

Preview

Apollo's Fire: Intimate Bach, Part II — a conversation with flutist Kathie Stewart

by Daniel Hathaway



When Apollo's Fire resumes its “Intimate Bach” series with Part II — four concerts in Akron, Cleveland Heights and Rocky River from March 14-17 — one of the featured artists will be baroque flutist Kathie Stewart, who will solo in J.S. Bach's *Flute Sonata in e minor* and join violinist Olivier Brault, cellist René Schiffer and harpsichordist Jeannette Sorrell in two of Georg Philipp Telemann's *Paris Quartets*.

We reached Kathie Stewart in Houston where she was changing planes on the way back to Cleveland from Apollo's Fire's tour of “Come to the River”, with performances in Pennsylvania, Florida and California. “I've been playing on 19th century copies of Irish-style flutes and now I'm putting those away to play Bach and Telemann.”

Since the flute has such ancient origins and exists in some form in all cultures, professional flutists usually own a collection of instruments from which they choose according to the musical task at hand. “I have a closet full of flutes,” Stewart says, “maybe fifteen or so, but they're all completely different and range from modern to really early instruments.”

For the “Intimate Bach” concerts, Stewart will chose a baroque instrument, but even then, one flute may not fit all the music. “I'll probably play the whole concert on my copy of a German baroque flute by Oberlander, which is my preferred flute, however, we're also playing the two Telemann quartets, one of which has a high F that doesn't exist on the instrument.” Stewart will probably turn to a copy of an Italian baroque instrument “which has a reliable high F.”

Out of the several flute sonatas that bear Johann Sebastian Bach's name, Stewart says that only five are now regarded as authentic: the sonatas in E major, e minor, b minor and A Major and the solo Partita. “The e minor sonata was dedicated in the autograph score to Michael Gabriel Fredersdorff, a valet of Frederick the Great. You get the feeling that everybody played the flute in Frederick's court. He must have been pretty good, because Bach's flute sonatas are outrageous.”

How does the baroque flute fare in a situation where the number of players involved creates an intimate situation but the spaces are relatively large? “The pieces are so well written — the e minor sonata presents the flute in its most brilliant range — that there should be no problem hearing the flute if the space has good reverberation. And churches which are about the size of the rooms in which the sonatas would have been played are good places for us to play.”

Stewart is looking forward especially to Telemann's *Paris Quartets*. “They're amazing pieces and Telemann was the only one who wrote for this combination of flute, violin, cello and harpsichord. The first set of six were so popular that he wrote six more. In his autobiography he tells of hearing them played by the best musicians of his time. That really made his name in Europe.”

When Kathie Stewart isn't choosing flutes to play with Apollo's Fire, she teaches baroque flute, coaches baroque ensembles and serves as the harpsichord technician at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music. “I have a whole bunch of new, fantastic students, mostly modern players, who take to the baroque flute easily and become incredibly good fast.”

Her job as a harpsichord technician involves caring for the Conservatory's large collection of instruments — fourteen or fifteen by her count “that need to be tuned and repaired all the time.” Happily, she has some help from apprentices who are taking her class in harpsichord tuning and maintenance. “There were two important baroque concerts at Oberlin while I was in California — I was able to send in my best student to take care of that.”

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