

Concert Review of October 11, 2008

By John Paul Keeler For the Hudson-Catskill Newspapers

FALL SEASON AT BERKSHIRE BACH IN FULL SWING

The Berkshire Bach Ensemble started their fall season at the First Congregational Church at Great Barrington on October 11th. It was a stunning concert, featuring the world premiere of Kenneth Cooper's arrangement of Johann Sebastian Bach's (1685-1750) six trio sonatas in chamber music settings. The works were written for two manuals and pedal. Cooper has taken Bach's rather dry settings and done wonders with them with a gloriously colorful palette bringing out the stunning beauty of these wonderful works.

The first Sonata in E flat major (BWV525) had an ebullience which would nearly knock your hat off. The adagio had mystery and the plaintive French horn, oboe and bassoon brought uncommonly rich sonority to this great work. Trio No 2 in C minor (BWV 526) as all lyric sparkle, a haunting adagio and fulsome allegro. The first half ended with Trio No 3 in D minor (BWV 527) with the marvelous flute playing of Judith Mendenhall and the wizardry of Cooper at the harpsichord bringing a wild Gaelic sweep to the work.

After intermission, the Trio No 4 in E Minor (BWV 528), which was such a success in their recent Chatham performance, was even better this time around in the splendid acoustics of the church. Trio No 5 in C major (BWV 529) had the gorgeous viola sound of Irena Momchilova matched by Cooper's elan at the harpsichord. The program ended with the Trio No 6 in G major (BWV 530). The combined brilliance and energy of the nine musicians in Cooper's marvelous reworking of this great work made one think that it was a seventh Brandenburg Concerto. The series continues on December 13 at the Church with the first part of Bach's rarely performed Christmas Oratorio conducted by the eminent James Bagwell.