clevelandclassical•com reprints

Pittsburgh's Chatham Baroque to visit Rocky River Chamber Society Series

By Mike Telin

Chatham Baroque, Pittsburgh's long-standing period instrument ensemble, will be featured on the Rocky River Chamber Society series on Monday, March 2 at 7:30 pm at West Shore Unitarian Universalist Church. Violinist Andrew Fouts, violist da gamba Patricia Halverson, and theorboist and Baroque guitarist Scott Pauley will offer a program that Fouts said might be titled "Bach and Before."

I recently caught up with Andrew Fouts for a telephone conversation about the group and their program.

Mike Telin: Is this going to be the group's Cleveland debut?

Andrew Fouts: I'm in my eighteenth year with Chatham Baroque, and this will be the first time we've played in the Cleveland area.

MT: What is the program going to be?

AF: It'll be a program of trio sonatas and violin sonatas. We're focusing on German and Austrian repertoire beginning with Johann Sebastian Bach, which is the highest Baroque that we'll be performing. We could call the program Bach and before.

In a sense the program is a bit of a survey of those composers working in German-speaking lands who influenced Bach and who wrote, as German composers often did, in a combination of Italian and French styles, or who worked very squarely in the seventeenth century German stylus *fantasticus*.

We have works by composers such as Buxtehude whom Bach greatly admired. He wrote two opuses of trio sonatas for violin and viola da gamba, so they're perfectly suited for Chatham Baroque. Buxtehude was a major proponent of that virtuosic form of composition that was meant to inspire and show off and be free in its spirit — rhapsodic and improvisational.

There will also be a violin sonata by Johann Heinrich Schmelzer showing how German composers in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, as well as Bach, reconciled Italianate and French styles.

There's also a trio sonata by Philipp Heinrich Erlebach who wrote trio sonatas specifically for viola da gamba and violin that can be played by two violins. Erlebach was one of those who wrote in what came to be known as *Les Goûts-réunis* or the reconciliation of styles. He's a fascinating character to Chatham Baroque because he wrote music that's perfect for our instrumentation of violin and viola da gamba. He's one of those composers who are often referred to as Lullyists — composers who were enthralled with French dance traits that were defined by Jean-Baptiste Lully.

Erlebach's sonata begins with Italianate movements — adagio and allegro — and then moves into a French dance suite. After those two movements, we have an Allemande, Courante, Sarabande, and Gigue, which are very French. It's fun to play that music because you can integrate Italianate and French ornaments in a way that seems very reconciled.

And there will be a sonata by Heinrich Biber. As a violinist, Biber is one of my favorite composers to play. He was perhaps most famous for his Mystery Sonatas, which Alan Choo of Apollo's Fire recently recorded and plays so miraculously.

Biber's Sonata No. 3 was published in 1681. I think all violinists revere Biber because he really pushed the boundaries of the violin as a virtuoso instrument. We revel in that because it's an opportunity to show off in a way that's entirely idiomatic for the violin.

I don't want to say it's easy to play Biber, but when you're learning a Biber sonata, you're gifted a lot of violinistic secrets about how to play in a virtuosic and expressive style. They teach you how to be a better violinist.

We'll finish up with a sonata by Handel, who is perhaps the most cosmopolitan of the composers we're playing. Of course most of his career was in London although he's German-born. I like closing with this piece because it's just so expressive. It's just so evident in anything you play by Handel that he's an opera composer.

MT: Who all will be traveling to Cleveland?

AF: Myself, Patricia Halverson playing viola da gamba, and Scott Pauley, who will play both archlute and theorbo. We are really the core ensemble of Chatham Baroque, but we present concerts that are larger by inviting guest instrumentalists and vocalists throughout our season.

MT: The group has also taken on the role of a presenter.

We also present groups from elsewhere for programs that we don't participate in. That started when we took on the mission of an organization we absorbed about ten years ago. I think Renaissance and Baroque, which began here in 1969, is the second oldest early music presenting organization in the country. It's storied, having presented some of the great icons of early music right from the get-go.

We took them on to continue the tradition of inviting guest ensembles to Pittsburgh, but we became aware that they wouldn't be long for this world. So we did a bit of soul-searching and thought, you know, it just is not a good thing to have this legacy presenting organization fold. And the takeover is somewhat reciprocal in that it increases our presence in Pittsburgh as well.

With our instrumentation of violin, theorbo and viola da gamba, we're kind of centered in the 17th century. But another thing that inspired us to carry on the Renaissance and Baroque tradition is that it gives us that liberty to expand the story of early music and to present music from the medieval through classical periods. Every season we think about creating an arc to promote early music, not just from the 17th or 18th century or squarely Eurocentric.

MT: Along those lines, how much early music is yet to be discovered?

AF: That's to be seen. But I would imagine that the bulk of it is already known. So it's not so much has it been discovered, but have *you* discovered it? Have you presented it, and have you considered the historical context of this or that composer's life and their reason for being, and their reason for writing? That is what stimulates all of us who work in this field — the notion that there's so much more than Bach and Vivaldi. I'm constantly discovering new music but also new ways of telling stories.

MT: Tell me about your Peanut Butter and Jam Sessions. That sounds like fun.

AF: They have been going on nearly as long as Chatham Baroque. Next season is our thirty-fifth anniversary. It's integral to our heart and soul to reach out to young people.

The Jam Sessions are thirty- to forty-minute programs that are centered around some topic. It can be instructional. We might talk about ways that kids come to understand music a little better. Whether it's a program about happy and sad music, or slow and fast music, or just music about a particular theme, like love. That was our most recent one.

We work with a Kindermusik instructor who is our facilitator and helps to explain what it is we're doing, and helps to activate the kids through movement or through song, or through dance, through singing along.

What I love about Peanut Butter Jam Sessions is that they're very unstuffy. We encourage kids to be themselves. And Linda, our Kindermusik instructor, is remarkable. You have the overactive kids who would be disrupting, but she somehow manages to welcome that, to maximize it and find a way for it to be integrated into the movement or the song. I think it's just as important to be able to present to young people in a way where they don't feel like they're out of line.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com *February 17, 2026*

Click here for a printable copy of this article

Return to the Front Page.