British ensemble’s Vivaldi pleasant but insubstantial

PARLEY OF INSTRUMENTS

The Parley of Instruments provided a pleasant, if insubstantial evening of Vivaldi last Saturday night. The advertisement for their concert announced that the British ensemble was founded in 1979 “to explore and present the rich and neglected repertory of seventeenth-century concert music.” Why, then, were there two concertos from Vivaldi’s much overplayed Four Seasons included on the program? And could something more novel be found for an encore than Pachelbel’s top-of-the-pops Canon? By JONATHAN RICHMOND

MÉDÉE

Sarah Caldwell’s controversial production of Médée is now in full swing at the Opera House in Boston. It makes for an extraordinary evening, incorporating as it does Greek tragedy declaimed in Ancient Greek as well as the choral music and choral numbers. The Greek is gripping, and intensely moving, too, the opera a bit slow on the uptake, but with a shifting Act III crescendo to Médée’s climactic killing of her two sons. The tragedy and the opera do not fit as well together as might have been wished — the intensity of the Greek dilutes the impact of the Cherubini. It makes for some eccentric transitions — but there is so much to grab the imagination that with Parley of Instruments Series available for only $6 it would be a crime not to go. — Jonathan Richmond

Note: A full review of Médée will appear in The Tech next week.

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PRO ARTE

The Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra will be conducted by Bramwell Tovey in Gerald Finzi’s Cello Concerto, with Raphael Wallfisch, soloist, Mendelssohn’s Overture to “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” and Dvorak’s Cello Concerto in D, Op. 104, for soloist John Medeski. The concertos from the Seasons were performed by soloist Benjamin Hudson, who played with technical virtuosity but with no special insight. Holman also appeared for the Concerto in D, Op. 3, No. 9, playing with fluency and, in the second movement, feeling. Paul O’Dette was on stage to perform two concertos for lute and one for mandolin. They were all done brightly and provided enjoyable entertainment, but left the impression that Vivaldi’s music could only appeal on a superficial level. The slow movement of the Concerto in C for Mandolin, in particular, is a remarkable work of introspection, but this did not show through in O’Dette’s entry rendition. The Parley did provide wonderful, rich continuo textures and, in the Sinfonia in B, “As the Holy Sepulcher,” did present an unusual Vivaldi work, written for a true string quartet without continuo, and perform it with a keen sense of ensemble. The program as a whole, however, veered in the direction of easy popularity and failed to capture the essence of Vivaldi.

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