

Season's Final Vivaldi Concert Includes 'Delightful Oddball Ringer'



Cellist Deborah Davis performs during the final concert of this season's Valley Vivaldi series.

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By STEVE SIEGEL

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Bethlehem, Pa. -- The Pennsylvania Sinfonia Orchestra presented the season's final Valley Vivaldi concert on

the evening of Sunday, Aug. 30, 2009, at Wesley Church, Bethlehem, Pa., with some real classics--few works are more well-recognized than Pachelbel's Canon--but, as expected, with an oddball ringer or two thrown in.

Sunday's oddball--and a delightful one at that--was an obscure piece by Vivaldi himself. *Al Santo Sepolcro*, scored for two violins, viola, cello, and bass, was anything but the composer's usual upbeat, foot-tapping material. In this somber, two-movement work, the cello and bass do not constitute a continuo, but perform almost as they would in a modern string quintet. The second movement, a bit livelier than the first, sounded like Vivaldi, but in the manner of an old LP being played at too slow a speed.

Mary Ogletree and Rebecca Brown were the featured violin soloists in Handel's *Trio Sonata in F* for two violins and continuo. They established a lovely dialogue in the piece's first movement, its operatic lyricism recalling a duet from the composer's *Giulio Cesare*. The adagio had the flavor of a stately sarabande, and the final allegro was lively and high-spirited.

Equally lively was Mozart's Quartet in F for oboe and strings. Oboe soloist Lisa Kozanko played with a rich, well-rounded sound, presenting a performance more introspective than outright bouncy. She handled the piece's many fast-fingered, rapid passages with aplomb, and made the instrument's lower register appear almost bottomless.

As many times as one has heard Pachelbel's Canon in D, it's rare to actually hear it in its entirety, written in its original form for three violins and continuo. The ensemble's performance was delightful, with each of the three violinists--Ogletree and Brown joined by Simon Maurer--engaged in an entertaining game of chase, playing the exact same phrase but delayed in time. Kudos to cellist Deborah Davis and harpsichordist Allan Birney for their marathon performance in the continuo.

The program closed with Bach's Concerto in E for violin, strings, and continuo, a tour de force for the talents of violin soloist Ogletree. From its bright, cheerful opening, throughout its profoundly intense adagio, and to its lively conclusion, Ogletree's performance was superb. Her delivery was silky smooth and well-balanced, the adagio played with

loving passion. She took off on flights of virtuosity in the rondo's set of variations, each departure more perilous than the last, each played splendidly.

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