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CONCERT REVIEW: Ensemble musicians go for Baroque

By Susan L. Peña

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The ensemble Melomanie has carved out a unique niche for itself, which it demonstrated in a concert presented by the Albright College Friends of Music in the college's Center for the Arts.

Performing Friday night on exquisite Baroque instruments, including a harpsichord decorated in black, gold and red, the ensemble plays, as one would expect, Baroque music. But it also specializes in contemporary music.

Bypassing the Classical and Romantic eras suits Melomanie's instruments and style; the sound is gentle, with a limited range of dynamics. Performed in a small venue like Roop Hall, one can appreciate the nuances and the subtle colors.

Tracy Richardson played the harpsichord; Kimberly Reighley played Baroque and modern flutes; Douglas McNames played a 1708 cello; Donna Fournier played the viola da gamba; and guest Rainer Beckmann played recorders.

In every case they played with sensitivity and attention to detail; their choice of material was interesting and highlighted their many gifts.

They opened with Georg Telemann's Trio for Alto Recorder in F Major, in this case arranged for four, with viola da gamba, cello and harpsichord. The intricate writing and swift-moving lines of the two outer movements contrasted nicely with the brief, lovely slow movement.

Reighley performed French contemporary composer Jean Francais' Suite for Solo Flute, a delicious set of dances with Baroque names like "Saltorella" and "Allemande" (the latter requiring alto flute, the warmest and most seductive of flutes).

Reminiscent of Francis Poulenc, the piece revealed an impish sense of humor in both composer and performer. Reighley's technique was dazzling, her playing sheer joy.

McNames also performed a solo that was breathtaking in its expressivity and beauty of tone: Domenico Gabrielli's Ricercar No. 7 in D minor, written in 1689 — one of the first solo works for cello.

Beckmann had his turn with "Blue Mosque for Bass Recorder" by Dutch contemporary composer Jacques Bank. The exotic sounds, produced by various extended techniques, called forth the calls of the muezzins of Istanbul. It was a tour de force unlike anything I've heard on a recorder.

Also on the program were the neo-Baroque/Brazilian Sonata No. 1 for Recorder and Harpsichord by Liduino Pitombeira — a mellifluous piece played with plenty of heart — and Johann Quantz's elegant Sonata in C Major for Flute and Recorder, with cello and harpsichord.

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