

## Akademie excels in technique and sensitive arrangement

By Richard Todd



Two German orchestras on two consecutive Fridays; we could easily get spoiled by the likes of last week's Württemberg Orchestra and **the Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin that gave a splendid concert last night** in St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church. The Akademie was founded in 1982 as an alternative to the state-sponsored musical institutions in East Berlin. **After the fall of the Berlin Wall seven**

**years later, its international reputation blossomed. Its members were able to tour more extensively and their reputation was further enhanced by a number of recordings on the Harmonia Mundi label which, taken together, represent more than a million sales.**

The repertoire that this conductorless period instrument ensemble played was all mainstream high baroque: Telemann, Vivaldi and Bach. But it wasn't what they played that made the strongest impression; **it was how they played it.** Beginning with Telemann's zesty suite *La Bizarre*, **the musicians demonstrated how little they need a conductor. Ensemble playing was close to perfect and things like balance and intonation were beyond criticism or, might we even say, beyond praise.** The piece itself is rather curious, an example of Telemann's use of the standard French suite of the time.

Next came Vivaldi's String Concerto in G, RV 156. **As before, the musicians played to the highest of standards. Their solid and powerful sound was particularly impressive,** all the more so since they were playing with instruments which, by some accounts, are too reticent for modern sensibilities. Next came a curiosity, an arrangement for orchestra of J. S. Bach's famous Italian Concerto. Despite its designation, Bach wrote the piece for solo keyboard. It fell to other, unspecified, hands to come up with the arrangement used by the Akademie. Did it work? **Indeed it did, partly due to the excellence of the performance, no doubt, but also on account of the sensitive and intelligent arrangement.** The slow movement was especially pleasing. The second half of the concert began with another Telemann work, a concerto in D for traverse flute (as opposed to the recorder). The soloist was Christoph Huntgeburth, whose virtuosity is unquestioned. There were a few musical decisions he made that might be questioned, but it was a pleasing performance for all that. **The final offering was Bach's glorious Concerto in D for two violins and strings, in a glorious performance by violinists Georg Kallweit and Midori Seiler.** The second movement soared as it's supposed to and provided some **moments of surpassing beauty.**

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