valley Music Blog! Check in regularly for tips on worthwhile nocturnal activities and one-of-a-kind concert and record reviews from our resident pop music aficionados.

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ABOUT THE WRITERS



GARY BLOCKUS He bought his first album at age 14: Bread's "Baby I'm A Want You." The next day, he bought Black Sabbath's "Paranoid" and Deep Purple's "Machine Head." He's covered everything in the metal/hard rock genre, from Motley Crue to Papa Roach to Ted Nugent and Aerosmith to the softer side like Bon Jovi.



JODI DUCKETT As The Morning Call's assistant features editor responsible for entertainment, she spends a lot of time surveying the music landscape and sizing up the Valley's festivals and club scene. She's no expert, but enjoys it all — especially artists who resonated in her younger years, such as Crosby, Stills, Nash, Young, Tracy Chapman, Santana and Joni Mitchell.



KEITH GROLLER Our local sports editor strays from his post on Groller's Corner for another of his passions. He's attracted to the sights (Shania

hers of bell-like clarity, his a more complex alchemy, with a sheen like liquid mercury.

Much of Pergolesi's score evokes the flavor of Handel's "Messiah," with similar chromatic sequences, sighing passages, and dramatic dissonance straight out of the operatic style that made both composers famous.

Bach's "Magnificat" was brisk and dramatic, with resplendent trumpet fanfares and solid, full-bodied choral sections. Joining Zsigovics was soprano Rosa Lamoreaux, with a voice a bit brighter and more transparent than Zsigovics' creamy, velvety tone. Zsigovics' soulful, yearning aria, "Quia respexit," with oboe obbligato by Mary Watt, was a highlight, as was "Esurientes implicit," sung by Taylor and accompanied by flutists Robin Kani and Susan Chariton.



Cantata BWV 147, which opened the first part of the program, is one of Bach's most beloved, famous for its instantly recognizable choral, "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring." Tenor Benjamin Butterfield delivered its opening recitative with tenderness and conviction, introducing the character of Mary for the first time.

The piece was filled with exquisite pairings, such as the imposing double basses behind Butterfield's forceful delivery of "Hilf, Jesu," Cheryl Bishkoff's oboe d'amore obbligato with Taylor in "Schame, dich," and Zsigovics' aria "Bereite dir," lovingly accompanied by violinist Elizabeth Field. Bass-baritone Christopheren Nomura excelled in a booming performance of "Ich will," made especially dramatic by Lawrence Wright's brilliant trumpet solos.

The ringing baritone voice of William Sharp was highlighted in Cantata BWV 158, especially in his compelling duet with Lamoreaux, "Welt, ade," accompanied by Watt and Field in a particularly virtuosic obbligato. Sharp and Lamoreaux also sung beautifully in Bach's short but sweet A Major Mass, also known as a Missa Brevis. Short because it sets only the Kyrie and Gloria sections required by Lutheran usage, sweet in its sheer nobility and tenderness.

A "Bach and Mary, Mother of God" will be repeated at 4:30 p.m. (Part I) and 8:30 p.m. (Part II) next Friday at Packer Memorial Church, Lehigh University, Bethlehem. Tickets: \$27, \$21 adults; \$10 up to age 22. For tickets and information on this and other Bach Festival festival concerts, call 610-866-4382 or go to www.bach.org.

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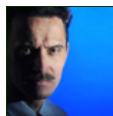
persons. He's attracted to the signs (Orania, Faith, Carrie, Martina) and sounds (Paisley, Strait, Adkins, Keith) of today's country music scene and likes to add a little twang to the conversation.



ARLENE MARTINEZ Her music was influenced by her mom, who hasn't turned the radio off since Arlene came home from the hospital. She's a top-40 kinda girl with a special place in her heart for hip-hop, R&B, rancheros and musical soundtracks. Favorites include the Bee Gees, Jill Scott, Neil Diamond, Q-Tip, Juan Gabriel, T.I., Britney Spears and all of "Les Miserables." She is used to people making fun of her taste.



JOHN L. MICEK caught the rock bug young. The TMC Harrisburg Correspondent bought his first record, U2's "Under a Blood Red Sky," at age 13 and hasn't looked back. Besides listening to artists ranging from The Ramones to Dean Martin, Micek also writes about music, his work appearing in publications including The Big Takeover, Pop Culture Press and Playlist magazine. He is also a former contributor to PopMatters.com. And when he's not writing about music, Micek is playing it. From 2002-07, he fronted Milkshake Jones, a power-pop act that released two critically acclaimed (if woefully overlooked) records on The Paisley Pop Label of Portland, Ore. These days he handles bass guitar duties for Fink's Constant, a ska and reggae band that gigs regularly around central Pennsylvania.



JOHN J. MOSER He caught the music writing bug in high school when his Led Zeppelin story won an award. He wrote the first story ever on Jack's Mannequin, has the number for All-American Rejects' Nick Wheeler on his cell phone and was the only newspaper writer given access to the Jonas Brothers for a day.



STEPHANIE SIGAFOOS A Jersey native raised in Northeast PA, she was reared in a house littered with 8-tracks, 45s and cassette tapes of The Beatles, Elvis, Meatloaf and Billy Joel. She also grew up on the sounds of Reba McEntire, Garth Brooks and Tim McGraw and can be found traversing the countryside in search of the sounds of a steel guitar. A fan of today's 'new country' she digs mainstream/country-pop crossovers like Lady Antebellum and Sugarland and other artists that illustrate the genre's diversity.

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