

Valley Vivaldi series opens splendidly

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By Steve Siegel Special to The Morning Call

The Pennsylvania Sinfonia Orchestra presented its first Valley Vivaldi concert of the summer Sunday evening at Cedar Crest College's Tompkins Center with its usual mix of familiar and lesser-known fare. Anchored by Bach's double violin concerto, the program's most well-known work, were pieces by Boismortier, Blavet, Telemann, and of course Vivaldi.

Even those unfamiliar with Vivaldi's Cello Concerto in B Minor would instantly recognize the composer's signature bouncy style and use of ritornello. Cellist Deborah Davis performed splendidly, giving many passages a deeply muscular voice. The largo was particularly passionate, and the final virtuosic allegro was packed with energy.

Boismortier's Sonata in E Minor for Three Violins was a bit less inspiring, although still bright and lively, especially in its presto movement. The adagio seemed a bit ragged, and the final allegro too-brief. But in Telemann's Concerto a 4 for flute, oboe, violin, and continuo, the adagios excelled. In an especially lovely passage, oboist Cheryl Bishkoff, flutist Robin Kani and violinist Simon Maurer played beautifully against a continuo of pizzicato cello and harpsichord, played by conductor Allan Birney.

French composer Michael Blavet's flute concerto was a tour de force for soloist Robin Kani, who cruised through its complex passages with a silken tone and gentle attack. Its many trills, slurs, and arpeggios sounded very Vivaldi-like, but with some delightfully quirky tempos.

Bach's Concerto in D Minor for two violins was the most solidly performed work of the evening, and with eight musicians, the most orchestral. Violinists Mary Ogletree and Rebecca Brown played seamlessly — a near-perfect match of intonation, balance and modulation as they chased after each other through the fugal texture of the famous work. The largo was a perfectly balanced duet, and the fascinating dialogue between the two soloists carried through to the finale.