

Baroque concert feast for the ears and eyes

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By Marc Shulgold

REVIEW

We're used to Baroque music coming out of our FM radios on a quiet Sunday morning - and it can be a lovely listening experience. Music of the late 17th and early 18th centuries can work well as background music for brunch or quiet conversation. But if you really want to experience the Baroque, you have to see it performed. The visual element, as presented with emphatic brilliance by the Italian ensemble Interpreti Veneziani in Lakewood on Wednesday, added immeasurably to the joys of these colorful pieces. The nine-member, all-male group traveled a long way from its home in the San Vidal Church in Venice - but the players managed to take some of that Venetian magic with them. San Vidal, after all, is where Vivaldi played his fiddle back in the day.

The Red Priest, as he was called, was a major feature of Wednesday's fast-moving concert. There were Vivaldi concertos for one, two and four violins, plus three more excerpts played in encore before a cheering, packed house that couldn't get enough Baroque. To counterbalance all those note-crazy concertos, the group served up a Concerto Grosso of Corelli (Opus 6, No. 4) and the romantic-sounding strains of Vitali's G-minor *Chacone*.

And just to prove that they're not stuck in the early 18th century, the ensemble played a lively setting of Falla's First *Spanish Dance* from *La Vida Breve*, and, to bring this rousing program to an eye-popping, mind-boggling conclusion, Nicola Granillo dazzled his audience as soloist in the final movement from Paganini's Second Violin Concerto.

That movement, known as *La Campanella* (The Bell), features some impossible virtuoso solo lines that call for right- and left-hand pizzicato, harmonics, harmonics in double-stops, *glissandos* in double-stops and other crowd-pleasing fiddling heroics. Granillo hardly missed a note, ably assisted by the bell-like triangle of Paolo Cognolato, who happily abandoned his post as harpsichordist and tapped away with the soloist.

Throughout the concert, the visual aspect of this music kept the audience enthralled. Seated in a semi-circle, the string players chimed in with solo passages, unison ensemble passages, duets, trios, etc. It looked like a spirited party conversation, enlivened by the obvious pleasure the group's members felt in playing music that surely must be in their blood. The all-important continuo parts were nimbly handled by Cognolato and cellist Nazzareno Balduin. Solos were distributed among the four violinists, with first-chair Paolo Ciociola taking the lion's share. Each fiddler, however, seemed the equal of the others. This is a group consisting of nine first-rank players. And this was an evening of first-rate music-making and unforgettably exciting music.

So much for a quiet Sunday brunch.