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MUSIC REVIEW | CHAMBERFEST

Wistful Baroque Moods Echo Through Time

By **VIVIEN SCHWEITZER**

There is often a pervasive sense of melancholy in the music of the early Baroque, a gentle wistfulness that underlies both somber and spirited scores, like the selections by Dario Castello and Tarquinio Merula performed in Paul Hall at the [Juilliard School](#) on Monday evening. Members of Juilliard's new historical-performance program offered works by these two infrequently performed Italian composers to inaugurate the school's ninth annual ChamberFest, a six-day series of chamber music performances by 20 student ensembles, which received intensive coaching by faculty members during the winter break. They were joined by guests from the Royal Academy of Music in London.

To judge from these technically adept and expressive performances (coached by the excellent Baroque violinist Robert Mealy), the early-music program is off to a strong start. Joan Plana, violinist; Ezra Seltzer, cellist; and Jeffrey Grossman, harpsichordist, were joined by Silvio Richter, a violinist from the Royal Academy, for gracefully wrought renditions of works including sonatas by Castello and Merula's Ciaccona.

[Shostakovich](#) may seem a jarring contrast after music of the early Italian Baroque, but with its melancholy mood and Baroque forms, like fugue and passacaglia, his Piano Trio in E minor seemed a natural progression. The biting wit and paranoia integral to many of Shostakovich's scores is replaced by a deep sadness and passionate intensity in this trio, written shortly after the death of his closest friend, the musicologist Ivan Sollertinsky, whose passing Shostakovich described as "a bitter blow."

The four-movement trio opens with a somber fugue, whose theme is initiated quietly in the cello's highest register. Russell Durham on violin, Tommy Mesa on cello and Aizhana Nurkenova on piano offered an intelligently conceived interpretation of the work, but the searing Largo lacked an essential pathos and intensity.

There is plenty of Shostakovichian satire in Charles Ives's Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano, which came after intermission, ably performed by Tanya Gabrielian, pianist; Aleisha Verner, cellist; and Giovanni Guzzo, violinist. After the dark-hued and moody opening, the second movement, titled "TSIAJ ('This Scherzo Is a Joke') Presto, weaves distorted fragments of American folk songs through an irreverent and cacophonous frenzy. The witty ending elicited chuckles from the audience.

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The program concluded with an elegantly shaped and polished interpretation of [Beethoven's](#) Septet in E flat. Sheryl Hwangbo, on violin, led her colleagues with flair, offering a fine solo in the concluding Presto. There was also notable playing from the clarinetist, Anna Hashimoto (a Royal Academy student), who offered stylish phrasing and lovely, liquid tone.

ChamberFest continues through Saturday at the Juilliard School, 60 Lincoln Center Plaza; (212) 769-7406 or juilliard.edu. Free; no tickets required.

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