



JOHN BLOW'S *VENUS AND ADONIS* AT OBF

as your dad saying ‘dude,’ but considering who now is writing attendant and more diverse voices (read: less old dead white men) But maybe it’s time to bury Bach the Lutheran.

impressively by Daniel Ficarrì. Something we get wrong, Halls points out, is that Bach’s audiences were greeted by music from the instant they entered their church.

Truthfully, I wasn’t sure how I felt about the structure: Quit talking about the wine and just let me drink it!

Halls spoke of how, as opposed to *St. Matthew’s* violence, *St. John* is about beauty and divinity as a path to salvation. Halls highlighted the heartbeat-like underpinnings of *St. John*, and how Bach harmonized lines with unstable chords, and the little mathematical tricks up Bach’s sleeve (like *St. John’s* intro literally “counting down” in the bars of its musical phrasing). Very clever, Bach. Very clever.

But once the talking was done with (I ended up a little sad to see Halls go), these factoids did add a richness to the work I might’ve missed. In the end I enjoyed at least the first part of *St. John Passion* more than *St. Matthew*, if for no other reason than it afforded another chance to hear Reginald Mobley sing. Its effect was gentler, Bach’s genius cleaner, the religion less heavy-handed, the ideas more universal beyond the mind of an 18th-century Lutheran. I loved it.

The Morning After

“Does any Bach music have drums?”

My 8-year-old daughter wanted a full report after I’d heard the last of the three OBF performances.

“I don’t think so,” I replied. Her face crumpled incredulously.

“But that’s the best part of music,” she said. And I agreed.

Did I leave any these shows feeling like these towering works were revitalized in the same way (and I know it’s an apples-and-oranges comparison) that I’ve seen *Hamlet* made startlingly clear to my 21st-century sensibilities?

No, I didn’t. Maybe it’s the heavy religious imagery. Maybe our modern ears do want Mendelssohn’s action-adventure-style *Passion*. How will Bach sound to my daughter, to my children’s children, for perpetuity?

I like the move toward period-authentic performance. I do feel it put me in touch with these composers and musicians as warm-blooded creative creatures. But if the Bach fest is truly concerned with reinvention, I’d encourage them to get even closer to the spirit of Bach as an artist, and how that side of human nature continues to this day.

Looking at history maybe OBF needs a little less Johann Sebastian and a little more Wilhelm Friedemann.

Perhaps the festival could truly decentralize across the city to all the nooks and crannies where music flourishes in Eugene. A festival of Eugene bands and jazz combos held at Hi-Fi or Jazz Station, or chamber music actually played in Eugene residents’ living rooms?

Bach was an educator, so how about songwriting workshops open to all ages and styles? Or an investment in a mainstream headliner for the Hult Center that carries on the legacy of musical exploration while driving audiences to buy tickets. How about Radiohead or Brian Eno? Why should we be afraid to think big in Eugene?

The Goldberg Variations with a rapper may seem as desperate as your dad saying “dude,” but considering who now is writing our great works, and opening up the canon to pop — and all its attendant and more diverse voices (read: less old dead white men) — may just be the answer. Bach’s music is timelessly beautiful. But maybe it’s time to bury Bach the Lutheran.

Or maybe we shouldn’t care if Bach stays relevant. Is it the responsibility of great art to speak to audiences as they shift and change, or is it the responsibility of audiences to keep alive these monuments to our Western world? Will we someday listen to *Revolver*, *The Queen is Dead* or *Nevermind* the way we listen to Bach?

I don’t know. All that being said, I did leave these performances pondering the importance of any work of music, from any time, telegraphing a conversation between composer and audience, as well as between musician and music. Art links us in our humanity, across geography, beyond boundaries and through time. That was no different in 1700.

And in this regard, OBF 2017 was a success. ■

The Oregon Bach Festival continues through Saturday, July 15. Remaining performances include Telemann’s Don Quixote at 7 pm Thursday, July 13; The On Ensemble (taiko drummers) Friday, July 14; and the concluding concert, Beethoven’s Missa Solemnis, Saturday, July 15. More information at OregonBachFestival.com.