**Academy of Ancient Music**

The Academy of Ancient Music builds to magnificent Mozart finale

*By JONATHAN RICHMOND*

I FEVER WE STAND A CHANCE OF KNOWING Mozart, it will be through performances such as that of the 40th Regional Symphony Orchestra of the Academy of Ancient Music last Friday. To a work of limitless depth, conductor Christopher Hogwood brought an interpretation of breathtaking revelation.

It lay in the fact that the music qua physical-sound-produced-by-tortured-cat-gut melted away to expose the pure symbolic content of the musical message. It was an ecstatic message, one of concentrated torrent transcended by rapturous joy. Above all, to listen to the Academy playing this symphony was to be party to an uplifting experience, one of beauty and refreshment.

There was a sense of precision from the opening moments of the first movement. Hogwood's architecture was finely-crafted and perfectly balanced. Each orchestral voice found a clarity all its own while relating to the others organically, drawing on the collective, unified inspiration of the members of the ensemble. The Adagio was particularly moving; the emotions in the Memmorial and trio were brilliantly controlled. The closing movement presented the most subtly played of oboe melodies, exhilarating horn music, and string playing that bounded the ensemble together and left the audience incalculably happy at the work's conclusion.

The earlier part of the concert had been of less felicitous proportions. Schubert's "Symphony No. 1," with which the evening had begun, was quite disappointing. The performance had an elegant form but little content. The Academy played the right notes, but did so drily and with little interest or expression.

Second act of "Julius" progresses to deeper levels

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Larson now showed remarkable sensitivity. Her golden tones were sweet and seductive as Cleopatra lived Caesar in Phaedra, pupilla. The harp in the ensemble orchestra consummated her electric sensuality. Later on, as the truth dawned that she is truly in love with Caesar, Larson's singing took on a new, self-questioning, mature: "If you do not have pity on me, just heaven, I will die!" Cleopatra sings: "I can only have peace in my torment or this soul will expire." As Larson explored every nuance of this text, it was hard to avoid a comparison with Fiordigli's struggles in Per petro (in "Cosi fan tutte"). Both Cleopatra and Fiordigli had to come to terms with a love they can no longer deny, and both do so in divine music. Led on by refined strings and gossamer winds, Larson's voice became closely personal, endearing delectably and exposing the audience to Cleopatra's inner yearnings.

Jeffrey Gall's performance also grew in stature as the afternoon progressed. His vocal dexterity was clearly extraordinary, and some passages were powerful. Overall, however, his voice seemed reminiscent, and the relationship of Caesar to Cleopatra was not as closely studied as that of Cornelia to Fabrizio.

Drew Minter — his voice projected through musical fangs — was wondrously wicked as Tolomeo and here, perhaps, Peter Sellars has earned his license to be wacky. The park diva's, sage, and ungentle body movements were evocative, and they worked both because they meshed with the music and because Minter is such a skillful singer.

Sellars could not, unfortunately, resist another dose of out-of-place cuteness before the opera's conclusion. He doubtless had a supply of tomato ketchup left over from his Castle Hill "Cosi" and a case of the subterfuge was employed over the slain Tolomeo (who, despite the ketchup stains, mysteriously returned to life to join in the Finale). We also witnessed a joyous Cleopatra frolicking about in silver hot pants and playing with sacks marked with a large dollar sign and "Credit Status" respectively. The final chorus, however, was simply glorious and quintessentially Han- delian.

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