

Music by Nature in Cuyahoga Valley National Park: an interview with flutist Jane Berkner

by Jarrett Hoffman



This July, the Music by Nature series invites audiences to Cuyahoga Valley National Park for two concerts by very different groups. On Sunday, July 12, the Cuyahoga Valley Chamber Players will perform “Summer Winds,” a program of three works for woodwind quintet. Two weeks later, on Sunday, July 26, “A Romantic Summer’s Eve” will feature the Chamber Players in an assortment of works for flute, guitar, viola, and cello. Both concerts are at 6:30 pm at Happy Days Lodge. Audiences are invited to bring a picnic beginning at 5:00 pm and to join the

musicians for a post-concert dessert reception. Tickets can be purchased [here](#).

We spoke about Music by Nature with flutist [Jane Berkner](#), interim flute professor at the University of Akron. Berkner has also served on the faculties of Ashland and Muskingum Universities, and she is director of Arts and Enrichment for the Conservancy of Cuyahoga Valley National Park.

“It’s a real thrill to play in a woodwind quintet,” said Berkner. “It’s like a small orchestral wind section, and you have to be very precise in playing together. The wind quintet also has a well-established literature, and it’s some of the most fabulous music ever written. There are some really in-depth pieces.”

The quintet's program will include Eric Ewazen's *Roaring Fork Quintet for Wind Instruments*, Karl Pilss's *Serenade for wind quintet*, and Paul Valjean's *Dance Suite*. Berkner said a few words about each.

"Ewazen is a native Clevelander, and that piece is a really nice fit to play in the park. The Pilss is such a big, beautiful, romantic work. It's busy. Every member of the group has to work hard, and we're really looking forward to playing it. *Dance Suite* will be a nice, light closer. It explores different styles of dance. Valjean studied bassoon at the Eastman School of Music and later became a dancer in Copenhagen, and he wrote this piece for a show in the mid-'50s at Eastman called 'The Bassoonists' Ballet."

Berkner said that the program for "A Romantic Summer's Eve" is a different story. "Guitarist Stephen Aron and I put together the quartet because of a single work by Ferdinand Rebay for flute, guitar, viola, and cello. So the rest of that program will be for different combinations from those four instruments. We're playing a set of Bach inventions that were arranged for flute and cello, called *(re)inventions*, a Villa-Lobos piece for flute and cello, and a trio by Albert Roussel for flute, viola, and cello. We'll end with Ricardo Iznaola's *Danzas de la Abuela* (The Grandmother's Dances) for flute, cello, and guitar. You'll hear a lot of influences from Iznaola's native Cuba."



Happy Days Lodge, the venue for both concerts, was originally a public works project under the New Deal in the 1930s, said Berkner. "The lodge is actually named after a campaign song for F.D.R., *Happy Days Are Here Again*." I didn't know the song, and she sang a little bit over the phone. "The place has such great acoustics. It seats about 250 people, and it's air-conditioned, which is a bonus. A lot of patrons like to picnic on the back porch around 5:00. After the concerts, the musicians and audience all have dessert together, and the Conservancy cooks are really talented."

I mentioned the stuffed bison heads that adorn the walls of the lodge. "They've been there forever," said Berkner. "The conservancy rents out the room for private parties, including a lot of weddings, so you'll often see one bison wearing a bridal veil and the other one with a top hat."

Known for her expertise as a flute choir director, Berkner will follow up the performances at Cuyahoga Valley National Park by directing the adult flute choir camp at

the Interlochen Center for the Arts. “We have our own building there on campus, and it’s lovely to be there along with the kids. There’s a real energy.”

How did Berkner become involved with flute choirs? “It all started because I wanted my students to have chamber music experience. There are so many flutists out there and only so many opportunities to perform. Since then, the repertoire for flute choir has really evolved to become even more interesting and complicated. There are so many wonderful pieces being written now, and a lot of flutists who weren’t interested in flute choir before are getting into it now.”

After Interlochen this summer, Jane will be performing at the National Flute Association convention. “I’m playing some new works with a group of Swiss and British flutists, and I’m really excited. There will be some really famous flutists there, like Matthias Ziegler and Chris Potter. It just shows that the interest level for flute ensembles, and for playing alto, bass, and contrabass flute, is really growing.”

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