

Wayward Sisters serve up illuminating program on a rainy night

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One of the advantages of living in a musically rich city like Chicago is the pleasure of discovering new ensembles and unexplored performance venues.

An event on this rainy Memorial Day weekend provided both with the performance Saturday night by the Wayward Sisters at the Chicago Temple.

Founded in 2009, the early music trio is comprised of three young women: violinist Beth Wenstrom, recorder player Anne Timberlake and cellist Anna Steinhoff. All are Oberlin graduates with extensive performing experience, Steinhoff locally as a member of Baroque Band.

For all its size and variety, Chicago is not teeming with early music ensembles, especially chamber groups performing on period instruments. The imaginative program and alert, stylish performances presented Saturday by the Wayward Sisters provide notice of a fine addition to the local music scene.

The intriguing program — “The Naughty List: Music by Braggarts, Hotheads, Curmudgeons and Snobs” — seemed to promise something more lurid and scandalous than the graceful evening of early music actually presented.

The title is based on the fact that the composers represented were mountebanks in some way or other — Bellerofonte Castaldi actually murdered someone — but it seems that rather than homicidal criminals, most were simply difficult and irritable, as pointed out in the wryly humorous program note.

The generous evening offered nine works and several unfamiliar composer names — to me anyway — but it might have been wiser to discard a couple items and dispense with the intermission to provide a tighter program.

Purcell’s Sonata VII In E minor made a fine calling card for all four musicians— John Lenti provided continuo support on theorbo—showing polished and spirited playing, and well-balanced ensemble.

The musicians were especially inspired in negotiating the mercurial contrasts of Matthew Locke’s Suite No. 6 in D major, with its strikingly expressive *Fantazie* and *Ayre*, alternating with buoyant dance-like sections.

Several of the selections gave individual members a chance to shine. Steinhoff, with Lenti, provided a sturdy rendering of two movements from Vivaldi’s Cello Sonata No. 3 in A minor. Timberlake was a rich-toned presence throughout with some dazzling

playing in Tarquinio Merula's *Sonata Prima* and *Ciaconna*, the latter delivered with equal verve by her colleagues as well.

William Brade's *Choral with Variations* is said to be the first violin solo written by an English composer. Here with ground bass provided by Lenti and Steinhoff, Wenstrom played with an easy grace and light bravura just right for the scale of this piece. The violinist was also to the fore in two excerpts from Nicola Matteis's *Ayres for the Violin*, Book 4, throwing off the virtuosic sections with fine panache and technical security.

Lenti showed impressive dexterity as well in Castaldi's *Follia*, a set of florid variations for theorbo on a stately theme.

Dario Cotello's *Sonata Duodecima* provided a quirky and rambunctious finale with bursts of bravura for all four players amid schizoid, C.P.E. Bach-like gear-shifts and an abrupt throwaway coda on an unresolved cadence.

The Chicago Temple is a superb venue for a group of this size. Situated across the street from the Daley Center, the Methodist Loop church offers beautiful stained-glass windows and a terrific acoustic, which makes one wonder why it's not utilized more frequently by the city's chamber ensembles.