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JUNE 18, 2013

The Art of the Chalumeau

Daniel Arts Center, Great Barrington, MA

www.astonmagna.org

June 16, 2013

by Barbara Stroup

After a cold winter and a wet spring, Aston Magna returned to the Berkshires with the best in chamber music - the pleasing combination of strings, winds and voice. Offering a rare glimpse at an obscure instrument, the ensemble provided guest artist Eric Hoeprich with respectful support in both programming and musicianship. In Hoeprich's hands, the chalumeau is an instrument that can enter mysteriously from the background texture, rivaling the voice in its soul-touching sound. The range of this small instrument belies its size, and the artist achieved a balanced timbre throughout. Paired with the oboe in a short work by Johann Adolph Hasse, the combination was ethereal. One wishes again that, like other neglected early instruments, audiences could hear much more from chalumeau players.

The program opened without the wind instruments with a Vivaldi work in three parts. Artistic Director Daniel Stepner's leadership, particularly at the cadenzas, gave the notes a chance to linger in the air and gave the audience a chance to savor them. It was a pleasure to be able to follow Vivaldi's fugal theme, as players took turns getting "out of the way" so it could be highlighted.

The evening's ensemble included a continuo section of three: violone, baroque cello, and theorbo. The group was a perfect combination throughout the varied program of arias, concerti, and other short works and the balance throughout was impeccably maintained, regardless of the number of voices.

Soprano Kristen Watson joined the instrumentalists for several pieces from Handel and Vivaldi, and for the closing Cantata by Francesco Conti. Her instrument excellently matched the ensemble. She seemed to particularly enjoy the opportunities to 'converse' with the chalumeau when Hoeprich and she were paired.

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Baroque oboeist Steven Hammer brought a masterful technique to the familiar Marcello Concerto, ending the first half of the program with rapid passage-work and flying fingers. All three featured artists had so much command of technique that they could put the audience at ease with their musicianship. The program was a delightful mix and it is hoped that a recording might be issued, because the term “chalemeau” on iTunes results in only ONE find.

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