

CELLIST
REBEKAH FRANKLIN
TURNS PASSION
INTO A PLAYLIST



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY KAYLA FILION/USA TODAY NETWORK; GETTY IMAGES

BACH PARTY

Amanda Sieradzki Council on Culture & Arts

Musician Rebekah Franklin encountered the baroque cello like a new dance partner. ■ The “gut” strings, made from animal intestines, provided a warm, mellow resonance that differed from her modern cello’s steel strings and projecting sound. Fifteen years of muscle memory helped guide her fingers as she rested the instrument’s substantial body against her legs. ■ Exploring the historic instrument’s range as part of the Tallahassee Bach Parley helped her to feel closer to one of her favorite composers, J.S. Bach. Even in the current absence of live concerts, Franklin is still finding ways to connect with musicians and early music aficionados with the virtual Bach Parley Book Party on Sunday afternoons. ■ “Music is able to create community,” says Franklin. “I’m making playlists of the pieces we’ll discuss so people can listen to what we’ll be talking about on Zoom. It’s a fun way for people to learn about the music the Bach Parley performs and still hear music even though it’s not live and in person.”

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Bach

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Each session focuses on a particular chapter in Christoph Wolff's "Bach's Musical Universe: The Composer and His Work," and creates discussion around the history behind Bach's musical accomplishments. Franklin co-facilitates each meeting with Bach Parley music director Valerie Prebys Arsenault and harpsichordist Dr. Charles Brewer.

She is looking forward to leading her chapter on the Bach Passions — a series of choral and instrumental works that were once composed for Friday church services, but now serve as long-form storytelling events. This confluence of scripture, song and characters comprises much of Franklin's research as a PhD candidate in musicology at Florida State University. The first time she heard one played live was as an undergraduate student at the Wheaton College Conservatory of Music.

"You get all these layers of drama, story and reflection, and it's all very beautiful because it's Bach's music and there are all kinds of symbolic text painting," Franklin said. "A lot of people connect thematically with the love and sacrifice in these works. Bach writes this music in such a human and connected way that, even if you don't ascribe to his original purpose, you can still get a lot out of it."

The Passions bring together Franklin's love for hearing cello played alongside a chorus of voices. She was often the on-call cellist at Wheaton for choirs and toured with many groups around the Chicago area. Her zeal for performance stems from her parents' influence.

Her father, a professional organist, taught her piano until high school, while her mother, a soprano singer and music teacher, provided encouragement to further her own education. Franklin joined Alabama's Mobile Symphony Youth Orchestra and greatly admired the technique of her cello instructor and mentor, Alexander Russakovsky.

Franklin's parents drove her four hours round trip every two weeks for lessons with Russakovsky at the University of Southern Mississippi. She recalls drilling etudes and scales under his keen eye and expectations for impeccably executed exercises.

"If I was lucky, sometimes he would play to demonstrate, and I would soak that up," remembers Franklin. "It sounded so easy for him because he had been practicing his technique for so long. I wanted to be able to have that beautiful tone and fantastic technique someday and be able to pull music out of the air like he did."

Franklin views her personal performance practices and musicology research as a symbiotic relationship. To-



Rebekah Franklin, shown here playing cello with the Baroque Ensemble, is still finding ways to connect with musicians and early music aficionados with the virtual Bach Parley Book Party on Sunday afternoons. PHOTOS BY MICHAEL BROYLES

If you go

What: Bach Parley Book Party

When: 3-4:15 p.m., Sundays May 24 and May 31

Cost: Free

Contact: Email BookClub@BachParley.org for a Zoom invitation. For more information please visit <http://bach-parley.org>.

gether, she is able to engage with composers' works and bring the words on the page to life through experiential exploration.

She strives to give a similar experience to her music history and appreciation students and will often bring her cello into lessons or tour FSU's early instrument collection. She also gives them fair warning when they arrive at the Baroque period.

"They're prepared for me nerding out when we get to the Bach unit," laughs Franklin. "I want them to experience people from the past and understand why they were important. We are still performing these pieces and whether they become performers, music educators, music therapists or arts administrators, not only do I want them to recognize them, but know the content behind them in case they have to write program notes or talk to a school board about why they are programming certain music."

Making the switch to online classes



Rebekah Franklin playing the cello with the Baroque Ensemble.

mid-semester turned her FSU music appreciation course into "online adventures." She allowed students to find popular music from musicals, television

shows and video games to dissect and discuss with one another. She says she's looking forward to incorporating many of these new classroom strategies in future classes.

She's hopeful the virtual book club will provide a similar thrill to the Bach Parley's audiences. Franklin says the book is merely a jumping off point and encourages Zoom attendees to join for the conversation whether or not they've read that week's chapters. For her, it's more important for the music and shared company to be an escape.

"I think there's something about music that speaks to everyone's heart," says Franklin. "Even if you can't physically hear music, you can feel the vibrations and the way they hit our bodies and change our emotions and state of mind. During this quarantine, music has been a good way to keep a level head when it's become too much. It can do a lot of good depending on the power you let it have."

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).

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