

On Sunday afternoon, January 15th, 2017 in the recital hall at Potter's Violin Shop approximately 20 violinists and cellists from Maryland, DC and Virginia attended an informative and inspiring workshop on the Bach Solo Sonatas and Partitas, presented by Katie Lansdale. Ms. Lansdale serves on the faculty at Hartt School of Music and Boston College, is a member of the Lions Gate Trio, and is noted for her wide range of repertoire expertise. However, the Sonatas and Partitas are perhaps her biggest passion – she has performed them complete at least 12 times and also recorded them.

Over the course of 5 hours the group looked at these pieces from many angles: their rhythmic motifs, polyphony, structure, history, performance practice. Of great importance were the complete performances Katie treated the group to, beginning with the Prelude to the C major fugue and later the g minor fugue. Participants were invited to experience bow techniques by playing from well-chosen examples: there were practice techniques for rolling chords to bring out the melody, fast and light strokes for fast passages, and some interesting bowing suggestions for bringing out phrases and imparting strong and weak gestures characteristic to the dances. Several handouts clarified some common misconceptions and editorial errors.

There was also discussion on when to introduce these pieces to students, her opinion being quite adamant that they should not be held in so much awe as to prevent exploration, but that the simpler movements should be taught as soon as manageable and the techniques needed for the more demanding movements perhaps taught through other repertoire—Telemann's Canonic Fantasies and Geminiani's Fugue for example. Every Bach piece in the Suzuki violin books got a mention and demonstration of style, the points mostly to do with dance rhythms.

Finally there was discussion on preparing students for auditions where these pieces are normally required. Katie encouraged teachers to have students play simpler movements where they could best show their musical and creative abilities; to require memorization for better internalizing the piece; and to listen to recordings in several styles (Baroque period specialists such as Elizabeth Wallfisch and Rachel Podger playing period instruments; 20th century players such as Milstein and Szeryng; and contemporary players such as Christian Tetzlaff, who incorporate Baroque style as much as possible with modern instruments.) Absorbing these very different approaches should give students and teachers ideas for incorporating the variation and creativity so readily available in these master works.

For certain everyone went home with new insights, teaching approaches and a desire for further exploration of these pieces. We are most grateful to Katie Lansdale for her friendly, well-presented and organized presentation, and to ASTA MDDC for organizing and hosting the event!

Jean Provine