

Review: Boomeria

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The Santa Cruz Baroque Festival's recently completed season featured an amazing variety of instruments. Its five concerts included the California Koto ensemble performing Vivaldi's "Four Seasons"; a guitar orchestra playing Bach; the complete Bach inventions performed on two mandolins; Bach on marimba with trombone; and a men's chorus a la Swingle Singers.

The 50 guests at Boomeria on Saturday were treated to a smorgasbord of surreal juxtaposition no less eclectic than that Baroque season, with the fundraising afternoon a fitting climax to the festival's 32nd year. On the grounds of Preston Boomer's Bonny Doon estate, complete with catacombs, castle and Chapel Royal, guests experienced a performance by Bill Visscher of French organ music, most appropriate for Bastille Day. With a guillotine just outside the chapel door, the audience had to tread lightly. The organist at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, Claude Balbastre [1724-1799] was one of the most famous composers of his day, so it's no surprise he was invited to teach music to Marie Antoinette. When the French Revolutionaries stormed the Bastille, Balbastre lost his job, but diplomatically played revolutionary songs, thus saving his head.

Visscher invited guests to enter the inner sanctum, where, surrounded by organ pipes of varying lengths and timbres ranging from just a few inches in length to room height, powered by the enormous bellows and complex assortment of pulleys, guests could truly sample surround sound in the raw. Saving his most polished performance for his last selection, Visscher's final piece, Bach's "Prelude and Fugue in B minor," was the perfect showcase for his nifty footwork with 32nd notes interspersed throughout the prelude.

Ann Thiermann guided us from the Baroque to the present day with a sampling of pieces by local contemporary composers. In "Mirage" by Franklin Asdown, Thiermann played as Visscher moved nimbly around the console, adding stops until he'd "pulled out all the stops."

This instrument was constructed in 1894, and, in a previous life, provided half a century of music at the Trinity Cathedral in San Jose before being lovingly rebuilt by Boomer and generations of San Lorenzo Valley High School students. It's not often that an organ, being an orchestra in itself, provides an accompanying role, but in the capable hands of Thiermann, the organ provided the perfect backdrop for Tatyana Rekow's dexterous performance of J. C. Pepusch's oboe "Sonata in G" 1667-1752.

The afternoon ended with an open mic and a request for Bach's "Prelude in D minor." Visscher, who'd already changed from his special organ shoes to his sneakers, supplied the goods from memory.

For the first concert of the season, the Baroque Festival had given us Vivaldi on koto; now, for its fundraiser for next year, we were treated to "Bach in sneakers."