

BAROQUE VIRTUOSITY



Violinist Kinga Augustyn

The XXI International Chopin & Friends Festival, under the artistic direction of violinist Kinga Augustyn, was held in New York on November 8 through 26. It consisted of six performances in prestigious venues such as the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland and Carnegie Hall, presenting a wide range of musical styles, from early Baroque through romantics like Chopin, Moniuszko and Noskowski, to 20th century composers Bacewicz, Gershwin, Williams, and into the current century: the world premiere of "Halna Fantasy" for clarinet solo by Jakub Polaczyk. There was also jazz, art songs and popular songs.

The final event of the festival was a concert titled "Baroque Virtuosity," in which Kinga Augustyn was the main performer, playing a modern replica of a Baroque violin. Other performers were Rebecca Pechefsky on harpsichord and Christopher Morrongiello playing archlute, Baroque guitar and lute. Before the musical performance, luthier Lukas Wroński gave a short presentation on the early traditions of creating string instruments.

The musical program of this concert was as follows:

Antonio Soler (1792-1783)	<i>Keyboard Sonata in D minor, R. 25</i>
J. S. Bach (1685-1750)	<i>Sonata in E minor, BWV 1023</i> for Violin and Continuo
Jean Marie Leclair (1697-1764)	<i>Sonata in C minor "Le Tombeau," op. 5 no. 6</i> for Violin and Continuo
Diomedes Cato(1560-c.1618)	<i>Fantasia Diomedes</i> for Solo Lute
Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713)	<i>Sonata in D minor, Op. 5 no. 12 "La Follia"</i> for Violin and Continuo

The continuo was provided by harpsichord and lute or guitar.

I have heard Kinga play many times, but never on a Baroque violin. The characteristics of such an instrument are very different from those of a modern one. The strings are of gut, not steel, the bow is under greater tension, and most significantly, the tuning is a whole tone lower than the current practice. As a result, the quality of sound is different from what we usually hear.

Despite the more limited acoustic capabilities of such an instrument (compared to one with modern stringing and tuning), Kinga elicited from it a strong, resonant yet graceful sound. As always, she showed amazing technique in executing rapid figurations with the bow and on the fingerboard.

I had one reservation: the harpsichord was played too loudly, and in spots its sound covered the more delicate passages on the strings. The delicacy normally associated with this instrument was missing. Perhaps it was miked too closely.

Congratulations to Kinga for putting together such an ambitious program and for a virtuosic performance in the final concert. It is yet another success in her career, and we wish her many more to come.