Camerata Capistrano goes for baroque

Sacramento State’s baroque ensemble, Camerata Capistrano, has humble beginnings but has grown into a renowned group during its seven years.

Playing music by all composers from the time period approximating Johann Sebastian Bach’s life (1685-1750), the group has become a must-have for concerts and festivals such as the Berkeley Early Music Festival, Bravo Bach! in Sacramento, Live at Mission Blue in San Francisco, and the Chico Bach Festival.

“We’ve done very well,” says the group’s director, Music Professor Lorna Peters. “The energy that everyone has put into Camerata from the very first year has been quite remarkable.”

The group performs at home at 4 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 9, in Sac State’s Capistrano Hall Room 151. Among the many numbers the group will play are Telemann’s “Water Music,” Handel’s “Arrival of the Queen of Sheba,” Vivaldi’s “Concerto for Strings,” and Johann Christian Bach’s “Grand Overture in E-Flat Major, Op. 18, No. 1.”

All 27 members don’t necessarily play at the same concerts, but the lineup consists of violins, violas, string bass, cello, bassoons, oboes, flutes, guitar, sometimes horns, and, of course, the harpsichord.

In keeping with a baroque ensemble performance, the group performs without a director. Historically the composer would play with the group, probably on harpsichord, nodding his head as a cue to the other musicians, says Peters. Camerata Capistrano musicians take their cues from one another. “Whoever has the main part gives the cue for the whole group to come in and we work on doing that together,” says violinist Amanda Lostritto.

While most of the musicians are music majors, that isn’t a hard and fast rule. “We have a violist who isn’t a performance major, she’s a biology major,” says cellist Carrie Miller.

Camerata Capistrano began in 2005 when some students asked Peters if she would coach a baroque ensemble. “I was delighted to hear that because I’d been wanting to do that for a very long time,” she says.
It didn’t take long for word to spread. A video of the group performing in Berkeley received a lot of attention on YouTube, and many incoming Sac State music students already are aware of the ensemble.

Violinist Paolo Reyes was invited to join the group and has found baroque an enjoyable challenge. “I especially enjoy the amount of detail work we have to look at and observe and remember every single time,” he says. “There are a lot of nuances.”

Students who join the group are demonstrating an extraordinary commitment to their craft. “This is an extracurricular activity,” Peters says. “This is on top of all their required ensembles, their lessons with their teachers and all their coursework.”

But all that work can pay off.

Faythe Vollrath was a harpsichordist during the group’s first year and says the experience proved invaluable. “To get the opportunities as an undergrad to play with so many different people gave me a much bigger foundation than other students when I went to graduate school,” she says.

Vollrath recently completed her doctorate in harpsichord performance at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, where she studied with Arthur Haas, Peters’ former teacher.

Many of the younger musicians pursue other baroque instruction and concert opportunities during the summer months. Others have formed smaller baroque groups outside of Camerata, and the ensemble provides smaller groups on its own when invited to various functions.

“I get asked all the time for a Camerata group to go here or there,” Peters says.

For their University concerts, Camerata Capistrano focuses on just one per semester, which gives them the opportunity to tackle a challenging program in great detail.

“That is not an opportunity students this age get very often,” Peters says. “And they always blow my socks off when they get out there and play.”

Tickets for the Dec. 9 concert are $10 general, $7 for seniors and $5 for students, and are available at the University Ticket Office, (916) 278-4323.

For more information on Sac State’s Music Department, visit www.csus.edu/music or call (916) 278-5191. For media assistance, call the University’s Public Affairs office at (916) 278-6156.

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