



Plaine & Easie Simply Charming at All Saints' Cathedral

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The Seattle Renaissance ensemble Plaine & Easie takes its name from the British composer Thomas Morley's 1597 treatise *A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke*. There was nothing plain nor particularly easy about the charming concert presented Saturday evening at All Saints' Cathedral, in the Early Music Now series.

The ensemble is comprised of soprano Linda Tsatsanis, violinist Shulamit Kleinerman, luteist John Lenti, and Nathan Whittaker on bass viol, a forerunner of the cello. By necessity, almost all their repertory is made up of their own arrangements (a common practice for early music ensembles). Plaine & Easie's arrangements are clearly conceived, with a light touch, and not overwritten, which is an aesthetic danger. To their arrangements they add profuse and insightful improvisation, going further in this regard than any other early music ensemble I've encountered. The result is freshness and spontaneity.

The theme of the program was "Across the Water in the English Renaissance," with focus on music by John Dowland and the anthologies published by his son, which included continental music collected by Dowland in his travels. Most of the pieces performed were for soprano and various instrumental combinations, spelled by instrumental numbers.

Tsatsanis has a classic sound for music of this period: light, clear and agile. What is not typical is her daring, theatrical and extroverted approach. I've never heard Dowland's well-known tragic "Flow my tears" come to life so vividly, with vocal acting that would not have been out of place on the opera stage. Playing the coquette, Tsatsanis was provocative and playful in Pierre Guédron's "Aux plaisirs, aux délices, bergère," and Filippo Azzaiolo's "Chi passa per 'sta strada."

Kleinerman's enticing solos, especially in jigs, reminded one how close early music can be to folk fiddle tunes. Lenti is an extraordinarily talented lute player, sensitive and imaginative. I marveled at the tone Whittaker coaxed from the bass viol, smooth and elegant. This young ensemble, 2009 winner of Early Music America's prize in medieval and renaissance music, consistently pulled off the elusive combination of refinement and liveliness. Early Music Now continued its remarkable run of exquisite performances played to full houses.