

# BACH VIRTUOSI Festival



Thank you Portland!

Last night, in front of an audience of nearly 400 music lovers, my brilliant colleagues gave another unforgettable performance. **Bach and Handel: Two Giants**. From the opening

chords of *Brandenburg 4* to the closing notes of Handel's *Let the Bright Seraphim*, this was a concert that brought all of St. Luke's to its feet... 4 times!

Over the course of our eight-day festival, there were so many highlights. From the opening chords of the *Cello Suite No. 3* to the Cantatas, the Sonatas, to Schumann and Handel, the instrumentalists and vocalists, who make up the Bach Virtuosi Festival were among the greatest in the world.

I mentioned last night that it was tremendously gratifying to see boxes of canned goods teeming over at the Falmouth Congregational Church en route to their Food Pantry to feed the hungry and poor and further learn that our audience had donated over \$1,000 for the Food Pantry. This is the heart and soul of our friends, the supporters of the Bach Virtuosi Festival.

Equally rewarding was the warmth and appreciation given to my colleagues by Portland. On behalf of all of them I thank you for your love and confidence.

I will leave you with a [review of last night's concert](#) (below) from Christopher Hyde, author of *Maine Classical Beat*. This review is so flattering of the work that the Bach Virtuosi did this week and we are extremely grateful to Chris for his third enthusiastic article about BVF.

In the weeks and months ahead we will share with you our plans and accomplishments. They will be enormously exciting and Portland can be proud to be the host of the Bach Virtuosi Festival. Please feel free to send us your thoughts, comments, and inspiration. Again, thank you for sharing with us a week of extraordinary joy.

The vision goes on.

Lewis

## Handel and Bach Close Virtuosi Festival

[June 25, 2018](#)

Bach Virtuosi Festival  
Cathedral Church of St. Luke

The Bach Virtuosi Festival, which ended its third season Sunday night at the Cathedral Church of St. Luke, has a way of changing one's mind about Baroque compositions as a whole, not only those of J.S. Bach.

I was never enthusiastic about Handel operas, but the arias performed

by soprano Sherezade Panthaki, countertenor Jay Carter, and trumpeter John Thiessen, were absolutely ravishing.

Handel works a text to death, crams it with fiendishly difficult ornamentation, and the result is a trip to heaven. If performance is all, I had never heard these works before. The combination of a great soprano and an equally fine countertenor provides some amazing effects, indescribable in words, while Panthaki's voice imitates and surpasses "uplifted angel trumpets" in an aria from "Samson."

Old J.S., who never met his contemporary, in spite of several attempts, was not to be outdone, however. The Brandenburg concertos are all equally works of genius, but some are more equal than others. Numbers 2 and 5 used to be my favorites, but after hearing the fourth, with flautists Emi Ferguson and Laura del Sol Jimenez and violinist Renee Jolles, supported by the festival's outstanding chamber orchestra, I'm no longer sure. If Portland's virtuosi festivals continue, we will come to love all of them to the same degree. Or maybe, "if I'm not near the girl I love, I love the girl I'm near."

The revelations never stopped. Organist Katelyn Emerson, from Maine and now a native of the world, provided a stupendous performance of the Bach Toccata and Fugue in D Minor (BWV 565), that brought a large audience leaping to its collective feet. In her hands, the Skinner organ of St. Luke's is indeed a phenomenon. It seemed, which is impossible, to have the physical volume control of a pianoforte, the ability to alter stops instantly in call-and-response passages, and voices reserved for J. S. Bach alone.

The articulation of its cascades of notes was as crisp as that of a Steinway grand. "The difficult we do immediately, the impossible takes a little longer."

A pair of Rod Regier's harpsichords from his Freeport studio took center stage with Arthur Haas and Gabriel Shuford in a performance of the Bach Double Harpsichord Concerto in C Minor (BWV 1069).

This is one instance where the cliché about Bach's music being for intimate venues applies to some extent. Regier's harpsichords are not only beautiful, but powerful, yet their sound faded the farther back in the pews one sat. Perhaps harpsichord, or clavier, solos should be presented in the smaller chapel of St. Luke's. The performance of the concerto itself, one of my favorites, was up to the festival's standards of excellence (and infectious excitement). Distance only made one listen more closely.

When I was working for ad agencies I would visit New York weekly, with some light excuse, to hear music or go to the ballet. I never heard anything as good as what Lewis Kaplan has brought to Portland. Let us all hope that it continues.

### **Bach Virtuosi Festival Media Reviews**

**"A rock-solid ensemble, magnificently polished... sizzling, steeped in lushness!"**

—Allan Kozinn, Portland Press Herald

**"Can't Miss Classical Event of the Summer!"**

—Boston Globe Classical Critic's Picks

**"Some of the world's foremost Bach interpreters...I never heard anything as good as what Lewis Kaplan has brought to Portland."**

—Chris Hyde, Maine Classical Beat