

# The Berkshire Eagle



## Bach and Forth: Three concertos to debut

By Andrew L. Pincus  
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STOCKBRIDGE -- Conductor David Alan Miller's charge to the three student composers was: Think baroque, write modern.

The three resulting concertos will receive premiere performances when Miller brings his Albany Symphony Orchestra to the Stockbridge Congregational Church for a concert Saturday. The new pieces will complement three genuine baroque works, including -- for the season -- Corelli's "Christmas" Concerto.

Under the commissions, each of three advanced composition students at New York's Juilliard School was allowed a solo instrument of his or her choosing. Juilliard students will also be the soloists.

Miller said he encouraged the composers to look at models by Vivaldi, Bach and Handel, "and then to really create their own, very much 21st-century analogy."

The new pieces, which Miller describes as "pocket concertos," follow their models in running about 10 minutes each. He held up the four concertos of Vivaldi's "The Seasons" as particular models.

"I was very adamant," he said, "about not encouraging them to ape baroque style or baroque idiom or baroque harmonies, but to kind of re-translate what they thought was the most essential elements and most successful elements of the Vivaldi concertos into their own terms. And what's quite lovely about the concerti is that they couldn't be more different."

The 3 p.m. concert by a chamber-sized orchestra will also feature Bach's Suite No. 1 for orchestra and a symphony by his son Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach.

The move to the church from the Colonial Theatre and Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center, the orchestra's last previous venues, represents a scaling back of its Berkshire presence. There will be only two concerts this winter, down from three in previous seasons.

The second program will take place on Feb. 27, 2010, at Barrington Stage in Pittsfield. It will feature the Parnas sisters of Stephentown, N. Y. -- violinist Madalyn and cellist Cicely -- as soloists.

Miller said finances were one reason for a cutback, which also reduced the orchestra's Capitol Region season from nine programs to eight. A three-year grant from the Berkshire Bank Foundation ran out, though the Berkshire concerts are still receiving key support from the bank and Jane Fitzpatrick of Stockbridge, he said.

But, he said, the orchestra also wanted to try other venues in the Berkshires. A survey of possible sites led to the choice of the church and Barrington Stage.

"It's a very challenging year for all of us in the arts," Miller said, "so if we could find venues that were less expensive, we were happy to do that." Especially with the Christmas decorations in the church, "we thought it would be a perfect venue for that program."

There will be two Berkshire concerts in 2010-11, in October and April, with the possibility of a third in December, according to executive director Brian A. Ritter.

The new concertos reflect two of the orchestra's long-standing concerns: commissioning new music and championing "rising star" performers.

The idea of commissioning living composers to write "beautiful, jewel-like" concertos in a baroque style had been in Miller's mind for some time. When he hit upon the idea of having young composers write such pieces for rising-star soloists, he turned to two Juilliard composition teachers whose works he has performed, John Corigliano and Robert Beaser.

"They thought it was a fabulous idea," he said.

Corigliano and Beaser took the proposal to the composition faculty, which recommended these three students. Miller then told them, "in a very broad-brushed way," the kind of pieces he had in mind.

There is a tradition, dating back to Bach and beyond, of composers adapting earlier styles to their needs. In recent times, Stravinsky, in such baroque adaptations as his "Pulcinella," is a prime example.

The new works and their soloists are: Michael Ippolito's "Vivaldi's Bicycle: Concerto for Cello and Baroque Orchestra" (Dane Johanson); Gity Razaz's Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra (Moran Katz), and Evan Fein's "The Frustration of Gottfried Reiche" (trumpeter Colin Seig).

As is customary in ASO concerts, the composers will speak about their intentions. Meanwhile, the fanciful titles of two works are explained in the composers' program notes.

Ippolito writes that in an interview, a reporter once asked a French cyclist if he liked music. "Very much, especially Vivaldi," the cyclist is said to have replied, "because he has formidable sprints from time to time."

In his concerto, Ippolito says, he tried to capture these "wild and irregular" aspects of Vivaldi's music.

Johann Gottfried Reiche was a town piper in Leipzig from 1706 to 1734, Fein writes. He became known as one of Germany's greatest trumpeters and was a favorite colleague of Bach, a fellow Leipziger.

"In this concerto," Fein says, "I have placed him in the imaginary scenario of performing a gig without the assistance of his celebrated neighbor, and in so doing, offer a comedic reinterpretation of the baroque concerto."

Raziz chose the clarinet, an instrument unknown in its present form during the baroque era, as her solo instrument precisely in order to write "a modern work in the spirit of baroque music."

"The pieces are, I think, very charming," Miller said, with a different approach by each composer lending variety to the project.

"I was concerned," he added, "that it didn't turn into a kind of pseudo-baroque parody -- that they really write contemporary, meaningful pieces that they felt strongly about -- but that somehow hearken back in certain ways to the baroque concerto."

**In Concert:**

**What:** Music by Corelli, J.S. Bach, C.P.E. Bach, and Juilliard composers Gity Razaz, Michael Ippolito, Evan Fein

**Who:** Albany Symphony Orchestra and soloists. David Alan Miller, conductor

**When:** Saturday 3 p.m.

**Where:** First Congregational Church of Stockbridge, 4 Main St., Stockbridge

**Tickets:** \$30-\$15