

## Preview

### **Apollo's Fire celebrates its twenty-second season with seven home programs and national and European tours**

by Daniel Hathaway



After I congratulated her on launching her ensemble's twenty-second season, Apollo's Fire founder and artistic director Jeannette Sorrell said, "We're into adulthood now, and we're in a really fantastic place regarding our artistic reputation." Cleveland patrons don't need to be reminded of the high quality of playing their resident baroque orchestra turns in on a regular basis, but a wider audience is now sitting up and paying attention.

One indication of Apollo's Fire's "grown-up" status: the ensemble has recently been picked up by Columbia Artists Management Inc. (CAMI), "a big stamp of approval", Sorrell said. "We're the first period instrument orchestra to appear on their roster, and after twenty-one years of honing our craft and trying to perfect our art, it's great to be getting global attention."

We reached Jeannette Sorrell via Skype last weekend to chat about the multiple performances of seven programs that local audiences will enjoy in area church venues this season. It all begins with "Virtuoso Orchestra", which opens on Thursday, October 10 at First Methodist in Akron and will be repeated on October 11 and 12 at Fairmount Presbyterian in Cleveland Heights and on October 13 at Rocky River Presbyterian.

Sorrell promises that the program will live up to its name with dazzling performances including Vivaldi's concerto for four violins, Bach's fourth Brandenburg Concerto and a novelty for local audiences, a concerto by J.D. Heinichen. "Watching Olivier Brault, Johanna Novom, Julie Andrijeski and Andrew Fouts in the Vivaldi will be like seeing a fencing match. And the Heinichen has been on my wish list for a few years. He wrote for the famous virtuoso orchestra of the Dresden Palace with a colorful use of winds. It's fascinating to hear his concertos in contrast to Bach's Brandenburgs — they're fun and light while Bach's are more spiritual." Other featured soloists include recorder player Francis Colpron, oboist Debra Nagy and flutist Kathie Stewart.

Then comes something completely different. "Tangos and Fandangos with Boccherini & Friends" will run from November 15 through 19 at venues in Cleveland Heights, Chagrin

Falls, Rocky River and Akron. “This is the closest a period instrument ensemble can come to giving a pops concert,” Sorrell said. “We’re turning Boccherini’s *Fandango* into a mediterranean romp with duelling guitarists and cellos, and René Schiffer has written a *Tango Concerto* for two viola da gambas.”

Apollo’s Fire will bring back two elaborate productions for the holidays: “Sacrum Mysterium: a Celtic Christmas” from December 3 to 8, and “Christmas Vespers: Music of Michael Praetorius” from December 13-16. “We tweaked ‘Sacrum Mysterium’ last year and I was very happy with it,” Sorrell said. It wasn’t planned for Cleveland this year, but there was a lot of demand for it. We last did the Praetorius in 2009 so we will be holding auditions for a new group of children and teenagers. Praetorius intended his music to be performed by an intergenerational ensemble and it’s a wonderful way of introducing young people to period instruments.”

Sorrell is thrilled with a new venue she’s lined up for some of the intimate midwinter “Fireside Concerts,” which will run from January 22-26. “We’ll actually have a fireplace at Rockefeller’s Restaurant at Mayfield and Lee. It’s a former bank and the restaurant is in the lobby.” Sorrell has arranged what she calls “a musical blind date” between soprano Meredith Hall and lutenist Ronn McFarlane, who have never worked together before. The program is entitled “Drive the Cold Winter Away,” and Sorrell promises “heartwarming Elizabethan ballads” both at the Rockefeller and venues in Akron, Cleveland Heights and Rocky River.

Sorrell describes the next set of concerts as “the most experimental program of the year.” “Sephardic Journey: Wanderings of the Spanish Jews” will blend sacred Hebrew chant with Sephardic love songs and dances, and selections from the *Song of Songs* by Mantovani composer Salamone Rossi. The programs will run from February 20-25, including two concerts at The Temple – Tifereth Israel, and are co-directed by Sorrell and soprano Nell Snaidas, who has done much research into Sephardic music.

The season will end with four concerts from April 24-27. “The Power of Love” will showcase the spectacular soprano Amanda Forsyth, who turned heads at the Boston Early Music Festival last summer with her performances in Handel’s first opera, *Almira*. “She’ll be featured in songs of love, pathos and rejection, mostly by Handel and Vivaldi,” Sorrell said, “and then we’ll be making a CD and leaving for concerts in Europe.”

An earlier tour will take place just after Apollo’s Fire plays its first set of concerts this fall: a major North American tour of Bach’s Brandenburg Concertos. That makes a busy Jeannette Sorrell even busier. “I’m practicing Brandenburg 5 right now,” she said, alluding to that work’s fearsome harpsichord cadenza. “I played it a dozen times last year, and it’s really much easier now!”

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