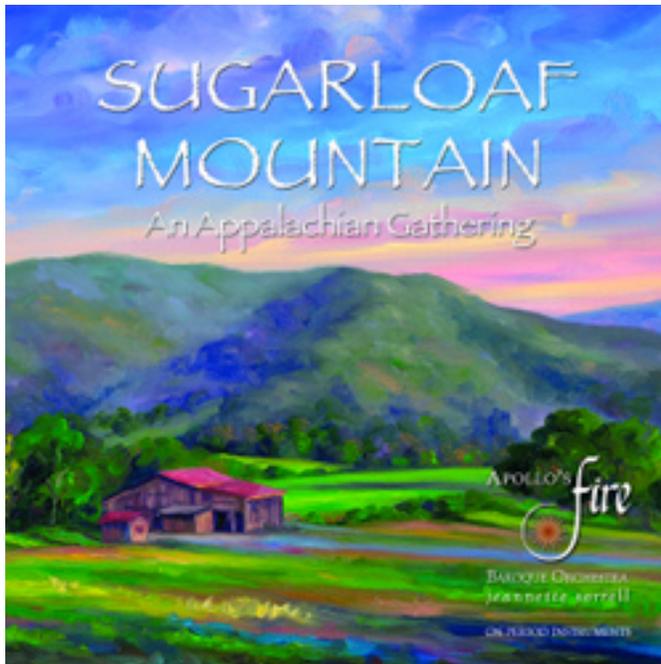


**CD Review: Apollo's Fire —
*Sugarloaf Mountain, an Appalachian gathering***

by Daniel Hathaway



When summer arrives, Apollo's Fire lets its hair down and goes off to visit Baroque music's country cousin — the music of Appalachian America. The ensemble's previous show, "Come to the River," now has a prequel: "Sugarloaf Mountain," an equally irresistible collection of tunes from the old and new worlds chronicling the passage of immigrants from the British Isles to their new homes in the American south — in the shadow of Sugarloaf Mountain.

The new CD preserves last summer's countryside concerts ("Glory on the Mountain") under a new title. Once again,

Jeannette Sorrell has gathered a splendid crew of singers and instrumentalists, including vocalists Amanda Powell and Ross Hauck, violinist (a.k.a. fiddler) Susanna Perry Gilmore, wooden-flute player Kathie Stewart, lutenist, guitarist, long-neck dulcimer player and vocalist Brian Kay, cellist René Schiffer, and hammered dulcimer player Tina Bergmann. While nobody would mistake this sophisticated, super-educated ensemble for a folk group, they wear their erudition lightly and take up their folksy material with infectious enthusiasm.

There's a narrative that runs through the playlist — a prologue about the mountains of the old country, then crossing to the new world, settling in the dark mountains, partying at corn shucking time, loving and losing, faith and religion, and a grand finale, "Sugarloaf Mountain," a retexting by Sorrell of the Scottish song, "The Mountains of Rhùm," that opens the disc.

Highlights are numerous, but Powell's version of the Child Ballad "The Cruel Sister" is winningly sinister (and will remind you of Tom Lehrer's "An Irish Ballad"). The

nonsense song “Nottamun Town” is fun and rhythmic with its toe and foot tapping. Powell’s “The fox went out on a chilly night” makes effective use of Appalachian diction and low humor (bone-sucking at the end), and Hauck’s unaccompanied singing of “Just before the battle, Mother” is haunting.

Stylistically, the harpsichord doesn’t quite fit the tone of the rest of the album in a medley beginning with “I wonder as I wander,” and things turn jazzy-gospely in “O Mary, don’t you weep,” but *Sugarloaf Mountain* is a keeper both for fans of Apollo’s Fire and of Celtic and folk music in general. The CD, produced by Jeannette Sorrell and Erica Brenner and recorded by Thomas Knab, has a lively, intimate sound. It’s almost as good as being there.

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