

PB Symphony, Miami Bach excel in show with 'Fireworks'

By JOSEPH YOUNGBLOOD , Special To The Daily News

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Fireworks from an Intracoastal barge and George Frederick Handel's *Music for the Royal Fireworks* in the newly opened Flagler Kenan Pavilion at the Flagler Museum.

That's how the Palm Beach Symphony completed its series of Great Music at Great Venues Tuesday. The high-energy concert was conducted by Donald Oglesby, artistic director of the Miami Bach Society, with soloists Glenn Basham, Huifang Chen, Adam Bookspan, James Hacker and Robert Heath. The orchestra presented works by J.S. Bach as well as by Handel, Tomaso Giovanni Albinoni, Francesco Manfredini and William Boyce, his contemporaries.

According to Palm Beach Symphony Music Director Ray Robinson, this was the first concert to be held in the pavilion. Considering that the floor is terrazzo and the ceiling and three of the walls glass, the space is about as live and resonant as can be imagined — and definitely not conducive to subtle dynamic shadings. Fortunately, Baroque music does not rely heavily on subtle dynamic shadings for its expression, so the musicians were not disadvantaged by the hall.

The full orchestra featured 13 strings; three each of oboes, trumpets and horns; a pair of bassoons; kettledrums; an organ; and a harpsichord.

Most Baroque ensemble music calls for a keyboard instrument. Robert Heath, artistic coordinator of the Miami Bach Society, performed on a 3 1/2-rank chamber organ and on a small harpsichord.

The concert opened with *The Arrival of the Queen of Sheba*, from the third act of Handel's 1748 oratorio *Solomon*. This work put heavy demands on the two oboists, who executed the difficult passages with considerable flair. The strings played with a lot of vitality, and Oglesby exacted from them some well-placed accents and interesting rises and falls in dynamics.

Two works by Bach followed. The *Air*, from *Orchestral Suite No. 3 in D, BWV 1068* — the so-called *Air on the G String* — was given an unaffected reading. The ornaments, often a stumbling point in music from this period, were rendered in a tasteful manner that did not disturb the smooth flow of the music.

Concertmaster Basham and Chen, soloists in Bach's *Concerto in D Minor for Two Violins and Strings, BWV 1043*, played with rhythmic precision and good ensemble. There is a lot of intricate detail in the fast passages, but these were pretty much lost to the hall. The soloists didn't dominate the orchestra but tended to blend in, making it difficult to isolate them at times.

Heath was solo violinist in Venetian composer Tomaso Albinoni's intense and dramatic *Adagio for Organ and Strings*. The strings sounded much richer in this work, which contains interesting cadenzas for the solo violin over the sustained organ, and some unusual melodic lines. Heath's playing was authoritative.

The first half of the concert closed with Manfredini's *Concerto in D for Two Trumpets and Strings*. Adam Bookspan and James Hacker were the soloists, playing small trumpets in D, which are about 20 percent shorter than the B-flat trumpet played by Harry James. Bookspan's trumpet had rotary valves, like a French horn, rather than piston valves. The soloists were accurate and well-balanced, and completely dominated the music.

The second half of the concert opened with English composer William Boyce's *Symphony No. 4 in F*. Oboes and horns joined the strings in this lilting, lighthearted work, whose movements followed Baroque dance forms. The horn solo in the second movement was especially lovely.

The concert concluded with *Music for the Royal Fireworks*. Everyone played in this work, and it had a beautiful, full sound, with an outdoors quality. Though not a flamboyant conductor, Oglesby had the orchestra under complete control in achieving a convincing Baroque style.

The Zambelli fireworks finale was greatly abbreviated because of the wind. However, what did take place was quite impressive.

The Miami Bach Society — one of South Florida's musical treasures — is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year and should keep going strong for another 20 years.