

Orchestra travels to Jordan

By Avigdor Zarembo
special writer

The Flauto e Basso baroque ensemble just opened their fourth season. Those who are familiar with this series expect a regular dose of unfamiliar works by mostly unknown, hard-to-pronounce names.

This, indeed, is one of its primary functions — to provide the listeners with some treasures untouched by programs featuring the standard repertoire.

The first of six programs this season, presented last Saturday at the Birmingham Unitarian Church was unusual in that respect: It was dedicated to one well-known composer — Handel, with six selections of his works presented.

This is unusually low for this series.

A typical program features many short pieces by numerous composers, loosely connected by a common denominator — too numerous to list or remember

without referring to the program, which even the musicians periodically have to do.

In addition to Thomas Clifton, recorder and baroque flute, and Daniel Jencks, harpsichord, there also were guest artists Doris Williams, soprano, and Thomas Selevick, baroque bassoon. Both of whom are known to the regular listeners. The program featured two vocal selections, two autes and two sonatas (not in that order).

HANDEL's most popular vocal work is, of course, the "Messiah," not represented here. Rather, some of his less familiar music was featured. The two vocal selections consisted of an aria from his opera, "Allesandro" and an Italian cantata, "Dio mio Ben." Doris Williams presented these with authority, easily climbing up the concluding scales, without undue pretentiousness.

There were some selections with a more familiar ring. The Suite No. 5 in E Major might not be familiar as a

whole, but many recall its final movement, a set of variations on "The Harmonious Blacksmith."

Here, harpsichordist Jencks stumbled in some of the running passages. But he provided a rewarding rendition of the earlier movements, laden with heavy rubato and rich ornamentation. The most familiar selection was a suite from the Water Music, arranged for the harpsichord probably around 1760, shortly after Handel's death.

While the harpsichord version falls short of the better known rich and supple orchestral version, it provides a great deal of color and texture and proved to be a rather interesting version. The one exception was the concluding air, which sounded harmonically deficient, and didn't fully utilize the capabilities of the instrument.

THE TWO sonatas for flute and basso continuo had some familiar movements, due to the fact that they were borrowed from some more familiar

works — a practice that Handel frequently used.

Contrary to the superstition that a sonata should have three or four movements, these had five. Bassoonist Selevick provided skillful passages in counterpoint to Clifton's flowing recorder or baroque flute themes. These mingled aptly with the measured harpsichord accompaniment.

As a whole, this program provided a rare bridge between the familiar and the obscure Handel. Even such a well-known composer wrote a lot of music that is essentially uncharted territory. This program offered only a small sample of the many possibilities.

For those who missed the chance this time, there will be a repeat performance at the Edsel and Eleanor Ford House this Saturday. Next program, "The Age of Elegance," will take place on Oct. 29 at the Birmingham Unitarian Church. Call 656-1574 for more information.

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