

## BW's 86th Bach Festival to feature Chatham Baroque & Kenari Saxophones

by Daniel Hathaway



Though the composer wasn't around to blow out the candles on his 333rd birthday cake in March, Johann Sebastian Bach's music lives on in both traditional and surprising ways. The Baldwin Wallace Bach Festival, whose 86th edition will be celebrated in Berea on April 20 and 21, will touch both the historic and the

innovative poles of all things Bach, hosting a period instrument ensemble as well as a saxophone quartet.

"Chatham Baroque sits at the center," Festival director Dirk Garner said in a telephone conversation. "They'll be doing their own concert of music by Bach and earlier composers on Friday night, and they're sharing their expertise by helping prepare the orchestra for Saturday evening's performance of the *St. John Passion*."

This year, the Bach Festival has hired a professional orchestra for the major Bach work. "Chatham's Andrew Fouts will be the concertmaster, Scott Pauley is playing lute, and Patricia Halvorsen viola da gamba. They're great musicians and really cool people," Garner said.

In 2018, the *Passion* will be sung by Garner's Motet Choir — the top chorus on campus — who will be joined by a roster of distinguished soloists. "Nick Phan, who will sing the Evangelist, is just fantastic, as are all the soloists. I couldn't be more excited. Tyler Duncan is singing Jesus, and soprano Molly Quinn is something special. And Tyler will be singing Bach's Cantata 82 on Friday night with oboist Danna Sundet, a staple of the Festival." That program, which Garner describes as "Bach-y," will also feature organist Nicole Keller, and visit music by Anton Webern

and Felix Mendelssohn performed by the BW Symphony Orchestra under Tiffany Chang.



Garner enjoys the process of finding and inviting soloists. “I discover them through referral and by contacts with my colleagues. I’ll also ask the current soloists to share names, and then I listen and listen and listen. With YouTube it’s so much easier than it was 20 years ago. It’s one of my favorite parts of the job.”

Although the Bach Festival is returning somewhat to its roots after last season’s innovations, Garner is delighted by Saturday afternoon’s program, which will feature the Kenari Saxophone Quartet. “The Kenari played Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* in a transcription by David Maslanka earlier this month, and it was as if you’d never heard a saxophone before.”



To learn more, we spoke with baritone saxophonist Steven Banks, who recently joined the BW faculty, and who will perform on Saturday with his Kenari colleagues Bob Eason, Kyle Baldwin, and Corey Dundee.

“That was a really fun concert,” Banks said of the April 6 performance. “The core was an arrangement of the *Goldberg Variations* with three improvisation sets along the way based on Bach’s chord progression. One was in the Baroque style, one in jazz style, and one used extended techniques like singing into the instruments — taking Baroque improvisation into modern times.”

For their Saturday afternoon program, the Kenari will collaborate with faculty percussionist Josh Ryan and the BW Treble Choir in other works by the late David Maslanka, one of Bach's greatest fans. "They're original works, but each piece takes off from a Bach chorale that will either be sung by the treble choir, or played by one of our student organists," Banks said. There's also a piece for solo saxophone and marimba in which each of the quartet members will take a turn.



"The saxophone has evolved a lot in the last 25 or 30 years, and the level of playing has gained more of a stronghold for the instrument in academic and classical music," Banks said. "When you look at major chamber music competitions, saxophone and reed quartets are winning top prizes pretty regularly. We feel the necessity and privilege of playing the music of Bach — not pushing the boundaries so much as joining the tradition of classical music, and becoming contributing members."

Although the Kenari are spread across the country — members live in Indiana, California, Michigan, and Ohio — the Quartet manages to play 30 to 50 concerts a year. "When we do get together for a week or a week and a half, we keep the schedule jam-packed," Banks said.

The Quartet is delighted to perform Maslanka's music. "He was a great friend to the saxophone and to the wind band community in general," Banks said. "He wrote ten symphonies for winds and four saxophone quartets, plus solo music. His music provides an avenue for us to play very substantial works that rival the great repertoire of traditional chamber ensembles."

The Kenari also wanted to pay tribute to Maslanka in this concert because the composer passed away last summer. "It's the perfect opportunity to expose audiences to his music and pay our respects by playing it along with the music he loved so much. And his son will present a video about David's connection to Bach during the concert."

Visit the BW Bach Festival [website](#) for details about the 86th Festival and to purchase tickets.

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