

ONS Concert Reviews

The Orchestra of New Spain kicks off its new season with an excellent house concert of Baroque work.

by Robin Coffelt, Theater Jones, Oct 2, 2016

“House concerts such as the one delivered by the Orchestra of New Spain Sunday evening are not only about the quality of the music. They’re about the deliciousness of the food and wine, the opulence of the hosting home, the charm of the other guests, and the plentitude of the other amenities such as valet parking. The Orchestra of New Spain’s most recent house concert excelled on all fronts.

The Orchestra of New Spain’s primary strength is presenting Metroplex listeners with music they would likely not hear otherwise. The Quartet Galant’s performance was no exception: it featured music from the Spanish music from the court of Aranjuez in the late 18th and early 19th centuries... Less well-known than Boccherini were the other two composers on the program, the violinist Gaetano Brunetti and the so-called “Spanish Mozart,” Juan Crisóstomo de Arriaga. The four musicians performed with energy and verve.

The quartet, with their tight ensemble and remarkable tone on their period instruments, did the work justice, and gave listeners a wonderful opportunity to familiarize themselves with this seldom-heard music... Sunday’s concert was among the best of the lot.”

"Music from the Casa de Alba"

by Gregory Sullivan Isaacs, Theater Jones, Sep 22, 2015

“All of the members of the orchestra did a fine job, even the horns, and all played with excellent intonation and facility. Brad Bennight was a genius at the harpsichord. his work was both creative and offered an effectual grounding for the entire orchestra. His solo turn, on a piece by Scarlatti, demonstrated why he is so effective. Bennight’s performance was remarkable.

Tenor Nicholas Garza showed us his considerable abilities as an alto. Soprano Anna Frederika Popova’s voice continues to grow and add depth and resonance. Mezzo-soprano Jendi Tarde brings a background in the theater to her performances helps her bring her characterizations to life. Tenor Andrew Dittman gave an impressive performance in his aria, displaying a gorgeous and creamy tenor voice.

Wilkins does a fine job as conductor...easily negotiated the many tempo changes and changes of pace so that the overall ensemble of the performance was spot on.

Wilkins recovered music manuscripts from this era by searching through the archives of the Liria Palace, which came to the House of Alba in the 19th Century.”

“Gone a Courtin”

Gregory Sullivan Isaacs, Theater Jones, Feb 14, 2015

“...Orchestra of New Spain thrills with five Spanish tonadillas, or comic operettas.

it is quite another to recreate the way things were staged, acted and costumed. This is admirably accomplished in the current weekend of concerts, entitled *Villa y Corte*. Gustavo Tambascio, a highly respected director specializing in historical stagecraft, brings an unfailing sense of humor to all the accuracy. Costumer Antonio Bartolo creates some outlandishly extravagant dresses ...and choreographer Jamie Puente’s work with two solo dancers, who act as a Greek chorus, also extends to the graceful movements of the singers.”

New Spain? No Spain!

The Orchestra of New Spain goes 1920s British for an evening of poetry and music by Edith Stillwell and William Walton...

by Robin Coffelt, Theater Jones, Mar 30, 2014

“...Wait, what? Yes, with modern instruments—including a saxophone, no less—and replete with audience members in 1920s-themed garb, this was not the Orchestra of New Spain's usual oeuvre... ONS performed the piece again Oct. 18 at the McNay Museum in San Antonio in conjunction with its exhibit of later works of Joan Miró, so there was method in the considerable madness.

Written for six instruments and reciter, the work is less a narrated piece in the conventional sense than one that uses the speaker as a sort of percussion instrument, with the text of Sitwell's poems in a jazzy counterpoint to Walton's quirky music. WRR radio personality Nancy Brunson and baritone Edward Crafts provided lively, energetic and well-timed readings. The six members of the ensemble are all capable players who brought verve and whimsy to the proceedings.”

“In Your Corte”

Robin Coffelt, Theater Jones, Mar 30, 2014

“...musical skits, which are a fun genre unfamiliar to most contemporary audiences. Anna Fredericka Popova and Jendi Tarde shone on the first such skit as two rival sisters who attempt to out-sing one another. Their well-matched sopranos were effective, although balance was an issue.

The Orchestra of New Spain was most successful Saturday evening when it was playing to its niche—seldom-heard Spanish Baroque. Music Director Grover Wilkins researched the tonadillas in Madrid, and that dedication and passion is evident in the performances. Bringing Dallas audiences works that are simply not heard elsewhere is a gift that this orchestra can provide, and that should continue to be its focus.”

“Orchestra of New Spain’s Flamenco concert heats up Dallas City Performance Hall”

by Manuel Mendoza, DMN, Feb 16, 2014

“...The pair’s passionate interplay was among the concert’s highlights, tapping the soul of southern Spain’s centuries-old flamenco culture. (Cristo) Cortes’ raspy, rough-hewn cries captured flamenco’s raw style born of oppression, (Antonio) Arrebola, his body cocked upright, brought the pride and swagger. It opened with the orchestra’s sensitive rendering of Falla’s 1917 pantomime ballet *El Corregidor y la Molinera*...Music director Grover Wilkins conducted a chamber version In the staccato style of gypsy tunes, the music chirped, galloped and raced.....The show’s second section featured dance ensembles animated by *Canciones Antiguas*, Lorca’s recreation of old Andalusian folk songs, a root source for flamenco.

The bravura peaked in the final, a *tablao* that opened with extended picking and tapping by San Francisco based guitarist Ricardo Diaz."

“Live Fusion. The Orchestra of New Spain opens its season with a festive mix of eras and styles, featuring Boston-based Rumbarroco.”

by J. Robin Coffelt, Theater Jones, October 11, 2013

“Orchestra of New Spain’s season opener on Thursday night, called *Latino Barroco*, gave the impression that musicians from four different centuries and at least as many cultures had gotten together for an improbable jam session. At one point, sharing the stage were a *viola de gamba* (played guitar-style, no less), a baroque cello, a harpsichord, and an electric bass, as well as a tambourine, a *cajón* (percussion box), and some Venezuelan-style guitars. This is not, to be sure, an exhaustive list. Amazingly, this assortment worked very well.

The program itself, though billed as music of the Latin baroque, in fact spanned a much larger time frame, from the Renaissance of the 15th century to the Modernist period of the 20th. Much of the reason for the unusual instrumentation and programming is that a few core orchestra members were joined onstage by Rumbarroco, a Boston-based Latin-Baroque fusion ensemble. They created a vibe that made a baroque cello and an electric bass sound like, not strange bedfellows, but harmonious ones.

Rumbarroco member Laury Gutiérrez provided helpful remarks explaining the pieces and at one point the instruments. Although excessive chatter from the stage is becoming a problematic trend at concerts, in this case it was most welcome. Even frequent concertgoers could find themselves out of their element here.

Indeed, this was not quite a traditional classical concert. Gutiérrez encouraged the audience to dance in the aisles, although no one accepted the offer, and there was a brief audience participation number at the end of the program, with audience members providing a rhythmic base (more or less) for the musicians’ melody.

The program featured few if any well-known composers, but did provide tastes of, among other delicacies: Andalusian and Sephardic tunes, Spanish and South American dances from four centuries, indigenous South American music, and South American music incorporating African influences.

Each musician’s individual skill level was remarkably high, a fact highlighted when most of the musicians received opportunities for solos. The Orchestra of New Spain and Rumbarroco did something distinct and novel Thursday night, and they did it well.”

"Ambitious production bodes well for Orchestra of New Spain's Future" by Wayne Lee Gay, D Magazine, Feb 18, 2013

"The Orchestra of New Spain and music director Grover Wilkins won a permanent place of honor on the local music scene .. a masterful and constantly delightful production of eighteenth-century Spanish composer Sebastián Durón's zarzuela *Las Nuevas armas de amor*.

The production,.....was both simple and authentic, with extraordinary attention to reviving the acting styles, costumes, and sets Mezzo-soprano Carla López Speziale in the title role of Cupid was first among many spectacular artists in the cast, which also featured remarkable performances by soprano Irasema Terrazas as Diana and soprano Anna Fredericka Popova as Jupiter. Stage director Gustavo Tambascio succeeded in bringing the stylized to life in a way that was never dull or pedantic, while Wilkins conducted an engaging reading by the small but tightly concise orchestra and chorus."

"All Aquiver" Cupid's New Weapons of Love by Gregory Sullivan Isaacs, Theater Jones Feb 15, 2013

"...once you stepped back mentally and looked at the stunningly beautiful tableau vivant that stage director Gustavo Tambascio created..... you immediately understood what is meant by the "Baroque style of acting."

Mexican mezzo Carla López Speziale, as Cupid, brought us all nearly to tears in the aria when the god mourned the loss of his arrows. The role of Diana, a female godwas beautifully sung by Irasema Terrazas.

It is beautifully sung by artists who specialize in Baroque performance practices, directed and brought to the stage by experts in recreating the experience as it was seen by the Spanish court, accompanied by an orchestra ...on original instruments and conducted by one of the nation's leading experts on (Spanish) Baroque music."

"Lively, baroque sounds from Orchestra of New Spain" DMN Oct 14, 2012

".....A la Jacara, Jacarilla by the Spanish-born Mexican composer Juan de Padilla, celebrated the Nativity in syncopated dance rhythms. Led by artistic director Grover Wilkins, the music was performed with skill and élan. From the eight singers came fine solos from sopranos Anna Popov and Rebecca Wilson, alto Laura Warriner and tenor Nicholas Garza."

DMN Oct 18, 2010

"a mass.....by Francisco Courcelle..was the evening's most sophisticated music, balancing bold choral passages with antiphony and counterpoint. Wilkins led enthusiastic and stylish performances. The eight singers sang boldly, brightly and well in ensemble. Sopranos Laura Warriner and Anna Popov were standout soloists. In Courcelle, the valveless horns were managed with impressive security. chamber-organ continue provided perfectly balanced imaginative and unobtrusive support."

"Concert blends Old, New World"

DMN, Tue Dec 8, 2009

"...this was the most polished concert I can remember from Wilkins' flexible group of singers and instrumentalists the playing, even of the notoriously cranky valveless baroque trumpets and horns was secure, as well as spirited and stylish."

Cecelia Porter, The Washington Post February 12, 2008

"Grover Wilkins conducted two vocal soloists and the Orchestra of New Spain...bringing to life a luminous sampling of 18th-century Spanish court and theater music. ...Both singers captured the emotional radiance and buoyant energy streaming through the sacred fare, awash in muted mysticism."

Scott Cantrell, Dallas Morning News January 21, 2008

"While some of our most eminent musical presenters... seem ever warier of trotting out any but the most well-worn warhorses, the Orchestra of New Spain keeps surprising us. ... Stylishly played, with minimal vibrato, the 18th-century-style instruments were revelatory."

Scott Cantrell, Dallas Morning News, Feb 12, 2007

"Glorious 18th-century Spanish sacred music rang through ... Composed for the Spanish court, this was music of grandeur, drama, excitement and poignancy."

Scott Cantrell, Dallas Morning News, April 19, 2005

"But the gloriously dramatic Mass in D by Francisco Courcelle turns out to be a genuine masterpiece, worthy of a place alongside the great masses of Bach, Haydn and Mozart."

Charles Ward, November 17, 2003, Houston Chronicle

"... impressive for its imagination and, especially, its rhythmic vitality...The 20-member [orchestra] of period instruments added a nice, spicy authenticity. The chorus sang with obvious affection for the music."

Olin Chism, November 14, 2003, Dallas Morning News

"The Orchestra of New Spain warmed up for a brief tour to Houston and New Orleans... The program of little-known music from 18th-century Spain left a vivid impression. Grover Wilkins, who chose the program, has a keen ear for what works. The most impressive was Courcelle. ... mass, at times moving, at times joyous, and consistently beautiful... reminiscent of Haydn. This was high-quality music that inspired the obvious question: Why isn't it better known?"