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MUSIC REVIEW

Camerata marks birthday in style

The Boston Globe

By Richard Dyer, Globe Staff | June 20, 2005

To celebrate the Boston Camerata's 50th birthday, the City Council officially proclaimed Saturday "Boston Camerata Day." The city has abundant reason to be proud of this renowned ensemble; the group's way of celebrating was to perform its "Carmina Burana" program for an enthusiastic Jordan Hall audience at the Boston Early Music Festival.

Camerata artistic director Joel Cohen put together this program 10 years ago, recorded it, and toured it widely. It was good to hear it again. Cohen noted that some of the medieval texts are famous through Carl Orff's perennially popular and "raunchy" oratorio. His own effort was to reconnect the lusty poems to their original music or to suitable music of the period.

There was some very good singing by a current Camerata team, with veterans making strong showings: sonorous baritone Donald Wilkinson; soprano Anne Azema, singing with vivid imagination and delicacy of detail; tenor Timothy Leigh Evans, plaintively voicing the lament of a roasted swan. Among the relative newcomers mezzo Deborah Renz-Moore and baritone Aaron Engebretsen promised a bright future, along with a lively group from the Harvard-Radcliffe Collegium Musicum. Cohen led a vigorous instrumental group from his lute, and provided intelligent and amusing spoken commentary.

At the end, he brought onstage some people active in the Camerata at the time he himself joined back in 1963, including two former artistic directors, Daniel Pinkham and Victor Mattfeld, as well as tenors Charles Fassett and Richard Conrad, and Friedrich and Ingeborg von Huene, who played recorders made in their famous workshop. Smiling on from the audience was Nancy Armstrong, the most radiant of Camerata sopranos. Everyone onstage was then joined by a gigantic birthday cake.

Cohen's abilities as a program-maker are legendary; this was one of the few BEMF concerts of the week that didn't go on too long. For example, Friday night's concert featuring the BEMF Orchestra and various guest soloists lasted nearly three hours.

Three BEMF musicians bravely stepped in when Italian superstar baroque violinist Giuliano Carmignola canceled at the last minute because of illness. Russian violinists Andrey Reshetin and Maria Krestinskaya offered a lively, scruffy performance of Bach's Double Violin Concerto. With eloquence and finesse, cellist Phoebe Carrai played a terrific concerto by Johann Wilhelm

Hertel (1727-1789) that deserves a place in the repertory alongside the concertos of Haydn. Carrai had performed the concerto earlier this year in Montreal, and fortunately owns a set of orchestral parts. A fortepiano concerto in F-Minor by Hertel is an equally strong piece, which manages to sound simultaneously baroque, classical, and romantic. The virtuoso fingers, highly developed ear, and prodigious musical personality of fortepianist Kristian Bezuidenhout served it handsomely, although he does let the rhythm wilt when he is playing slowly.

Recorder virtuoso Matthias Maute offered contrasting concerti by Telemann and Vivaldi, playing both of them with crackling vitality and whizzing velocity. The program closed with a splendid "Magnificat" for double chorus by the composer of this year's festival opera "Boris Goudenow," Johann Mattheson. Most of the excellent young singers served in the chorus for "Boris." Bass Olivier Laquerre, the old Czar Theodorus, contributed an imposing solo to the "Magnificat." The score was composed with an impressive virtuosity matched by that of the players and singers.■

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