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REVIEW: "INTERPRETI VENEZIANI"

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The Italian chamber orchestra Interpreti Veneziani may specialize in baroque music of the 1700s, but its approach is anything but old-fashioned. The five violinists -- backed by a viola, cello, bass and harpsichord -- each had a turn at being the soloist, swapping chairs and even scores throughout the performance, rather like a jazz band. (Group leader Paolo Ciociola kept the first chair unless he stood as a soloist, and the swapping of scores, in the middle of an encore, appeared to be a mix-up, through which they kept playing as if nothing unexpected was happening.) And they delivered the music with the animated body language and acoustic interplay of a jazz band, too.

Most of the music was by Vivaldi, both the main program and the two encores. We get accustomed (and sometimes bored) with yet another hearing of "The Four Seasons." But at the Friday-night program in the Discovery Theatre, other treasures from the enormous trove of Vivaldi's compositions came out, each a gem of ingenuity and elegant excitement.

The night opened, however, with a concerto grosso by an earlier composer, Corelli, whose numerous contrasting episodes of fast and slow sections confused some in the audience, who applauded at every pause. They seemed more comfortable with the standard three-movement format of the Vivaldi offerings, in which no mis-claps were heard.

Two more recent pieces closed each half of the program, but both fit the mood of the night. Sarasate's searing "Zingaresca" uses the grand baroque form of a chaconne. Paganini's "La Campanella" has no such formal connection to the earlier music but shares Vivaldi's love of picturesque effects; in the case of this arrangement, harpsichordist Paolo Cognolato accompanied the "Bells" theme on a triangle while soloist Nicola Granillo spun off astonishing fiddle tricks that might have got him caned had Corelli been there.

But the sold-out house in Anchorage loved it, cheering, shouting, jumping to its feet and departing to start cars at minus-10 aglow with the charm of Venice's warm musical heritage.