

BlueWater Chamber Orchestra celebrates season fifteen!!

By Mike Telin



On Saturday May 17 at 7:30 pm in Trinity Cathedral, BlueWater Chamber Orchestra and Cleveland Chamber Choir present “I Believe! Knitted Voices of Justice and Faith,” with Daniel Meyer, conductor, and Katherine Jolly, soprano. The program includes Margaret Bonds’ *Credo* and Mozart’s “Great” *Mass in c*, in partnership with the Cleveland School of the Arts. Pay-what-you-wish tickets are available at the door and [online](#).

The concert also marks the culmination of the fifteenth anniversary season for BlueWater Chamber Orchestra. We spoke to BlueWater founding member and administrator, Nancy Patterson and music director Daniel Meyer.

Read an earlier interview with [Ladonna Woods](#).

Nancy Patterson



Mike Telin: You played an important role in the creation of BlueWater: How did that come about?

Nancy Patterson: Carlton Woods' original idea was for the ensemble to be run by the musicians where every member would have some administrative or marketing duty.

At our first meeting everybody kind of nominated me to be the main administration person, so I sort of became Carlton's right hand lady. I mainly helped to get a board together and find support from other people in town who were involved in music-making ventures.

MT: It was not a good time in Cleveland for chamber orchestras. Were people skeptical that it could work?

NP: I think everyone had a lot of faith in Carleton. Two people knew him from the past and knew how good he was at getting support. So they thought, if anybody can make this happen, he can.

BlueWater Chamber Orchestra gave their debut performance in September of 2010 at the Breen Center for the Arts. Read the review [here](#).

MT: BlueWater has always been committed to Cleveland personnel, and you still have a number of the original players in the group.

NP: From the beginning Carlton was very determined to only use local musicians. I know some of our contemporaries will pull people from outside if they feel they need this or that person. But there're so many good people here.

And Carlton did not want to have auditions. He said it's better for his principal players to be sitting next to people that they want to make music with. And we have tried very hard to include musicians from all generations. All of this makes for congenial working conditions.

I think we relate to our audience because so many of them know many of us personally and they're interested to hear what we think about the music. That's one of the unique things about BlueWater. People talk to the musicians before and after the concert. And the musicians are only too happy to interact in that way.

MT: 15 years. Do you ever think about the fact that most arts organizations don't last that long?

NP: When we hit 10 years I was happy. I thought, this is great, we'll keep on going. At that point Carlton had passed away, and Daniel had taken over, and we thought, okay we can keep going with this. Everybody liked Daniel — the musicians and the audience, so we had a few more years in us. And all of a sudden it's 15 so now we're looking at 20.

I also need to mention that throughout the years the orchestra has been fortunate to have a working board who never hesitated to utilize their talents and skills for the good of the organization. This has been in the areas of marketing, accounting, insurance, administration, etc. And that is what has enabled the orchestra to accomplish a lot on a shoestring budget over the past 15 years.



Daniel Meyer

MT: Congratulations on the 15th anniversary. How did you and BlueWater get together?

Daniel Meyer: I came to BlueWater through the recommendation of violinist Ken Johnston. He said that he'd been playing with BlueWater for a number of years, and it was a wonderful group, like friends who get together and make music. And all of a sudden I perked up and I said that I would love to have the opportunity to

work with them.

When Carlton Woods knew that his health was starting to fail, he wanted to make sure that the investment he had made in the orchestra was going to live beyond him, and I thought that was pretty special. He called me and asked if I'd be willing to take a concert and I was happy to do so. And it really felt right from the first moment of the music-making. It was everything that Ken had promised me.

The opportunity to play Schubert and Haydn in an intimate setting with really fine musicians who enjoy playing with each other is something to be treasured — and that was a real discovery for me.

MT: You conducted your first concert as the artistic director in April of 2019.

DM: When Carlton passed, the board of directors reached out and asked if I would be willing and interested in taking over the artistic leadership of the orchestra. We had a very positive meeting and I said yes.

MT: Congratulations on what you, and a lot of other people connected with BlueWater have done. What does it mean to you to be a Cleveland and to be part of an organization that uses the tagline “from Cleveland for Cleveland.”

DM: It's very Cleveland-centric and part of that is celebrating the incredible talent that is in Cleveland. So even when we're seeking guest artists to perform with us, we're always looking for some kind of Cleveland connection. We're also looking to develop audiences throughout Northeast Ohio.

MT: When it came to finding a home, how did the relationship with the Church of the Covenant come about?

DM: I think the connection was through our current board president Paul Rodney Keen. He's a parishioner and a leader at the church and he helped facilitate the relationship. The church has a thriving music program and they have been very hospitable to us and to our musicians.

It's a nice venue for live music, and the opportunity for the audience to be so close to the orchestra is wonderful.

MT: When it comes to programming, do you have a guiding philosophy?

DM: I think that putting a program together is like taking somebody on a journey and having a conversation.

MT: Looking at the program that you've done since you came on board, there are a lot of different musical styles. This year alone you've programmed an interesting mix of traditional and newer works.

DM: Part of it is a practical one. We get together for a few days leading up to the concert, and it's important that I program some repertoire that I know the orchestra is going to play really well. And then I want to allow space, intellectually and artistically, for some discovery and for allowing it to sit right alongside those wonderful symphonies of Haydn and Beethoven and Mozart.

It's not agenda-driven, per se, but it's more discovery-driven. It's trying to create unique musical experiences, that then when you look at them on a brochure you think, oh, there's some dialogue happening here between old and new, and familiar and unfamiliar.



MT: What are your hopes for the future?

DM: I think we're looking to get in front of the public a little bit more than we already are. Part of that is a budgetary concern. The other part is just being very conscious about how we're going to grow. We don't want to get so overextended that we're hurting ourselves. We want our audience to feel that our concerts are something to look forward to, and we never want it to feel routine.

So we're going to try to keep this family feel in the orchestra, but also expand it over the next five to ten years and see where that takes us.

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