

Artist Management

Soprano Rosa Lamoreaux
with the Four Nations Ensemble at the Freer Gallery

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Review: Chamber Music goes Baroque at the Freer

By Cecelia Porter

The Four Nations Ensemble programmed an unusual assortment of Baroque and Rococo chamber music by composers largely unfamiliar to most audiences on Thursday at the Freer Gallery.

Two were Italian missionaries: Teodorico Pedrini (in China) and Domenico Zipoli (in South America). Jean-Marie Leclair, Jean Philippe Rameau and Francois Couperin dazzled the musical scene at French courts. Raynor Taylor and Benjamin Carr were part of Philadelphia's rich cultural life in the late 18th century. All of Thursday's music was intended not for today's public concert hall but for the intimate spheres of the royal apartment, the aristocratic salon, or a cardinal's parlor. Much was sheer entertainment music geared to delight the senses.

Soprano Rosa Lamoreaux offered dazzling versions of Zipoli's cantata "O Daliso, da quell di che partisti" and three songs by Carr. In Zipoli's mini-drama, Lamoreaux's voice took on a dark shade of lyricism to portray a maiden tearfully lamenting a lost love. She nuanced phrases with sensitivity and ornamented cadences with liquid grace. Sung by someone else, the Carr songs could have been mere sentimental trivia in romantic style. But Lamoreaux transformed their archaic tone into jewels glowing with gentle humor and sheer exuberance.

The rest of the evening brought mixed success. Flutist Charles Brink skillfully preserved the expressive mellow tone of his wooden period instrument even while charging through passages at lightning speed. Violinist Krista Bennion Feeney, cellist Loretta O'Sullivan and harpsichordist Andrew Appel zipped through some zesty solos and buoyant ensemble work, but not without some misses.