

The members of the Berkshire Bach Ensemble are superb modern players, some of the best in the country. Their exuberant leader, Kenneth Cooper, has consistently approached these concerts with imagination, even daring. Over the more than ten years that I have attended this annual event, it has seemed, at least to my ears, as if the playing has grown more and more stylistic. The group now seems to combine virtuoso playing with a kind of lightness, what I might call stylistic joy. Add to that hearing them in the warmest of places, the Troy Music Hall, and you have one terrific afternoon. The Viennese have Johann Strauss—we have Johann Sebastian Bach. The concerti themselves are an encyclopedia of affect, ranging from darkest and deepest sadness in some of the oboe solos, to the Falstaffian exuberance in the first pages of Concerto no. 1, to the deep, dulcet thinking aloud of the slow movement of the 6th. It seems in a good performance like all of life can be heard in these pieces. What struck me this year especially was their comprehensiveness, the sense that one gets from any large-scale group of fecund inventions, that one is in the presence of a mind which can continuously create, often using the smallest building blocks, the greatest examples of this being the Goldberg and the Diabelli Variations. Though the six concertos of the Brandenburgs are not related, they find a way to touch almost every human feeling, and that deeply. That said, they are also somehow light music, which is pleasant in the best sense of that word. Mr. Cooper and his players found this joy and this lightness, never neglecting the depth that sometimes begins to sing out. And enthralled audience listened to two and a half hours of sublime music, rose to their feet, and walked out of the place blessed.

--Keith Kibler, Berkshire Arts in Review, January 2012