

## **Bach Meets Mozart**

### **Festival Brings Two Classics Together**

By Jacquelyn Walsh



This year's Shenandoah Valley Bach Festival will feature music by Bach and Mozart during concerts held June 12-19 at Eastern Mennonite University and Asbury United Methodist Church.

For almost two decades, the Shenandoah Valley Bach Festival has brought Bach's music to the forefront for a week.

This year, the festival, which features a composer, country, era or culture alongside Bach each season, will pair the famous musician with Mozart in concerts held June 12-19.

Eastern Mennonite University, where the Festival Concerts are held, is a sponsor and supporter of the festival, which does fundraising and programming as a separate entity.

"It has been a wonderful cooperative between EMU and the Bach festival," says Mary Kay Adams, executive director of the festival.

For 19 seasons, the Shenandoah Valley Bach Festival has brought something new to the Valley and audience members, said Ken Nafziger, artistic director and co-founder of the Shenandoah Valley Bach Festival.

"The people that come to play and sing are really excellent musicians," Nafziger said. "They come out of a love for it, and I think that's the best way."

Musicians come from around the United States as well as the community and are chosen by Joan Griffing, concertmaster of the Shenandoah Symphony Orchestra.

The Festival Orchestra is comprised of musicians from around the country, and the volunteer Festival Choir includes both amateur and professional vocalists from the community.

"The quality of the music that is performed, both the greatness of the music itself but also the quality of the performance, is very high - this is not a mediocre group by any means," says Adams.

The festival draws a diverse audience, too, organizers say. Audience members come from around the globe, says Adams; attendees from at least 15 states and three other countries were present last year.

"From the perspective of a musician, the festival is just a lot of fun. You have a whole week focused on music," says Griffing. "The community really comes out and supports our concerts. It's great to see the enthusiasm for classical music."

Many audience members are repeat attendees, she adds, but for those who've never been, they can expect to have "a fun evening of being pleasantly surprised that music can be this much fun," says Griffing. "We want everybody to enjoy themselves and laugh and be swept off their feet. I think they would be surprised at how laid-back it is."

The festival features 11 unique concerts.

The three main Festival Concerts - which will feature guest artists, the Festival Orchestra and Festival Choir - will be held at 3 p.m. on June 12, 7:30 p.m. on June 17 and 7:30 p.m. on June 18 in Lehman Auditorium. Tickets range in price from \$5-\$25 for a single concert or from \$15-\$60 for a three-concert package.

The other eight concerts - featuring a chamber or small ensemble - will be free, though donations will be collected.

Noon Chamber Music Concerts will be held at noon on June 13-18 at Asbury United Methodist Church. The festival will also feature a Virginia Baroque Performance Academy Faculty Recital at 5:30 p.m. on June 13 at Asbury United Methodist Church and a Leipzig service at 10 a.m. on June 19 at Lehman Auditorium.

"That is our gift to the community," says Adams. "You can go to the Bach festival no matter what your income is - we think that it's essential to offer that to the community."

While there is a plethora of events throughout the week, Griffing is looking forward to the evening performance on June 18 most. The concert features a Mozart opera, which showcases "a combination of all the arts," says Griffing. "You've got the music and the stage and the costumes and the story line. And it's a comic opera, not a tragic one."

The Leipzig service on June 19, a church service, is another tribute to Bach, who spent part of his professional career working at St. Thomas Church in Leipzig, Germany.

"Our festival is all about Bach and we're ending the week with going right back to Bach and doing something in the way he might have done it," says Adams.

The community aspect has been especially strong from the very beginning, says Nafziger.

"It's an exciting thing to be a part of something that is way, way bigger than any of us could have imagined at the outset," says Nafziger. "It's something that evolves and sometimes it takes us places we might have expected to go but oftentimes to places we never expected to go."



**Noon Chamber Music Concerts will be held from June 13-18 at Asbury United Methodist Church.**

Photos by Lindsey Kolb.

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