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Baroque music enriches Bach style in symphony concert

By [Mark Kanny](#)

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The debut of [Jeannette Sorrell](#) with the [Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra](#) was an especially joyous occasion on Friday night.

The American conductor and harpsichordist brought an exciting combination of individuality with decisive yet graceful style to Johann Sebastian Bach's Six Brandenburg Concertos.

Sorrell is the founding music director of Cleveland's period instruments orchestra, Apollo's Fire, with which she has enriched many a season of the Pittsburgh Renaissance and Baroque Society back to the 1990s.

Friday's performance at [Heinz Hall](#) surmounted all of the potential problems of playing baroque music with a modern orchestra in a big hall. Sorrell used a small ensemble, with all the musicians standing except for cellos and harpsichord.

From the start of the Brandenburg Concerto No. 1, it was apparent that Bach's music would reach the ear with virtually perfect balance and transparency, that the incredible richness of Bach's textures would provide many delights at any given moment for the listeners' ears.

Sorrell's sense of pacing was energetic and free of metronomic rigidity. Her use of agogic accents was part of broader gestures, which however strong were never heavy handed. They were expressive gestures.

She was at her freest in an improvisatory performance of the long cadenza in the first movement of the Brandenburg Concerto No. 5, even coming to a stop as she created the illusion that the music was finding its way at that moment.

There was particular delight to be taken from the playing of the orchestra musicians, starting with oboist Cynthia DeAlmeida in the first movement of the First Concerto. DeAlmeida's phrasing had wonderful nuance of articulation and dynamics, and her tone was gorgeous and pointed. Hornists William Caballero and Robert Lauver were terrific in the second trio. Incidentally, the concerto's third movement was played after the Menuetto.

Concertmaster Noah Bendix-Balgley played with wonderful musicality throughout the concert, and surpassing virtuosity in the Fourth Brandenburg. George Vosburgh was outstanding in the high-flying trumpet part in the Second Concerto, in which he was a soloist along with flutist Lorna McGhee, DeAlmeida and Bendix-Balgley.

Each concerto has a different orchestration, which provides variety and creates a pause for stagehands between pieces. Sorrell provided delightful commentary during those breaks. This is a concert not to be missed.

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This concert will be repeated at 8 p.m. Saturday and 2:30 p.m. Sunday in Heinz Hall, Downtown. Admission is \$20 to \$93. Details: 412-392-4900 or www.pittsburghsymphony.org. Mark Kanny is classical music critic for Trib total Media. He can be reached at 412-320-7877 or mkanny@tribweb.com.

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