




This Early Music New York concert reflects the Baroque dominance in Bach's family tree

22/03/2022 by Daniele Sahr

 **United States 'Bach Cousins':** Daniel Moody (countertenor), Early Music New York / Frederick Renz (conductor). First Church of Christ, Scientist, New York, 5.3.2022. (DS)



Frederick Renz conducts the Early Music New York ensemble © Benjamin Chasteen

Johann Christoph Bach – Lamento 'Ach, dass ich Wassers g'nug hätte'
Johann Ludwig Bach – Overture in G

Johann Bernhard Bach – Overture No.3 in E minor

Johann Sebastian Bach – Cantata sinfonie; Cantata sonatina BWV106; Cantata ‘Widerstehe doch der Sünde’ BWV54

There is nothing quite like experiencing something done well by those well-poised to do it. This was true of the Early Music New York musicians as well as the eighteenth-century composers featured in the program, ‘Bach Cousins’. The evening proved the two entities share an unyielding dedication to producing Baroque music with standards that elevate repertoire and experience. Like the extended Bach family which made a name as the best place for musical one-stop-shopping, so New York City can rely on the brilliantly grouped musicians under the devoted direction of Frederick Renz to offer an impeccable concert.

While the program did include three cantatas by the ever-transcendent Johann Sebastian, the compositions by his relatives, who rest on an impressive family tree stretching from 1615 to 1750, held their own. Early Music New York’s program illustrated a pattern of musical development which mirrored music history in a chronological theme that more concert-planners ought to emulate. (Chronology is too little heeded in our post-postmodern world.)

The early works such as the sonatas by Heinrich Bach and Johann Michael Bach included extensive parts for recorder and viola da gamba. These compositions laid the foundation for a rustic Baroque sound, unwavering from the expected harmonic sound, format, texture and ornamentation. Tricia van Oers and Sarah Davol played recorders with a vigor and tonal adroitness that unveiled the sonorous beauty existing in this oft-misunderstood instrument.

As the branches of the family tree grew, so did the counterpoint, harmonic terrain and number of dance suites. J. S. Bach’s Cantata sinfonia (1707-8) and Johann Ludwig’s Overture (1715) were performed with well-oiled, dynamic accuracy that skillfully shouldered the altering effect period instruments carry, making strengths out of what the contemporary listener’s ear might erroneously hear as tonal defects. This came as near as could be to how it would have sounded in 1707 or 1715, thanks to the nimble playing of musicians on period instruments.

tasting the castle cellar's rarest wine, just opened to the world with a burst of brilliance. Daniel Moody performed Lamento 'Ach, dass ich Wassers g'nug hätte' by Johann Christoph and Johann Sebastian's Cantata BWV54 with a gripping, hypnotic voice. It was impossible to look away from his enrapturing presence and not cling to the otherworldly timbre of his voice – a sound neither mimicking a female vocal range nor stretching the male's but creating a new aural space: silky, smooth and innocently mysterious. Moody's blend of theatrical, expressive and steadfast style paired with the ensemble's astute accompaniment made a graceful combination.

To end the evening, we heard Overture No.3 from Johann Bernhard Bach, a slightly older cousin of Johann Sebastian. This French-influenced work managed to avoid being completely overshadowed by the Cantata BWV54 that preceded it. The tightly crafted, dynamic dance suite, including individually titled character movements, found its own place of prominence on the program thanks to a series of pleasurable movements that unfolded, each with an individualized flair.

Early Music New York will close its season in May with an all-Telemann concert: 'Telemann à la Polonaise'. If 'Bach Cousins' was any indication, we are in for further musical enlightenment this spring.

Daniele Sahr

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