

Apollo's Fire: Madeline Apple Healey to play Lieschen in Bach's "Coffee Cantata"

by Daniel Hathaway



Johann Sebastian Bach's charming cantata about a parent in the throes of despair over his daughter's addiction to coffee forms the centerpiece of Apollo's Fire's next set of concerts, "Family Frolic", which will begin its run on Thursday, January 22 with a performance at the Cleveland Institute of Music's Mixon Hall.

Set in the context of a day in the Bach family quarters in Leipzig, the comedic cantata had — and will have — some connections to real life. One of Bach's daughters answered to the nickname of Lieschen, and Madeline Apple Healey, the soprano who will play that role this

weekend actually works as a barista at Phoenix Coffee in Ohio City. And she does love the beverage she dispenses, she said in a telephone conversation. "I'm a coffee purist. Usually I just make a pourover of single origin coffee — Ethiopians are my favorite, though occasionally I'll have a cappuccino."

Bach penned his *Kaffee-Kantate* to be performed by the Leipzig Collegium Musicum at a Leipzig coffee emporium, possibly Zimmerman's, where the composer's student ensemble was a regular fixture. After being called to order by a narrator, Herr Schlendrian storms in, roaring like a bear over his daughter's fascination with the caffeinated brew, which is all the rage among the younger set in Leipzig. Lieschen responds with an elaborate ode to coffee, and the conversation, or shall we say family argument, continues from that point. Artistic Director Jeannette Sorrell, who has provided a new English translation, will direct the mini-drama with tenor Corey Shotwell as narrator and bass-baritone Jeffrey Strauss as Schlendrian.

“Jeannette says she has some very funny bits for me to do, including a bit of dancing,” Healey said. “The piece will be semi-staged and the orchestra will have some banter to contribute at the beginning, so it will be involved in the work besides just providing accompaniment.”

What does Healey think of her character? Is she an air-head? Manipulative? “She definitely knows how to get what she wants. It’s all very good-natured. Lieschen would like a husband, but she would probably like to drink coffee even more. So she manipulates her father into thinking she’ll give up coffee while spreading the word that anyone who wants to marry her will have to let her continue to drink it.”



Madeline Healey has been involved with Apollo’s Fire from an early age. “I must have been seven or eight when I was playing with my mother and brother in our front yard in Hunting Valley across the street from the Baroque Music Barn. I heard someone rehearsing, so we went across and met Jeannette and came to the concert the next evening. I remember hearing the Coffee Cantata at the barn when Sandy Simon used to perform it there. It’s pretty remarkable that after finishing my master’s and moving back to Cleveland, I’ll be singing it myself with Apollo’s Fire.”

Healey began her direct with the ensemble when it first performed the Praetorius Christmas Vespers and she was chosen to be the child soprano. “Since then, I’ve sung small solos in the Vivaldi *Gloria* and the Celtic Christmas program. I’ve pretty much been involved with every chorus project since 2006.” She also had a major role in last spring’s Young Artist Showcase. “Jeannette has been very much of a mentor,” she said.

Healey also works part-time as Apollo's Fire's music librarian, chorus manager and assistant to the artistic director. "As music librarian, I do all the preparation of parts and scores for chorus and orchestra projects. Last fall I managed the Monteverdi *Vespers* tour and sang in the chorus as well". As Sorrell's assistant, she handles correspondence, organizes auditions, makes contact with artists and does pre-screening for chorus and soloist auditions.

"It's great to be learning both sides of the business," she said. In addition to her developing career as a soloist (she's appeared recently at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC and will sing forthcoming concerts in Philadelphia with Tudor Music and The Thirteen), Healey has also launched her own ensemble with a friend from graduate school. "Ampersand is a vocal ensemble of flexible proportions that performs rarely-performed music. We will produce David Lang's *Little Match Girl Passion* next spring at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in New York."

Healey is a good example of the entrepreneurial spirit that inspires today's young musicians to create situations for themselves. "I think that the industry is in a period of rapid change. The way things have been done is not sustainable. There are more singers now, and fewer jobs. Finding music I'm most passionate about and discovering ways to present it is something I'm trying to do this year."

Her experiences with Phoenix Coffee have also been useful. "I love working there. It's a really wonderful foil to the work that I do in music. I get to meet a lot of people and get to know their day-to-day habits. It's a case study in humanity. You meet 150 people every day who you really don't know anything about except that they like to drink cappuccino. And it's fun to tell my colleagues that I'm going to be singing about coffee in the early 1700s!"

In addition to the Coffee Cantata, Apollo's Fire is programming a musical family album of works by Bach's sons, Johann Christian and Wilhelm Friedemann, including another piece by Papa Bach himself. And coffee will be offered after the show.

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