

# The Oregonian

## Music review:

## A TRINITY OF TRADITION, ENERGY AND WARMTH

Trinity Consort - "Baroque Christmas" yields French Baroque's and J.S. Bach's elegance

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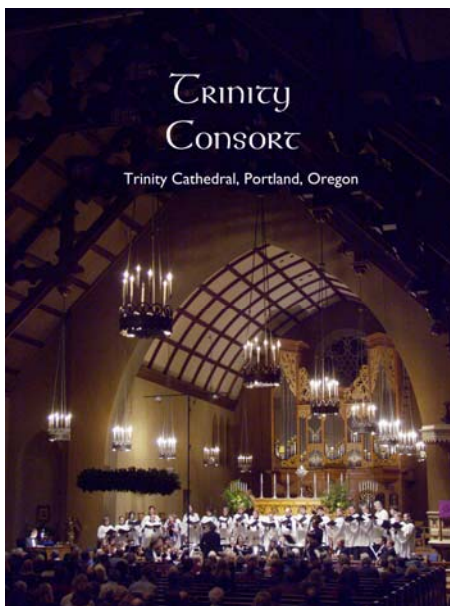
Like the holiday season itself, Trinity Consort's "Baroque Christmas" at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral is a mix of tradition and pleasant surprises. The tradition, established by artistic director Eric Milnes over the past several years, is a combination of French Baroque works with excerpts from J.S. Bach's six cantatas, known collectively as the "Christmas Oratorio." The format allows for variability, and therein lie the surprises, sparkling novelties alongside offerings from previous Christmas seasons.

This year's program, unwrapped Saturday night, included the second of the "Christmas Oratorio" cantatas; orchestral pieces by two other Johanns from the Bach family, Johann Ludwig and Johann Bernhard; Marc-Antoine Charpentier's "Dialogue of the Angels and Shepherds in Judea" and his setting of the Magnificat; and works by Jean-Baptiste Lully and Jean-Philippe Rameau. It was an awful lot of music, but excessive generosity seemed in keeping with the spirit of the evening.

Directing from the keyboard, Milnes imbued the music with vigor, rich detail and unrelenting momentum -- to hazard an oxymoron, he achieved a kind of tightly-wound elegance. He sometimes sacrificed a sense of melodic line in favor of emphatic effect, most obviously in the final chorale of the Bach cantata, with its exaggerated note shaping. But that seemed a fair trade-off for the evening's warmth, energy and moments of edge-of-the-seat excitement.



ERIC MILNES



PORTLAND'S TRINITY CONSORT

The Rameau, a set of excerpts from a grand, marvelously inventive setting of Psalm 126, was the highlight. Each movement shone with brilliant facets: a charming imitative exchange among solo singers and double reeds; an aria contrasting sonorous bass with flute filigrees; a florid trio vocal setting of the word "exsultatione," or "joy"; and a magnificent, rafter-raising finale.

Much of the concert's success owes to the Trinity Chamber Singers, an assembly of some of Portland's best choral talent. Few choirs could follow Milnes' thrill ride in the finale of the Bach (the chorus "Ehre sei dir," borrowed from the oratorio's fifth cantata) with such responsiveness, unity and joyous enthusiasm, and then repeat it as an encore. The orchestra was likewise tireless, with a full and buoyant sound.

Contributions from soloists were too many to enumerate here, but they included the radiance of sopranos Laura Heimes and Amanda Jane Kelley; the fine blend and sensitivity of Rodrigo Del Pozo, Blake Applegate and Kevin Walsh; the rich, rapturous tone of Tuesday Rupp; and the firm sonority of Richard Lippold.