

REVIEW: Cantemus joins with Rumbarroco to bring colorful Latin American music to life

Tuesday

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The music of Latin America, with a special focus on Venezuela, formed the basis for an unusual collaboration Sunday afternoon between the choral group Cantemus and the instrumental ensemble Rumbarroco. The program, led by Cantemus's music director Jane Ring Frank, was sung at Central Congregational Church in Newburyport, and repeats this Sunday, May 7, at The Bridge at 211 in Salem.

By Keith Powers / Correspondent

If you go...

WHAT: Cantemus, with Rumbarroco

WHEN: Sunday, May 7, 4 p.m.

WHERE: Bridge at 211 (Murray Hall), 211 Bridge St., Salem

TICKETS: \$25, \$20 seniors, students/under 21 free. Visit www.cantemus.org or call 888-246-7871

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The program, led by Cantemus's music director Jane Ring Frank, was sung at Central Congregational Church in Newburyport, and repeats this Sunday, May 7, at The Bridge at 211 in Salem.

Inspired by research done by Frank and Rumbarroco's music director Laury Gutiérrez into Latin women composers, the music featured some outstanding settings by Modesta Bor, Diana Sáez, and Beatriz Corona. Cantemus also sang some a cappella arrangements of instrumental works by Astor Piazzolla, and some traditional pieces.

This was hardly a typical mixture — a chorus of four dozen singers, paired with a small group of Latin instrumentalists, mostly playing Baroque instruments (viola da gamba, violin, bass, guitars, percussion). But it blended beautifully to bring these colorful compositions to life.

Modesta Bor (1926-98) was a Venezuelan composer and choral director who has a large body of works, mostly for vocal ensemble. Here, Cantemus and Rumbarroco performed her settings of texts by Fernando Rodríguez, García Lorca and Emma Pérez, all distinguished compositions.

“Canto a la Vida” featured a ruminative text by Rodríguez paired with a beautiful melody by Bor. The blended chorus sang with lyric energy — the tall, echoey room was not conducive to power, but had a distinct enough acoustic to allow each of the vocal ranges to come out. Simple accompaniment eased the text along.

The male voices stepped aside for a pastorella by García Lorca and a lullaby by Pérez, also with simple, appropriate accompaniment. Guitarist Juan Carlos Ruiz moved to a spot in the middle of the chorus, blending his small instrument delicately with the female voices.

A more lively setting, the traditional “El Monigote,” closed the first half of the performance. The instrumentalists, anchored by the rigorous percussion of Zayra Ocasio, took a more prominent role, including a vigorous solo section.

Rumbarroco opened the second half of the concert with a premiere from Diana Arismendi, “Für Elena,” a set piece that allowed each of the instrumentalists to lay out and show their stuff. Yi-Li Chang, who alternated between baroque violin and viola da gamba throughout the performance, had a particularly elegant and virtuosic line in this new work.

Another collaboration between Bor and García Lorca, “Ribereñas,” was a highlight — once again with female singers only, swaying to a kind of waltz rhythm. A minimalist, minor-key setting, “Corazon Coraza,” by Corona, also showed both ensembles blending nicely.

Arrangements of instrumental pieces by Piazzolla for wordless singing were somewhat less successful, the articulation of individual lines being blurred by some lax articulation and the general boominess of the room. The concert ended on a lively note, with the anthemic “Venezuela” and then an audience participation, directed by Gutiérrez, of a Puerto Rican plena.

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Keith Powers covers music and the arts for GateHouse Media and WBUR's ARTery. Follow [@PowersKeith](https://twitter.com/PowersKeith); email to keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com

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