

LEHIGH VALLEY STAGE

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Reviews

["Mr. Bach Comes to Call" continues to engage 10 years later](#)

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Bach Choir staged a delightful and uplifting “Mr. Bach Comes to Call,” Sunday at Zoellner Arts Center, 10 years after the original production which was recorded for television and a DVD.

A decade later, the production retains its charm and offered the enthusiastic audience of families a chance to hear top notch performances of Bach’s music, beautifully sung and played by the Bach Choir of Bethlehem and Bach Festival Orchestra.

The original story was written by Susan Hammond for the Classical Kids CD series, and was turned into a stage production and a film in a collaboration between the Bach Choir and Touchstone Theatre in 2007.

The hour-long production which combined acting by both adults and children with the musical performances, featured the return of Mark McKenna as the playful, but earnest, Johann Sebastian Bach.

Bach appeared unexpectedly as a 12-year-old girl was reluctantly practicing Bach’s “Minuet in G” for her piano lesson.

As Bach entreated Elizabeth, played by the engaging Abriana Ferrari, 13, to not only play but love the music, viewers young and old learned all about the famous composer.



The production began by noting that three of Bach’s compositions are included on Voyager, the space probe launched in 1977 by NASA.

McKenna made Bach fun and self-aware – at one point admitting he did some “pretty good stuff” and at another ruefully noting people thought “Mozart was more fun.”

As Bach told Elizabeth about his life in the 18th century, woven through was his music including “Jesu Joy of Man’s Desiring” from Cantata BWV 147; allegro from

Brandenburg Concerto no. 5, as well as pieces from his orchestral suites and cantatas.

Joining Bach were three choir boys played by Silas Taylor, Ethan Silver and Matilda Snyder, who are all members of the Bel Canto Children’s Chorus of The Bach Choir of Bethlehem.

The three children added energy to the proceedings, playing a lively game of tag with Elizabeth and ordering pizza (which they shared with the audience.) The rambunctious 9-year-old Matilda was particularly vivacious.

One of the highlights was during a segment in which Bach's composition was explained using the classic children's song "Pop Goes the Weasel," arranged for orchestra by Larry Lipkis.

As Bach Choir conductor and artistic director Greg Funfgeld explained how Bach would invert a musical phrase, he picked up the petite Matilda and turned her upside down.

The music was effectively used to advance Bach's story as well.

After the death of his first wife Maria, the Bach Choir sang the chorale from "St. Matthew's Passion" BMV 244, and when he talked about his children, "Prelude in C Major" one of the pieces of music he wrote for his children to play, was performed.

Bach Choir member Shannon Aloise performed a lovely rendition of the aria, "Bist du bei Mir" (If You are With Me) as Bach's hard-working second wife Anna Magdalena.

The show also explored how Bach especially loved writing music for the church and "wrote for God," dismissing his music's lack of popularity for 100 years after his death.

A fascinating moment was when Bach explained he actually put his own name in "The Art of Fugue," adding notes that corresponded with B-A-C and H (German nomenclature for B) in the unfinished final movement, played by Funfgeld on harpsichord.

As Bach prepared to leave, Elizabeth asked him for his favorite, prompting the Bach Choir to send off the audience with a soaring performance of chorus no. 5 from Cantata BMV 129, a fitting ending to an entirely satisfying and enriching performance.



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