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Arundel Festival reviews

Festival concert celebrates composers known to be revered by Bach family

THE third and final concert of the Hanover Band series consisted of a superb harpsichord recital given by its guest musical director Mahan Esfahani. The instrument was a beautiful copy of a 1711 model in the Flemish style.

Mahan opened with a short and virtuosic toccata by Hamburg composer, organist and harpsichordist Matthias Weckmann.

This was followed by another rare piece, by Elisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre – her suite in D minor, consisting of a prelude and no fewer than eight courtly dances in the French style.

It included a section called canaries – birds or dogs?

It was refreshing to hear a piece by a female composer, the only one in the series.

In his extensive programme notes, Mahan described the genre as a great drama

unfolding in its construction of suite “architectonics”. Both these composers were known and revered by the Bach family.

This led seamlessly into the great Johann Sebastian Bach himself, with one of his well-known French suites, following a similar pattern of courtly dances.

Here again, Mahan displayed each contrasting section with great intensity, whether it be the lyrical qualities of the allemande, sarabande and menuet or the liveliness and panache of the courante, bourrée or gigue

Bach’s second son, Carl Philipp Emmanuel, was described by Mahan as being a bit of a rebel, and there was certainly some quirkiness evident in his Wuertemberg sonata in A flat, with its frequent pauses and temperamental flourishes.

Frenchman Francois

Couperin, Mahan’s favourite, was represented in this fascinating recital with *Les Ombres Errantes* (Wandering Shadows) and the enigmatic *Chaconne la Favorite* (possibly written for a lady).

Many of Couperin’s pieces have picturesque titles, maybe pre-empting the emergence of Programme Music in the 19th and 20th centuries. As an encore, Mahan gave us his own arrangement of one of Cimarosa’s

operatic arias, with intriguing echo-effects, using both manuals and side levers.

After the recital, the select audience was treated to a discussion followed by welcome refreshments.

Marilyn Dennis

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