

Ensemble Soleil traverses musical currents perfectly

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Given their colorfully assorted hardware – gambas, violin, lute, organ, with a bassoon taken on board

Music Review

as invited guest – the six-member Ensemble Soleil would have been hard put to come up with the sort of drab, monochrome concert that this assuredly wasn't. Additional insurance against same lies, frankly, in the sort of people they are. If your

ENSEMBLE SOLEIL

The third event in the 1996 SoHIP Summer Early Music Concerts series. At: *Lindsey Chapel, Emmanuel Church, Boston, Thursday night. (Same program also given Tuesdays in Weston, Wednesdays in North Weymouth.)*

reviewer's intuition is right, these are people who eat, drink, breathe and metabolize the riches of early music 24 hours a day, asleep or awake.

Yes, their program did bear a rather formidable title – “Musical Crosscurrents Between Spain and Italy 1550-1650” – but this was only truth in packaging. You could check your intellectual anxieties at the door and be none the worse off for it. While Margaret Angelini (organ) and Judith Bedford (bassoon) were playing, you couldn't really care all that much what a “Recercare Segunda” was or why Diego Ortiz (fl. 16th c.) had concocted one. Have you ever noticed how people whose bodies have, so to speak, a low center of gravity can turn out to be graceful whizzes when they take to the dance floor? Nature may not have intended a mating of organ and bassoon, but you wouldn't have guessed that from this unshowy but definitely virtuosic performance.

Pleasant as the first half was – the sweetly exact resonance of Peter Lehman's lute playing (Luys de Narvaez), the gorgeously many-stranded texture of viols and lute (Vengas de Henestrosa) – it was in the second, everything-moves-to-Italy part that the composed music itself began to flame with creativity at a consistent high temperature. You knew at once that you'd been dropped into a more settled, deeper, yet more adventurous culture. Bigger, more complex forms came at you. They'd heard of changing meters. Thus Giovanni Paolo Cima's violin-bassoon-organ sonata showed you how inward and private something called a sonata could be, while Dario Castello, cultivating much the same terrain, came up with a much more self-conscious and “public” product that was very strong on antiphonal, stereophonic effects.

These performers don't call themselves an ensemble for nothing. That beautifully fading unison diminuendo at the end of Orazio Vecchi's Fantazia couldn't have been better judged, and there was a pithiness to the sound of the extended “Pavana Prima” of Carlo Farina – who was Schuetz's concertmaster, by the way – that was totally on the side of the music. This part of the program couldn't help but start a CD shopping list in a listener's head. How sly of Ensemble Soleil to have saved Tarquinio Merula's Canzona “La Lusignuola” for the last. What a piece of work is the consort of viols. And is Merula (1594-1665) always that good?