

Wayward Sisters prove to be quite a quartet

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From what was heard, one never would have suspected. The program was billed "The Naughty List: Music by Braggarts, Hotheads, Curmudgeons, and Snobs." The music, mostly of 17th century vintage, was a delight to hear, definitely period material, often lyrical or lilting, alternately affecting and danceable. It hinted not at all that their creators reportedly lived lives less nice than their compositions.

But then, the performers of Sunday afternoon's concert in St. Thomas Lutheran Church were not what their collective label indicated: Wayward Sisters. They aren't sisters and nothing seemed wayward, surely not musicianship, about violinist Beth Wenstrom, recorder specialist Anne Timberlake, and cellist Anna Steinhoff. What's more, the "sisters" brought a "brother" along, lutenist and theorbo player John Lenti.

They made quite a quartet. They also proved themselves excellent soloists. And the program gave each at least one opportunity to take the spotlight. For violinist Wenstrom, that came in William Brade's Choral with Variations and the Grave movement of Nicola Matteis' Ayres for the Violin: Book 4. Wenstrom contributed some heated fiddling during these pieces.

Timberlake, a Jacobs School alum, produced floods of clarion tones on several recorders but was particularly prominent in two items by Tarquinio Merula, a Sonata Prima and Ciaconna, that made her instrument the equivalent of a coloratura soprano, and an awfully good one at that.

Steinhoff produced resonant and thrusting tones on her Baroque cello in a performance of Antonio Vivaldi's Sonata Number 3 in A Minor. Lenti, another IU product, let loose in the complex developments of a Follia by Bellerofonte Castaldi.

The concerted works on the program -such as the appealing Sonata VII in E Minor by Henry Purcell, the pacific and amiable Suite Number 6 in D Major of Matthew Locke, and Dario Castello's creative and animated Sonata Duodecima- were played in commendably integrated fashion and with interpretive persuasiveness, proving that these musicians are, indeed, an ensemble.

Now, for the record, about the naughtiness of those composers:

Brade had problems with employer after employer, one of them calling him "mischievous" and "wanton." Matteis tended toward the prideful and arrogant. Merula was fired from one job for "indecent towards several of his pupils," a charge he fought and lost. Vivaldi, the so-called "Red Priest," was deemed vain and consorted with a soprano, which a priest shouldn't.

Castaldi committed murder, but in retribution for the death of his brother. Purcell generously bought drinks for fellow tavern patrons. Locke was called all sorts of bad things because, apparently, he was. Castello is believed to have had an acerbic personality, but one of the Wayward Sisters admitted that they simply loved his Sonata Duodecima and needed some sort of an excuse to put in on the program. Fetching, in truth, it was to hear, as was so much during this welcome Sunday event.