



BACH FOR BEGINNERS

The leaner Oregon Bach Festival kicks off June 29

What, you've never been to the Oregon Bach Festival?

That's like living in Eugene and never once watching a track meet at Hayward Field, never cheering at a Duck game, never enjoying the Whiteaker Block Party or never getting down and dirty at the Oregon Country Fair.

What will you tell your grandchildren? That you lived in the same town with a Grammy-winning musical festival and never heard a note? You owe it to yourself to take part in this cultural experience, which this year runs June 29 through July 15.

So here's a quick guide for the uninitiated, with three recommended concerts to try out.

OBF is a festival in transition, stripped down to basics. Instead of the big sprawling summer gathering of years past, with giant concerts in the Hult Center's Silva Concert Hall, this year's version offers a leaner calendar focusing on more-intimate shows in the smaller Beall Concert Hall at the University of Oregon.

The downsizing comes hand-in-hand with (relatively) new artistic director Matthew Halls, who took over after founding artistic director Helmuth Rilling retired in 2013. A German choral conductor, Rilling was known for big, romantic 19th-century style performances of Bach choral works. Think wall of sound.

A youngish Brit, Halls has opened the festival's doors to the much trendier "historically informed performance," which means Bach as it would have been played in Bach's day: smaller, lighter ensembles, smaller halls, smaller and quieter instruments. Think intimate.

Here's what to see:

Concert No. 1: You can hear the new OBF at its best in the sparkling clear acoustics at Beall Hall, which is where the festival opens Thursday, June 29, with a performance conducted by Halls of J.S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*. Can't make it June 29? The concert will be repeated June 30 at Beall.

"Beall Hall is the perfect space in which to hear Bach," Halls said in a phone interview earlier this month. "It has the drawing-room acoustics of an 18th-century space."

Soloists are Sophie Junker, soprano; Reginald Mobley, countertenor; Charles Daniel and Lawrence Wiliford, tenor; and Peter Harvey and Tyler Duncan, baritone. The Pacific Boychoir Academy will perform along with the OBF Festival Chorus and Orchestra.

Concert No. 2: Next up, take in at least one episode of the newly renamed (re)Discovery series. The wildly popular old Discovery series touched on the beating heart of the festival, which was Rilling's behind-the-scenes master class for choral conductors from around the world.

In those informal afternoon concerts, the *eminence grise* Rilling — in shirtsleeves — would explicate a Bach choral work, using the orchestra and chorus directed by students from the master class to illustrate his points. This was as good as watching Neil deGrasse Tyson talk about science.

Under Halls, the (re)Discovery series has been moved to evening slots, giving more access to people with day jobs. This year's series looks at Bach's *St. John Passion* in presentations July 5, 10 and 12, all at Beall Hall.

"It's following a slightly new design," Halls says. "Allowing the student conductors to share their own thoughts about the piece in an informal discussion with me."

For concert No. 3, I'll suggest a couple options, both in the Hult Center.

On Saturday, July 8, the full forces of the festival will return to the Hult's Silva Hall for Handel's *Hercules*, a seldom-performed dramatic choral work that lies somewhere between opera and oratorio.

Danish harpsichordist and conductor Lars Ulrik Mortensen, who was named Danish musician of the year in 2000, conducts, with Junker, soprano; Sarah Mesko, mezzo soprano; Reginald Mobley, countertenor; Nicholas Phan, tenor; and Peter Harvey, baritone.

"It's been far too long since a major work of Handel has been offered at the festival," Halls says. "To have *Hercules* on the schedule is a great delight."

As an alternative, try the festival's closing-night performance on Saturday, July 15, of Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*, also in the Hult's Silva. Halls conducts the orchestra and chorus, with Nicole Cabell, soprano; Mesko, mezzo soprano; Phan, tenor; and Morgan Smith, bass.

Missa Solemnis is big, lush and authentically Romantic in character. "It's not heard very often," Halls says. "It's a visionary work and a difficult work. It's Beethoven at his most confused and conflicted. A mass that portrays the paradox of the believer."

Halls will have more than Bach or Beethoven on his mind during this year's festival. At the time of this writing, he and his wife — Toronto soprano Erin Cooper Gay — were expecting the imminent birth of their first child.

One final note: Don't be late to the show! The festival has moved up the curtain time for all its evening performances this year from 7:30 pm to the unprecedented concert hour of 7 pm. I anticipate a fair number of stragglers in the lobby. ■

The Oregon Bach Festival runs June 29 to July 15 at the Hult Center and at the University of Oregon School of Music and Dance. Tickets and more information are at OregonBachFestival.com.

VISUAL ARTS

BY ESTER BARKAI

LAYERS: THE LIFE AND WORK OF ALLAN KLUBER

Old Work/New Work at Karin Clarke Gallery

What do you want to be when you grow up? It's a question asked of children, and they know to pick just one thing. Sometimes it works out that way. You decide on a profession or fall into a job, and then stay in it the rest of your life.

Other times you choose one answer, and after nearly 20 years, put it aside and choose another. That is how it happened with Allan Kluber, whose ceramics are on view at Karin Clarke Gallery through July 1.

Kluber moved to Oregon to study ceramics at the University of Oregon. After earning his degree he worked as a studio artist rather than as a professor.

His inability to find employment as an instructor at first seemed unfortunate. Looking back, Kluber realizes that it afforded him time to focus on making art. He produced colorful porcelain ceramics during the 1970s and 1980s, showing in town at the former Opus V gallery, and he received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Oregon Arts Commission.

At his opening earlier this month, the artist explained how he made his ceramic pieces by layering colored clays into blocks and then slicing them. The results are strands of varying widths, with colors running across plates and around bowls and vases.

Each artwork is functional, but the designs are abstract, with lines of color randomly and gracefully embedded in the formats.

All the pieces on view at the gallery were made in the 1980s, during the last two years of Kluber's time in the studio. When he stopped making them he went back to school, earned a degree in counseling and gave up his preoccupation with art for interacting with people and raising a family.

When this exhibit was scheduled, it was to show the artworks that Kluber produced in the days he worked in the studio. At the time he didn't tell Karin Clarke that he was working on something new, because he didn't exactly know how it would turn out.

So he worked in secret.

Last summer Kluber took a trip to southern Utah. There he was moved by rock structures, in particular by the vast spans of time it took for nature to create them, eroding and restructuring them differently. He saw those rock formations in terms of clay, and when he returned to Oregon he began creating his own versions. He replaced the forces of nature with his own hand by pouring water over blocks of layered clay to emulate the effect of erosion.

Kluber refers to this series of sculptures as "Geologic Forms." Displayed at the gallery, the forms are framed in cases and resemble miniature biospheres.

Old Work/New Work includes a collection of pieces made by Kluber in just the past few months as well as a collection produced about 40 years ago, from his first time in Oregon working in the studio. The geology metaphor, so striking in the sculpture, can be seen in the colorful layers of his earlier work as well.

I asked whether he had been thinking about geology back when he made those first pieces. No, he said, it wasn't until he looked back that he found the idea of stratigraphy in his old work.

Today Kluber works as a mediator — and as an artist once again. He thinks of the sculptures as being in their adolescent stage. Now in his early 70s, he is once more at the beginning.