

Bach sample ensures his immortality

By Avigdor Zaromp
special writer

This is the time of Bach celebrations. Chamberworks series has been offering us baroque music programs this season. While all were expertly designed and prepared, none could match the quality of last week's program. This is because — there was no master who could equal J. S. Bach, at least not during the baroque era.

It is fairly easy to put together a program of works by Bach. The quantity, in almost every form, could provide material for a complete series dedicated to his music practically indefinitely. Bach's music may be challenging and formidable, but some of it is accessible to listeners of all levels. Even those works that don't require technical virtuosity demand a great deal of understanding and commitment by the performers to make an impact.

Stylistic comprehension and integ-



Avigdor Zaromp

ity were the rule on this program. Credit for this goes to Thomas Kuras, artistic director of the series. The knowledge of the period that Kuras demonstrates in these programs should qualify him as a leading authority on the subject. It goes beyond the encyclopedic assimilation of facts. The style and atmosphere of the period seem to be a natural environment for him and this tends to transform the event into a genuine, authentic presentation of a living period and style, rather than an abstract academic study of ancient music.

IT WOULD be impossible to present a significant variety of Bach's music in a single program. This one,

indeed, gave only a small sample of his chamber music, excluding such major categories as cantatas, works for unaccompanied strings, and

more. However, even this small sample would have been sufficient to make him immortal.

The selections were two sonatas for violin and harpsichord, a sonata for viola da gamba and harpsichord, a French suite, a prelude and fugue from the "Well Tempered Clavier" and a sonata for two violins and basso continuo. Kuras, who played the harpsichord, was joined by violinists Maria Smith and Stephanie Preucil and cellist Paul Willington.

The perception of style, the most important element in Bach's music, was always present and made this program extremely rewarding in spite of some occasional intonation slips. To those who argue that the harpsichord is a monstrous instrument due to its inability to support a crescendo, the playing of the French suite in E Flat Major and the Prelude and Fugue in C Major provide a convincing refutation.

The stylistically correct rubato

and the varied embellishments on the repeats made the music as varied and eventful as any work from later periods. The strings, played with only minimal vibrato, were uncompromised in their expressive quality.

As always, the event was sold out and only those who ordered tickets could be admitted. Due to the limited seating capacity of the Bellin Center, this is likely to be the case in the future.

Photos document bygone lifestyle

"The Highway as Habitat: A Roy Stryker Documentation, 1943-1955," at Henry Ford Museum, to June 12, is a photographic exhibit of 136 black and white images capturing a bygone era.

Executed under the direction of sociologist Roy Stryker for Standard Oil of New Jersey, the documentary project, from which the exhibit was drawn, produced over 70,000 images that have become a narrative of their time — the time when the automobile had revolutionized American culture, but not yet overwhelmed the landscape.

In a manner similar to the "Day in the Life" projects familiar today, Roy Stryker engaged 25 photographers in 1943 to document American culture as it related to oil. Stryker

took no pictures himself. Rather, for 12 years he sent his photographers out in the field armed with knowledge about economics, sociology and the intricacies of the oil business. Because he defined the project in a very broad way, the images, once only important to an oil company, became a detailed pictorial history portraying American culture during the World War II and post-war period.

Stryker's documentation is a portrait of how truly pervasive the automobile had become in American society. It had brought the hub of life from the towns out onto the highways. Roadside diners were viable because travelers needed sustenance as they hurried on their way. Motels sprung up for road-weary

vacationers and traveling businessmen to rest en route to new horizons. Massive bridges were built so travelers could pursue new vistas even farther. And gas stations were a necessity to keep this bustling society on its wheels.

Ulrich Keller, a University of California Santa Barbara art history professor who selected the photographs for the exhibit, stumbled upon the Standard Oil photographic archive at the University of Louisiana in 1970 when he first came to the United States from his native West Germany.

The images of post-war America with its glistering cars and middle class excesses contrasted sharply with his own childhood memories of a war-torn Germany where every-

one relied upon public transportation and only the very wealthy had automobiles.

Stryker is also known for the photo documentation he organized for Roosevelt's Farm Security Administration depicting rural America during the 1930s Great Depression.

Included among the 22 photographers represented in the "The Highway as Habitat" exhibit are John Vachon, Margaret Bourke-White, Charles Rotkin, Esther Bubley, Russell Lee, Harold Corbin, Gordon Parks and Leo Libsohn.

"The Highway as habitat" is on loan from the University of California, Santa Barbara. There is no additional charge for the exhibit beyond the regular museum admission.

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