

Tafelmusik

JEANNE LAMON, MUSIC DIRECTOR

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Ambient music, from the Baroque era CONCERT REVIEW | Tafelmusik creates a glorious sound

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BY BRYANT MANNING

The next time you're sitting in Starbucks, there's a good chance you'll hear the Canadian period-instrument ensemble Tafelmusik playing Baroque music overhead.

Coffeehouses have long chosen pieces from the Baroque era as their background sounds of choice, and Tafelmusik takes its name from a 300-year-old tradition of music written to create a pleasant, non-distracting ambience.

When the American-born Jeanne Lamon took over the ensemble as music director in 1981, she might not have foreseen the rabid interest that the specialized ensemble would eventually generate. The orchestra gives more than 50 concerts a year in its native Toronto, along with maintaining a rigorous international touring schedule, and regularly records new albums at the rate of three per year. All things considered, Tafelmusik's visit Monday night to Ravinia's Martin Theatre inspired high hopes and seldom disappointed.

The orchestra's presentation is unusual: Most of the players perform standing up, creating a vertical and more energetic musical delivery. Young and old members make up the 18-piece ensemble, and thankfully not all of them are on the same fashion page. Then there's the raw thrill of seeing ancient instruments that once played in 18th century European banquet halls and courts perform in a contemporary setting.

The night's peak was a muscular performance of Boccherini's Symphony in D Minor, Op. 12, No. 4 ("In the Devil's House"). In the outer movements, the music begins as a plaintive nocturne before turning wickedly fast and furious.

The familiar melody in the final movement isn't Boccherini's, but rather a liberal quotation of Gluck's "Dance of the Furies" -- and at Ravinia, the violins ate it up. The middle movement's quietly spare pianissimos demonstrated the instrumentalists' keen sense of dynamics.

Oboists John Abberger and Marco Cera exchanged highly focused solos in Albinoni's Concerto for Two Oboes in F Major, Op. 9, No. 3. Abberger's bright tone overpowered his counterpart's subdued, warmer sound, but their differences proved companionable. Before the concerto, Tafelmusik gave a spirited reading of Veracini's Overture No. 6 in G Minor.

Substantial helpings of Bach and Handel rounded out the program's second half. In Bach's Concerto for Three Violins in D Major (transcribed after BWV 1064), the three violin soloists all showed signs of expressive brilliance.

To close it all out, Derek Conrod's and Scott Wevers' agile Baroque horn-playing gave life to an otherwise temperate performance of Handel's "Water Music" Suite in F Major.

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