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Music Soars in Hands of Flying Forms

BY BARBARA GOLDOWSKY

A vivacious young ensemble enlivened a cold, damp April afternoon last Sunday, presenting baroque chamber music on period instruments in the Avram Gallery at Stony Brook Southampton.

The group's name, Flying Forms, is an allusion to baroque architecture—lofty buildings, fanciful ornamentation. It can also define the music's style. The four so-called "core members" who were featured in last Sunday's concert have performed extensively—both as individuals and together—have won international competitions, and share a passion for early music. Recent performances have included concerts at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Yale University, and Stony Brook University.

Violinist Marc Levine is also the artistic director of the Sunday Music Series at Stony Brook Southampton. Appearing with him were cellist Jonathan den Herder, harpsichordist Tami Morse, and Stephanie Corwin, playing the baroque bassoon. Mr. Levine welcomed the audience to what he called "this trial version of the series" and encouraged all in attendance to leave written comments. Responding to his obvious enthusiasm, suggestions were voiced immediately: "It takes time to gather an audience" ... "A number of programs started small here, and are big now."

In the intimate space of the Avram Gallery (the Avram auditorium is still under renovation) such informal interchange between musicians and listeners was perfectly appropriate and charming.

Seeming pleased with the response, Mr. Levine introduced his musical program—compositions spanning about 150 years, from Giovanni Batista Fontana, who died circa 1630, to George Frederic Handel, who died in 1759. Along the way, and represented by works that showcased each performer's special instrument, the program included pieces by Corelli, Vivaldi, Rameau and Marais, as well as the less well known Benedetto Marcello and Dario Marcello.

The tones produced by each of the Flying Forms musicians were superb—crisp and energetic in fast passages, lovely and singing in adagios, a pleasure to hear in ensemble as well as in solos. Mr. Levine starred in Arcangelo Corelli's Sonata for violin and continuo, Opus 5, No. 3, and in Handel's Sonata in G minor for violin and continuo. In both, he executed rapid acrobatic passages with verve and clarity. Tami Morse, the harpsichordist, provided continuo—a bass accompaniment indicated but not necessarily written out by the composer—with inventive skill.

The elegant cellist, Jonathan den Herder, shone in Antonio Vivaldi's Sonata No.3 for

cello and continuo, again accompanied by Ms. Morse. In Benedetto Marcello's Sonata No. 1 for two cellos and basso continuo, Stephanie Corwin, playing bassoon, joined Mr. den Herder as "second cello," a substitution often made at the time.

The baroque bassoon is a formidable instrument that looks like a cross between a large, stout walking stick and a hookah. Admirable for her seemingly effortless control of the unwieldy object slung around her neck, the slender Ms. Corwin elicited a beautiful, mellow sound from the instrument.

After inviting the audience to stay for a reception after the show, the entire ensemble performed the final piece, "Sonnerie de Saint Geneviève du Mont de Paris" by Marin Marais. They were rewarded with much-deserved applause. In the context of an early music presentation, it's important to remember that Stradivarius made new violins, and that baroque music was not born old. How refreshing to meet this youthful group that plays old music as if it were the newest, coolest thing going.

The Sunday Music Series will conclude with a concert on Sunday, April 20, featuring the Stony Brook Chamber Music Cooperative.

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