

Two Memorable Music Department Performance Classes

During the summer of 1960, it was announced by the Music Department at the University of California at Berkeley that two interesting music performance classes would take place a class on the performance of Bach given by harpsichordist Alice Ehlers and a second class on the performance of Baroque works given by Eva Heinitz. a cellist. who also specialized in the viola da gamba, a fretted instrument with five to seven strings, the same size as a cello. For those who do not know, a harpsichord is a keyboard instrument in which the strings are plucked rather than struck, as with a piano. This produces a sound which is more like a guitar or lute. Also, a harpsichord may have more than one manual or keyboard, each of which is connected to a different set of strings which can be set to produce a different type of sound. These courses sounded interesting, so I enrolled in both. I wanted to learn something about the instructors so I inquired and learned that Alice Ehlers studied harpsichord under the legendary Wanda Landowska in Berlin. She was considered a skilled interpreter of the works of Bach. Eva Heinitz was born in Berlin and taught at the University of Washington where she introduced students to the viola da gamba. Now I will get to some of the interesting details of these classes.

In the class on Bach, I was to play a Sonata for violin and keyboard with Ehlers playing the harpsichord part. It was then that I noticed that she was playing a large magnificent harpsichord by Pleyel, the famous maker of keyboard instruments,. It had a large and grand sound, so much so, that when she began playing I was taken back and could not come in with my part. I had to ask her to begin again after I collected myself. The second time was truly a memorable one for me, and I will never forget playing with Alice Ehlers on a magnificent Pleyel harpsichord.

During the Baroque music class conducted by Eva Heinitz, a most interesting thing happened. Hertz Hall had put on display a historical collection of instruments, including a beautiful bow of the Baroque era. It had a partially fluted shaft and a beautiful ivory frog in the shape of a small lute with gold strings. The adjustment nut was also ivory and beautifully carved. It was a stunning piece of workmanship thought by some to be the work of Antonio Stradivari. I just wanted to hold it, but of course doing something like that was not possible. It occurred to me that in this class taught by a distinguished musician, it would be most appropriate to use that bow. I made a request to the department chairman David Boyden that I use it during a class performance. Much to my surprise when it was time for the next class, Boyden appeared carrying a special case containing the bow. I don't recall what was performed, but I do remember magnificent playing characteristics of that bow. As you might expect with a baroque bow, with each stroke, it stayed firmly on the instrument strings. Boyden was very interested in this fact. When that short performance was over, he left with the bow. To this day, I have thought of that performance many times. I have tried to find the bow

documented somewhere on the internet, but have been unable to do so. It was a privilege to be able to play such a magnificent relic of the baroque period.

So that is my memory of these two classes and the magnificent musicians who made them possible.