

Preview: Akron Baroque ends fourt season on May 18 with Vivaldi's 'Gloria' at First Congregational Church

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by Mike Telin



Reading how violinist Amy Barlowe describes the task of creating Akron Baroque, everything sounds so simple. First you find a concertmaster you know and trust, in this case Alan Bodman, Barlow's husband and concertmaster of the Akron Symphony. Second, you find a Music Director who has an established reputation in the conducting world, in this case Guy Victor Bordo. Third you ask 15 to 16 talented musicians who enjoy working together to join your ranks, and they all say yes. Fourth, you find a venue that is as acoustically pleasing to listen to music. Oh, and a newly renovated Casavant organ would be helpful, and along comes the First Congregational Church of Akron. Finally you recognize a niche that needs to be filled in the musical life of your city and you offer your performances to the city free of charge. Of course, in no way is it really all this simple, because if it were, there would be far more success stories like Akron Baroque to be told.

We caught up with Akron Baroque's Music Director Guy Victor Bordo and concertmaster Alan Bodman last week by telephone and asked them about the upcoming concert on Tuesday, May 18 at 7:30 at First Congregational Church, which will feature the debut of the Akron Baroque Chorus in a performance of Antonio Vivaldi's Gloria.

Mike Telin: First, congratulations on all of your success. At this concert you are adding a chorus for the first time?

Guy Bordo: Yes, we wanted to do something that was a little bit different. There is such a great breadth of vocal repertoire from the baroque period and we thought we really need that to be part of what we do. Both Alan and I have worked quite a bit with Jim Mismas and have incredible respect for his ability. We thought he would be the perfect person to do this. He also knows so many wonderful singers, so we will have twelve singers who will be joining us. It will be a small and very agile group that we are both very excited to work with.

MT: I agree that Jim is an amazing musician.

GVB: Yes he has so many skills and it is amazing when you stop and think about everything that he does so well.

Alan Bodman: We are just so thrilled that we are able to do this with Jim and I would also agree that he is a superb musician and a real pillar in the community so we are so thrilled.

MT: What type of choral sound can we expect to hear?

GVB: Because we are using such a small chorus it will be an intimate listening experience, and actually it is a unique experience for me in that I have worked with a lot of choruses, and many times very big ones, but this is the first time for me to do a piece like this with a very small group and I am so

excited about the musical possibilities.

MT: Who are the soloists for the Geminiani?

GvB: Alan and Amy Glick will be the violin soloists, Ann Smith is the viola soloist and Christina Rosser will be the cello soloist.

AB: Of course this is a concerto grosso so the solo parts are incorporated into the orchestra tutti section, so we are not standing in front the way a soloist would.

GVB: We do a lot of concerto grosso's -- first because there are so many of them from the baroque period, but it is also a great chance to feature different players. The audience likes getting to hear the individual players, and I think that is a critical part of what we do.

MT: One of the things I think is great about Akron Baroque is the fact that you are exploring that part of the neglected repertoire.

GVB: Yes, and getting to explore this repertoire is part of why this orchestra is exciting to me. With the other orchestras that I am the music director of, we can't afford to do something with only 15 or 16 players on a regular basis because everybody wants and needs to play, so the baroque repertoire is not always represented. I have really gotten to love Geminiani. I think his melodic gift is tremendous and his music will appear on a fairly regular basis with us because I think it is just fabulous. It is pleasing to the ear and very comfortable to play. There is a lyricism that you don't often hear in the music of other composers from the baroque period.

MT: What are both of your views on the best way to get a modern instrument orchestra to play in the baroque style?

AB: There are a number of ways that one can approach the baroque style starting with the way it was done 50 years ago, which was a much more heavy handed and rich style approach as opposed to baroque performance practice where groups perform on period instruments. Apollo's Fire, for example, takes a very performance practice approach and we didn't feel like we wanted to com-

pete against them. Also our group is much smaller and not all of them have baroque instruments, so we kind of have a compromise where we play in a lighter style that is influenced by baroque performance practice, but performed on modern instruments. I think we produce the kind of sound that you would find if you listened to a recording of St. Martin in the Fields.

GVB: We are also very lucky in that the acoustics in First Congregational are incredible. It is a wonderful place to play and it gives a lot of warmth to the sound.

AB: Yes, it is great fun to play in there because you get that warmth back because the sanctuary. It is kind of round, so anyplace that you play in it will give you that rich sound, which is great for the players, because that is not always the case. Sometimes it sounds great in the audience but you don't get that sound back as a player. In this environment we do.

GVB: I believe they renovated the space four or five years ago and apparently the acoustics were dramatically improved. The other thing that we really like about it is that it is such an intimate space, whether you are on the main floor or in the balcony, you feel like you are right there with the musicians. So it is a great place to hear a concert as well as to perform a concert.

AB: Also part of the renovation was putting in this fabulous new organ, so we often look for compositions that include the organ so that we can use this incredible instrument. Valerie Thorson, the music director of the church is such a great keyboard player.

MT: What is in store for the future?

GVB: Next year we will be performing four concerts, two that we will produce on our own at First Congregational. The third will be in collaboration with the Chamber Music Society of Ohio, and the fourth will be at Westminster Presbyterian Church where Jim Mismas has invited us to play on the Five at Five series. Next year is going to be a big year for us. We don't know the repertoire yet, because basically the summer is spent working that out. We have a lot of discussions ahead of us.

MT: Will you remain committed to keeping the concerts free?

GVB: Yes, and it has worked out very well for us that way. We have given this a lot of thought, but people have been very generous at the door. People are free to give at the level that they want to. We do have donations that come in, and we do private fund raising as well, so we seem to have been able to make it work. And in some respects it is a lot easier this way.

AB: The process of making this free and available to everybody is part of our philosophy. Baroque music is perhaps the most accessible to the lay listener. Many people get their classical music feet wet by listening to the baroque style. We have gotten so many wonderful comments from people in the audience saying how enjoyable these concerts are, and they never really done a lot of listening to classical

music, but they are enjoying all that they are hearing. That is very gratifying.

MT: Any last thoughts?

GVB: I think people should know that we as a group really do like working together. There is a tremendous chemistry between the players and the rehearsals are enjoyable. It does not feel like work. We enjoy having the opportunity to come together to make music, and we hope that shows in the performance.

AB: I remember the principal bass just beaming, saying this is so relaxing compared to other orchestral playing. And, it is, we just have a great group of people and as Guy said, there is a great chemistry. I also have to add that I think we have a wonderful conductor. He brings his great musicianship, organizational skills and his imagination to this group in a way that is very gratifying to everybody.