

IN REVIEW > CONCERTS AND RECITALS  
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## Women of the Baroque

CHICAGO  
Collaborative Arts Institute of Chicago  
10/9/20



Anthony Reed and Amanda Majeski in *Women of the Baroque*, presented by the Collaborative Arts Institute of Chicago at the Poetry Foundation

**C**OLLABORATIVE ARTS INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO commemorated the centennial of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution with *The Women*, a series of streamed concerts dedicated to the music of female composers. *Women of the Baroque* initiated matters on October 9, with a tantalizing selection of works by Barbara Strozzi, Maddalena Casulana, Francesca Caccini, Antonia Bembo, Julie Pinel and Elisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre. Who remembers today that Strozzi was the most published composer of her lifetime? Or that Casulana, as noted in the excellent program notes by CAIC co-founder and artistic director Nicholas Phan, prefaced her *First Book of Madrigals* with her hope to "...show the world the futile error of men who believe themselves patrons of the high gifts of intellect, which according to them cannot also be held in the same way by women."

Chicago audiences first encountered Phan in 2007, with his performances in Monteverdi's *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria* at Chicago Opera Theater. The tenor's voice has beefed up since then and has served him well in Romantic song literature, but there was something ineffably satisfying in hearing Phan return to an earlier repertory. Phan's intrinsically plangent timbre was beautifully showcased in this music, as was his singular gift in straightforward expressivity. Casulana's "Vagh'amorosi augelli," which opened the program, was given a heartrending reading tinged by gentle melancholy, as was Strozzi's "Che si può fare?"—a ravishing piece that should be more widely known—at the concert's conclusion.



CAIC co-founder and artistic director Nicholas Phan

Although Amanda Majeski's résumé includes Handel's *Alcina* and *Cleopatra*, she has primarily made her name through more standard lyric repertory. Reportedly working at Baroque pitch for the first time in this program, Majeski skillfully pulled her sound back to deliver a wealth of subtle nuance and immediacy. In Strozzi's "Hor che Apollo," Majeski delivered liquid trills and coursed through the requisite melismas as to the manner born, and her response to text was consistently pointed and intelligent. A sense of pleading passion on the lyric "Sii men cruda a pur men bella" was only one of many telling moments.

Majeski was joined by bass Anthony Reed in a pair of duets by Caccini, "O vive rose" and "Io mi distruggo." Reed proved himself a real find with his masculine, russet-velvet timbre, and easy fluidity in the display passages. Like his two colleagues, Reed sang expressively off the text, with some particularly effective word painting in the shifting emotions of Strozzi's "Un amante doglioso."

The concert boasted the participation of some of today's best early music players, including Brandon J. Acker on lutes, Craig Trompeter on viola da gamba, and Mark Shuldiner on harpsichord. Violins were manned by Ann Duggan, and the ever-impressive Martin Davids.

The glassed-in expanses of Chicago's Poetry Foundation provided a comely setting for the event, which was attractively captured by videographer Mike Grittani. Singers performed well distanced from one another and from the masked instrumentalists. Those who doubt the power of music as a panacea in challenging times would have been convinced here; *Women of the Baroque* easily demonstrated why CAIC has emerged as one of the classiest vocal performance options in the city. —Mark Thomas Ketterson

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