

The New York Times

Review: Europa Galante Plays at Alice Tully Hall

By VIVIEN SCHWEITZER, MAY 11, 2015

During a visit to New York last year, the period-instrument ensemble Europa Galante offered a Vivaldi program showcasing (with distinctive interpretive touches) the oft-heard “Four Seasons.” On Sunday evening at Alice Tully Hall, they played something far less common: a vivid programmatic work by Carlo Monza, part of a concert tracing the development of the symphonic genre in Italy and its impact on a young visitor, Mozart.

The event offered a rare chance to thumb through what could have been Mozart’s childhood photo album: Here he is at 14, hints of his maturity already evident; here he is at 15, surrounded by the older composers who would prove vital influences on his development.

Composers jostled for prominence in 1770s Milan. One of the most successful was Giovanni Battista Sammartini, highly respected by the Mozart family. Europa Galante, led by the dynamic violinist Fabio Biondi, offered Sammartini’s four-movement Sinfonia in G, the bristling tremolo figures unfolding with intensity. Monza was one of Sammartini’s best students. His “Tempesta di Mare” evokes with colorful gestures a turbulent seascape, a subject also conveyed by Vivaldi in his piece of the same name.

Here and throughout the evening, the ensemble played with buoyant spirit, nuanced shadings and a wide dynamic palette, as in its rendition of Mozart’s Symphony No. 13 in F, which concluded the program. Written in 1771 during Mozart’s second trip to Italy, the work demonstrates his quick mastery of the form, with a more advanced use of winds and more confidently articulated themes than in his more juvenile Symphony No. 11 in D, which opened the concert. That work, composed in 1770 during Mozart and his father’s first trip to Italy, is a portrait of the composer in truly early adolescence, as is the Symphony No. 10 in G, both given fresh, vibrant performances here.

The program also featured music by Angelo Maria Scaccia and Antonio Brioschi, now obscure composers who had a major impact as Milan symphonists during their careers and influenced the development of the classical symphonic style. Mr. Biondi was the dynamic soloist in Scaccia’s Violin Concerto in E flat, with its hints of Vivaldi. Brioschi was represented by his joyous Sinfonia in D. As an encore, the ensemble offered the Overture to Gluck’s Sinfonia, from “Ipermestra.”