

Violinist Tessa Lark awarded Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship

by Mike Telin



On Tuesday, February 20, the [Borletti-Buitoni Trust](#) announced that violinist [Tessa Lark](#) is a 2018 recipient of the coveted Borletti-Buitoni Fellowship. Lark is the only American among the young musicians from around the world who join BBT's roster of Award and Fellowship winners.

Awards of £30,000 and Fellowships of £20,000 are

provided for the advancement of their musical careers across a broad range of projects and requirements. The BBT team offers generous support, networking opportunities, and counsel to help the artists realize their long-held ambitions. Since 2003, BBT has provided support to 103 individuals and ensembles from over 30 countries.

“I’m just really excited and that’s about all I can say,” the affable Tessa Lark said by telephone. “They sent me an email right around Thanksgiving telling me I had won — it was quite a surprise.” The Fellowship adds to the violinist’s expanding stack of impressive awards, which include an Avery Fisher Career Grant and medals at the Naumburg International Violin Competition and the International Violin Competition of Indianapolis.

Lark explained that receiving the prize was a two-step process. “I was notified earlier in the year that I had been nominated, and they asked me to send a biography and other information.” Lark was informed that she was on the shortlist this past fall.

“They told me I would know in a month or so if I had received the award or fellowship — it was a long period of anticipation.”

How will Lark make use of the award? She said that during the final round she proposed “a few projects” but would not be meeting with the BBT team until next month.

One possibility is to make a new recording that draws on her Twitter account, [#stradgrass](#). “I have a Stradivarius on loan from the Indianapolis Competition and I want to make a CD with that in celebration of its beauty. I’ve been having a lot of fun playing so many different musical styles on the instrument. I also want to include some original works as well as some that I remember Josef Gingold playing on his recordings.” The violinist said that another possibility would be commissioning projects, “and the other, which I will certainly use the funds for, is public relations.”

Being added to the BBT roster will also open doors for professional development. “The award is unique in that way,” Lark said. “Money is certainly helpful, but the people at BBT are so unbelievably generous and supportive. I think the most invaluable thing I will get from this award is the friendships I will be making in London and in Europe and the career advice they will provide to the Trusts Fellowship recipients.”

The award also puts Lark in the elite company of prior BBT recipients, including the Danish String Quartet, pianist Jonathan Biss, and violinist Augustin Hadelich. “It’s like a close-knit family of quite illustrious musicians. When I looked at their roster I was like — wow, they took me — I was blown away by every musician I saw.”

In addition to Lark the 2018 Fellowships were awarded to the Castalian String Quartet (UK), Trio Isimsiz (UK), violist Diyang Mei (China), and cellist Alessio Pianelli (Sicily). Award recipients are Dudok Kwartet Amsterdam (Netherlands) and clarinetist Annelien Van Wauwe (Belgium).

Tessa Lark is no stranger to Northeast Ohio audiences — this past November she performed on the Oberlin Artist Recital Series and in October played John Corigliano’s *Red Violin Concerto* with CityMusic Cleveland. In his review of that concert for this publication, Daniel Hathaway wrote:

[Lark] displayed both an abundance of energy and great technical discipline. She cleanly dispatched what Corigliano calls “knuckle-breaking double harmonics” in the second movement scherzo, delivered an arresting recitative followed by *flautando* effects in the

Andante, and proved to be rock-solid in the challenge Corigliano throws at the soloist in the finale...

At the time of our conversation Lark had just premiered *Love Letter*, a new concerto written for her by composer and double bassist Michael Thurber. “It was with the Carmel (Indiana) Symphony in the gorgeous Palladium Concert Hall. Playing concertos in beautiful halls is unique but I have never experienced anything like Saturday. The piece was written for me, and Michael was there. We both had a lot of family come and it was a pretty full house. It was nice to have the composer next door so you could just knock and ask how he had envisioned something.”

A native of Kentucky, Lark’s diverse stylistic capabilities extend to bluegrass, Appalachian music, and jazz — she recently performed with the Juilliard Jazz Ensemble at Lincoln Center. She said that *Love Letter* “successfully mixes” classical music with these styles. “It’s just a beautiful piece with a lot of stunning moments, but it’s also a lot of fun. I’ll be performing it again in the coming seasons.”

2018 will mark the release of Lark’s debut recording, which includes Telemann Fantasias, Schubert’s *Fantasie in C*, Ravel’s *Tzigane*, Fritz Kreisler’s *Viennese Rhapsodic Fantasietta*, and her own *Appalachian Fantasy*. “This is a result of another amazing organization, The Leonore Annenberg Fellowship Fund. Judith Sherman produced it and working with her was a wonderful experience.”

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