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Camerata offers lyrical 'Daniel'

By Harlow Robinson
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There are no roaring lions in Boston Camerata's ingenious, lyrical, and poignant staging of the story of the biblical hero Daniel. That, of course, is what most people remember about Daniel: He was thrown to the lions and emerged unscathed, protected by his faith. But Camerata's artistic director, Anne Azéma, and her versatile company of young singers, dancers, and musicians don't need real lions or Babylonian palaces. Singing in French-inflected Latin, they have smartly resuscitated and reinvented a 13th-century French version of the story, employing minimal resources (lighting, fabrics, movement) to convey the timeless spiritual message of Daniel's humility and courage more convincingly than could any Hollywood epic.

Chilled on a late November eve and fragrant with incense, the Trinity Church sanctuary provided an ideal neo-medieval setting. Assisted by Peter Torpey on lighting and media, Azéma made shrewd use of the entire space. Characters freely moved around the altar, pulpit, balconies, and up and down the center aisle. In the crucial scene where a hand inscribes mysterious writing on a wall, three illuminated words were projected in gleaming letters against the golden mosaic behind the altar. The clothes were modern, mostly black, with a few telling accessories: The queens wore high heels and necklaces with lots of bling.

A noted scholar of early music, Azéma spent a year preparing the musical edition

MUSIC REVIEW

THE PLAY OF DANIEL

Boston Camerata
At: Trinity Church Boston,
Friday evening

of the manuscript, which dates from 1230 and existed only in fragmentary form. She has also added several passages of linking narration that she sang herself in English from the pulpit, in the same folksy, lilting, chanting vocal style as the rest of the piece. The vocal soloists and various choral ensembles (boy sopranos, male chorus, female chorus, mixed chorus, more than 50 singers in all) are occasionally accompanied by *vielle* (an early violin) and harp (both played expertly by Shira Kammen), plus percussion and hurdy gurdy. Indrany Datta-Barua danced to her own choreography.

As Daniel, tenor Jordan Weatherston Pitts, a newcomer to the local scene, made a strong vocal and dramatic impression. He sang his first aria rising from the audience, dressed down, one of us, an "everyman" unafraid to speak truth to the scheming royals on the altar. Equally persuasive were tenor Jason McStoots as Belsazzar and bass Joel Frederiksen as the thoroughly modern Iranian king, Darius, cocky and resplendent in cool sunglasses.

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