

Concert Review

by Classical Voice

Two virtuosi, one great concert

By Truman C. Wang

Saturday, April 28, 2007

PROGRAM

Handel	Selections from GIULIO CESARE
Handel	Selections from SEMELE
J.S. Bach	Concerto in d, BWV 1052
Rameau	Selections from PLATEE

Jory Vinikour, conductor/harpsichordist
Celine Ricci, soprano

Performance of Saturday, April 28, 2007 at Zipper Hall,
Colburn School of Music

One famous conductor once remarked angrily, when his temperamental star soprano tried to upstage him, that “under the Sun, no one sees the star!” Those were the days when singers ruled and conductors did their best to follow – or not. Democracy might be the new norm in state politics of the day, but it had little bearing in music.

Fast forward the clock to year 2007, the salacious scandals and feuds are still there, but they are now the province of vain stage directors and producers. Surely, they argue, singers should be able to climb walls and jump through hoops onstage, and still sing with perfect pitch and legato without batting an eyelash, right? No wonder many singers today prefer the concert platform to the opera house stage.

No such injustice was wrought on soprano **Celine Ricci** on the Zipper stage last Saturday night, where she found a sympathetic partner in the conductor/virtuoso harpsichordist **Jory Vinikour** in a well-chosen program of bravura Handel arias that showcased her considerable lyrical and dramatic skills. No clash of Titans here, just two fine musicians relishing each other’s company and making delightful music together.

And delightful it was. The Handel selections ran the full emotional gamut, from Cleopatra’s mournful “*Piango*” and illusions of happiness (“*Da Tempeste*”) to Semele’s bratty outbursts in “*I Myself Shall Adore*”. Traversing these extremes of emotions, Ms. Ricci delivered beautifully controlled phrasing of light and shade, with some

memorably dramatic accents and word-pointing. Her command of the coloratura was skillful and fluid. One really felt she was having a grand ball dispatching the bravura lines with joyfulness and rhythmic buoyancy. Maestro Vinikour gave only minimal direction, content to be an accompanist in the unfolding drama.

After the intermission, it was Mr. Vinikour's turn to show off at the harpsichord. The d-minor concerto by J.S. Bach, with its extended cadenza in the first Allegro, served this purpose admirably. In the beautifully-controlled Adagio, the harpsichord produced the illusion of the singing human voice – easy to do on the modern piano, but nearly impossible on the harpsichord. It was a breathtaking feat.

Another pair of bravura arias, from Rameau's opera "Platee", found Mr. Vinikour once again in the supporting role and Ms. Ricci strutting her stuff, more confident than ever and this time with almost demonic fury. She truly believed the words she was singing, "*Essayons du brilliant! Donnons dans la saillie*" "*let us try something brilliant! let us go mad!*" In a sense, it was a perfect embodiment of the morally depraved world of the 17th-Century French Court of Louis XV.

As an encore, a Handel aria from "Rinaldo" provided an equal opportunity for virtuosic displays by both Vinikour and Ricci, and they totally ate it up. It's hard to believe this was the last concert the season. For devotees of Musica Angelica, unarguably So Cal's finest Baroque ensemble, the 2007-2008 season promises to be the best that's yet to come. I can hardly wait.

Visit www.musicaangelica.org for ticket and subscription info.



[Truman C. Wang](#) is editor-in-chief of Classical Voice, whose articles have appeared in the San Gabriel Valley Tribune, the Pasadena Star-News and other Southern California publications.

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