

Music review – *The Boston Globe*, 7 March 2016

A new chamber orchestra, with many familiar faces



Michael J. Lutch

The Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms Society during a performance at Faneuil Hall on Sunday. The orchestra featured Thomas Rolfs on trumpet, Toby Oft on trombone, and conductor Steven Lipsitt (center, back).

By [Jeremy Eichler](#) Globe Staff March 07, 2016

It's tough out there for small chamber orchestras seeking an audience and a support stream in the shadow of the mammoth Boston Symphony. Less than two years after the Discovery Ensemble abruptly [announced](#) it would be ceasing operations, the Boston Classical Orchestra last month [did the same](#), stating it would be canceling the remainder of its season and filing for bankruptcy.

But BCO's music director Steven Lipsitt, who has said he was not involved with the decision to declare bankruptcy, is clearly not ready to throw in the towel. With the backing of the core of freelance players who have for years comprised the BCO ensemble, and the support of some of the orchestra's longtime friends, he has founded a new venture called the Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms Society, or BB&B. The group gave its first performance on Sunday afternoon.

From the outside, the concert in Faneuil Hall might well have been a Boston Classical Orchestra event, with the same venue, the same players on stage, and many familiar faces in the audience. In fact, the program itself had been previously announced as part of the BCO season.

Highlights of the afternoon included the rare opportunities to hear Salieri's "Sinfonia Veneziana" in a buoyant performance, and Leopold Mozart's Serenata for Trumpet, Trombone and Orchestra, with the BSO's Thomas Rolfs (trumpet) and Toby Oft (trombone) as exemplary soloists. After intermission came another rarity on a Venetian theme: Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari's "Suite Veneziana," with Lipsitt drawing out appealingly dark, dusky string colorings for music depicting the city's lagoons at night. A vigorous account of Haydn's Symphony No. 59 closed the program.

Just like in the old days, Lipsitt frequently addressed the crowd with warmth, humor, and a casual familiarity, speaking of the day's program as if picking up where they last left off. The atmosphere, in short, had the charms of a living room salon concert, in a very large living room.

Still, classical fans may be wondering whether BB&B can survive in a local arts landscape where its predecessor did not? Indeed, the new ensemble would be wise to honor aspects of the BCO legacy without trying to replicate its formula in a literal way. BB&B should not restrict itself to a repertory as circumscribed as the BCO's often was. Nor should this new group tie itself exclusively to Faneuil Hall, a space of mixed acoustical blessings.

But I believe this newest venture should be able to thrive, especially if these players can build on their deep roots in the community and on the strengths of the BCO's example, while also, no less crucially, infusing it with some fresh artistic and organizational thinking. The crowd of supporters at Sunday's BB&B debut was a vocal one that clearly appreciated the resilience of Lipsitt and his players. The group's next performance is April 17 at Faneuil Hall.

BACH, BEETHOVEN, & BRAHMS SOCIETY

At Faneuil Hall, Sunday afternoon

Jeremy Eichler can be reached at jeichler@globe.com. Follow him on Twitter [@Jeremy_Eichler](https://twitter.com/Jeremy_Eichler).