

Review: "Birthday show" for 100th Bach at Noon Concert is spirited and colorful reunion



Bach Choir conductor Greg Funfgeld (far right) conducts choir and audience in closing chorale of Cantata 140 during the 100th Bach at Noon concert on Tuesday at Central Moravian Church in Bethlehem (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO BY STEVE SIEGEL)

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Special to The Morning Call

Even before Bethlehem Bach Choir conductor Greg Funfgeld's opening remark, "Happy 100th Bach at Noon," it was obvious that something special was about to happen Tuesday at Central Moravian Church. For the choir and musicians, it took the form of a joyful reunion, with many Bach Choir alumni returning for the event — and for the capacity audience, it was the awareness that they were part of a musical milestone.

Funfgeld made his usual insightful comments on the music to be performed, aptly listened to by the Bach at Noon regulars in addition to two large groups of young people. Twenty-eight kids from the Hamburg School District with music teacher Ben Watson, a singer in the choir, were in attendance along with another 25 students from Wind Gap Middle School with music teacher Andrew Roberts, also a choir singer.

The program was comprised, as are all Bach at Noon programs, of an instrumental piece and a choral work. Opening the concert was Bach's Concerto for Oboe and Violin, BWV 1060, featuring soloists Mary Watt, oboe, and Elizabeth Field, violin. A spirited and colorful piece, it

was a perfect program opener, with both soloists merrily winding their way through lots of contrapuntal commentary in the first movement allegro.

The slow movement was more dream-like, with a gentle, caressing texture. Watt and Field engaged in a lovely, gracious musical dialogue with the subdued strings playing behind them. The closing allegro was a return to the vigorous toe-tapping energy of the opening movement, with many virtuosic passages for both solo instruments.

A minor musical glitch toward the end of the movement prompted Funfgeld, who was conducting the piece, to request an encore of the last few measures. No matter – it is always great fun to get a second helping of Bach’s energetic playfulness.

The repeat will also benefit those who tune in to the WWFM Classical Network 1 p.m. April 8, when the concert will be broadcast.

Cantata 140, “Wachet Auf!” (Sleepers Awake!), has to be on everyone’s Bach Top Ten list. The opening choral, one of Bach’s most famous, was simply beautiful, with all the pomp and splendor that befits a sacred wedding. Tenor Lane Conklin McCord conveyed true excitement and zeal in his recitative, a formidable achievement with words spoken rather than sung.

A pair of soprano and bass arias, exquisitely delivered by Rosa Lamoreaux and William Sharp, tenderly evoked the sacred marriage of Jesus and Soul. The first was lovingly accompanied by violinist Field; the second by oboist Watt.

The centerpiece of the work was the glorious fourth movement chorale, with those majestic male voices running counterpoint to a background of strings.

Funfgeld asked the audience to join in on the closing chorale, a wonderful way of involving everyone present in this memorable concert.

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