



## Candlemas Concert in Hendersonville

by Richard Parsons

The Outreach Committee of St. James Church, Hendersonville, sponsors a concert around the time of Candlemas (2 February) as its principal fund-raising event of the year. Underwriters are solicited, a band of musicians is brought in to perform, candles are lighted in the windows, and the young people prepare and serve a sumptuous reception, all in support of a cause outside the parish. This year the money goes to aid those on the Gulf coast still suffering from the effects of the hurricane.

This year the performance was by Charlotte's Carolina Pro Musica, under the direction of founder Karen Hite Jacob, harpsichord and organ, with regular members Holly Wright Maurer, treble and bass viols, recorder, and flauto traverso; Rebecca Miller Saunders, soprano; and Edward Ferrell, recorder and flauto traverso.

The concert included several pieces the group worked up for a "Handel in the Colonies" performance at Handel's house in London. Handel did not always fare well in the hands of American arrangers and performers, but generally they did the best they could with the resources at hand.

The evening opened with a CPM arrangement of a New England arrangement, after Josiah Flagg and William Selby, of Handel's Overture to *Ptolemy*.

Next came Corelli's Recorder Sonata in F, Op. 5/4, with Ferrell, harpsichord, and viola da gamba. This seemingly perfect match of instruments took a little while to coalesce; the lovely Willard Martin single harpsichord after Mersenne is very percussive, in the Italian style, as one would expect, and was not best suited to the opening adagio. The ensemble really came into its own in the second movement, a fugal allegro. The various entries were extremely well handled, and both recorder and harpsichord were crisp and precise. The third movement was another pesky adagio; although better than the first, it lacked a certain *je ne sais quoi* needed to raise it above an exercise. But the final allegro, a gigue of course, provided more of Ferrell's crisp recorder and Jacob and Maurer's carefully measured continuo.

Having so many sonata-form pieces on the program gave a fascinating opportunity to look at the development of *the form*, from Corelli (b.1653) to Johann Adolph Hasse (d.1783). Slow-fast-slow-fast was fully matured by Corelli's time and changed little, even when it was called recitative-aria-recitative-aria. Ironically, the Corelli was more like typical Handel than any of the Handel on this program.

"Benedicta Sit" by Giovanni G. Arrigoni (d.1665) was performed by CPM using organ, two recorders and soprano voice. The organ stops were nicely chosen, making this usually-unsuccessful combination of instruments very effective. The organ and recorders were clearly differentiated. The viol played strongly, standing up well to the rest of the ensemble. Miller's control of vibrato in her voice – or, better, her ability to eliminate vibrato – was exactly what the piece needed to emphasize its early nature.

More "Handel in the Colonies" followed – Johannes Herbst's arrangement of the Prusso-Italo-Englishman's work into the anthem "Siehe das ist unser Gott" exists in the Moravian Archives at Salem. Herbst, a Moravian bishop, lived in Salem for the last eleven months of his life, which ended in 1812. It is interesting that, while there is no reduction of volume or clarity between the front row and the back

row of the nave when the ensemble is on the chancel steps, moving them ten feet east, to the organ console, put them on the other side of the chancel arch and produced a much more blended, if somewhat muffled, sound.

The group returned to their position in front of the altar for Karl Friedrich Abel's Sonata in A Major for Gamba. In a style well-known to Candlemas audiences, the printed programs were long on paper and short on words or accuracy. By the Abel, the silence of the rest of the audience had just about educated the every-movement-applauder near the rear, so it was too bad that the printed program had concatenated the first and second movements, Allegro and Siciliano, into Allegro Siciliano, followed by a second and final movement, Tempo di Menuetto. Thus two-thirds of the way through, the audience puzzled the performers a little by giving thunderous applause. Following this, the artists dove right into the final Tempo di Menuetto. Ah well, the applause was fully deserved both times.

Miller was the star of the next piece, Pepusch's Cantata III for soprano, recorder, and continuo. There were no surprises here but a lot of steady music making. Miller's intonation is particularly nice, and the limits she puts on vibrato make the good intonation more obvious. Maurer plays with a strong sound, and her gamba was very boomy and hollow, the way gambas are supposed to be, with characteristically absent alternating partials. Ferrell executed his demanding recorder part with élan; he had many more notes to get through than Miller. They were really cooking in the fourth movement, the aria "Why should I love the fair that flies me [sic]."

An hour and twenty-five minutes non-stop makes a long concert; an intermission would have been welcome here.

Jacob did a fine job of providing the most variety of timbres with the available resources. The next piece featured Maurer and Ferrell playing transverse flutes, with harpsichord continuo, in Hasse's Trio (yet another sonata) for flute and continuo. The intonation, particularly in the opening Largo, was good, and not easy, either. The succeeding Presto and Siciliano were musically predictable, but the cooks were in the kitchen again in the final Allegro.

Miller sang, and well, "Softly Sweet in Lydian Measure," from Handel's *Alexander's Feast*.

With a chortle on his face, if not on his lips, Ferrell played a Moeck bass recorder for the second and third movements of one of the few compositions for solo bass recorder, C.P.E. Bach's Trio in F Major (H.589), with Maurer, treble viol (replacing viola), and Jacob, harpsichord. The treble viol is a nice pairing with the bass recorder, which sounded like the hooting of some happy owl. C.P.E. asked for the impossible; Ferrell, without so much as a smirk, accomplished it handily.

The concert closed with "Let the Bright Seraphim," from Handel's *Samson*, re-worked by CPM from a 1795 New England edition that contained only soprano and bass lines, with back additions from the original, using the full resources present – all four of them.

A rousing standing ovation from the almost-SRO house indicated how much the audience liked Carolina Pro Musica.

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