

Preview: ChamberFest Cleveland: Conversations with David Bowlin, Julie Albers, and Alex Klein

By Daniel Hautzinger and Mike Telin

As part of our continuing coverage of [ChamberFest Cleveland](#), we spoke to three participating performers about some of the music they will be performing during the ten-concert festival.

David Bowlin



In the opening concert of ChamberFest Cleveland, violinist David Bowlin will perform *And Legions Will Rise* by 2012 Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Kevin Puts, a “very tricky, rhythmically fantastically difficult” piece that he has never played, written for the unconventional combination of violin, clarinet and marimba. Despite those challenges, there’s another piece that he thinks will be even more difficult: Schubert’s last string quartet.

“I’m sure we’re going to be spending the major part of our rehearsal schedule putting this thing together,” he said of the Schubert in a phone interview. But that doesn’t worry Bowlin, who is an Assistant Professor of Violin at Oberlin and a member of the International Contemporary Ensemble. “This is a phenomenal group of musicians, so when everyone comes together and already knows their parts, it actually flies together. There’s a lot to sink your teeth into, and it’s not something I get to do all the time. The string quartet is such a hefty medium and so difficult to do really well, so I’m looking forward to that challenge.”

Besides the Puts and Schubert, Bowlin will also be performing Kodály’s *Serenade for two violins and viola*. All three pieces are programmed within a four-day period, making efficient pacing of rehearsals paramount. “It’s as if you’re a chef and you’re preparing many courses at the same time. The first course needs to be ready at this point, the next at this point. A lot of that is done in advance, but at the same time, once you start going, you never quite know how it’s going to play out.” ChamberFest audiences will get to see all that rehearsal pay off firsthand.

Julie Albers



How do you most effectively present unfamiliar repertoire to audiences? “I think Frank and Diana Cohen do this beautifully by making sure that all of the music on each program is somehow relevant to the other pieces in addition to being really ideal for whichever venue the repertoire is being performed in,” wrote cellist Julie Albers, who will be performing in several ChamberFest Cleveland concerts.

Such thoughtful planning, “the interesting repertoire and the fantastic use of all of the different venues in the Cleveland area,” is what makes ChamberFest unique, in Albers’s opinion. Those venues range from traditional concert halls like the Cleveland Institute of Music’s Mixon Hall to churches to more unusual spots like Dunham Tavern, the Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Wine Spot. “The biggest challenge of performing in multiple venues is getting used to acoustics very quickly in a new space,” Albers wrote. “That can be fun though, when you find a space that works really beautifully!”

Over the eleven days of the festival, Albers will perform works including Dvorak’s E-flat piano quartet and Tchaikovsky’s “Souvenir de Florence,” standards “which I never get sick of performing.” But she looks forward to playing David Bruce’s *Gumboots* or Iannis Xenakis’s *Kottos* for the first time. She will also discuss the Xenakis with ChamberFest Speaker Patrick Castillo in a “prelude” to the performance.

Like David Bowlin, and for similar reasons, she most looks forward to playing Schubert’s last string quartet. “It’s not very often that one gets the opportunity to play string quartets unless you are a part of a formed group.” Beyond the music, returning to ChamberFest is an experience she eagerly awaits because of “the beautiful community amongst all the artists.”

Alex Klein

Making his ChamberFest debut this week is oboist Alex Klein. “I’m really looking forward to the festival,” Klein told us by telephone from the Sunflower Music Festival in Topeka, Kansas. “I have the greatest respect for Frank Cohen and his career, and I can hardly wait to get to ChamberFest.”



Klein's ChamberFest performances will reunite him with a work he refers to as "an old friend," Mozart's *Oboe Quartet*. "It's probably the piece of chamber music I have played the most. But I do believe it was written a hundred years before its time. It was written for the oboe demon Friedrich Ramm, and calls for virtuosity which was unfathomable for most oboists at that time."

Klein admits to being a little jealous of string players, who have so much great repertoire to choose from. "There is a lot of wonderful wind repertoire but there are very few great pieces like the Schubert Quintet. But Martinu's *Four Madrigals for Oboe, Clarinet and Bassoon* is one of the rare profound works for winds. It's one of the few pieces where you can feel like a string player."

One event that Alex Klein especially looks forward to is the free Family Concert. "I confess that when I was with the Chicago Symphony the thing I liked to do most were the family concerts. To walk on stage and hear the buzz of children talking is very stimulating." Klein does admit the program will not be the typical *Peter and the Wolf* concert repertoire. "There will be a work by Berio and some of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*."

While we had him on the phone, we asked Alex Klein to tell us more about his work in public schools in Brazil.

Working with children and families is not merely a hobby for Klein, it is his passion. After leaving his position as principal oboe of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 2004, Klein returned to his native Brazil where he created a music festival that also touched on the areas of social action. "We played over two hundred concerts in two weeks with nearly eight hundred students and one hundred faculty members. We gave concerts in the penitentiaries, the hospitals and retirement homes." So when the invitation came for him to help create an El Sistema-inspired program in the state of Paraiba in the north of Brazil, he accepted right away. Klein points out that the program follows the ideas of El Sistema, but with its own twist. "With PRIMA, we only work in the public schools and we began in the worst possible neighborhoods where there were very high crime rates and everything from murder to drugs and some of the worst possible social problems."

Klein explains that Brazil has 27 states and Paraiba is the 24th poorest in the country. "There are states in the Amazon with a lower GDP but Paraiba has been the victim of severe draught in addition to bad management," but he quickly adds that the management that is in place at the moment is fantastic. "Not only did they start PRIMA but also other

infrastructure investments like building roads. We cover an entire state that's smaller than Ohio, but it's a pleasure to be part of the renovation through the use of music." Klein says that he realizes that this type of work is not for everyone. "Not every musician has the patience to deal with all that you have to face."

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