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Calmus shines among Ravinia's 'Rising Stars'

By Dorothy Andries

Calmus is an German a cappella group of four young men and a woman, who have won all kinds of awards in European competitions. They concluded a year-long international tour Saturday, April 28 in Bennett Gordon Hall as part of Ravinia's Rising Stars series. By the time you read this, they will be back home in Leipzig.



It may be the first time Rising Stars has featured a singing ensemble, and it was a fine choice. If the four to one ratio seems unbalanced, that sells short soprano Anna Lipfert. She more than holds her own with the others, her voice soaring and illuminating their harmony with light and color.

The evening included Bach, Purcell, and — as was announced from the stage — that very prolific composer Anonymous. The group is particularly skillful at navigating the merry tangle of a Bach fugue. Their choice for this program was “Alles, was Oden hat, lobe den Herrn.”

They blended exquisitely in the Spanish Renaissance song “Dindirin, dindirin” and played air guitar in a dramatic number “La bomba,” about a sinking ship.

Their choice of Irish and pop songs was a treat. They exhibited an outstanding creamy blend in Charles Sanford's “The Blue Bird,” and Sting's “Fragile” was lovely.

They tried, nearly in vain, to get the audience to sing along with the chorus of Monty Python's “Always Look on the Bright Side,” but got a standing ovation after a particularly complex arrangement of Bobby McFerrin's “Don't Worry, Be Happy.”

Calmus sang to a nearly sold-out house, something which has not always happened at the Rising Stars concerts, From the very beginning it seemed that this showcase of promising young musicians in the festival's year-round facility had to fight for an audience.

It was not for lack of talent. Their roster included local luminaries, such as violinist Rachel Barton Pine, pianists Anthony Molinaro and Elizabeth Joy Roe, as well as nationally and internationally known violinists Pamela Frank, Gil Shaham and Maxim Vengerov, pianists Lang Lang, Jonathan Biss and Joyce Yang, cellists Zuill Bailey and Claudio Bohórquez and clarinetist Anthony McGill.

However, beginning last season, Ravinia instituted summer classical concerts in Bennett Gordon for \$10 and extended that modest price to Rising Stars concerts. It also trimmed the number of concerts to concentrate attention on the young artists who would be coming.

That strategy certainly worked Saturday night. The young people got an appreciate crowd and the audience got a bargain. You can't beat that.