

Tafelmusik

GET TO KNOW CHARLOTTE NEDIGER

This is part of a series of informal interviews with members of the Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra and Chamber Choir. This week we introduce you to harpsichordist Charlotte Nediger, a member of Tafelmusik since 1980.

Where did you grow up?

My parents come from Clinton in Huron County (so-called “Alice Munro country”), and my early childhood was spent down the road in Seaforth. We moved to London, Ontario when I was seven.



How old were you when you started to make music?

The photo (left) speaks to that. My mother played piano at home, and taught piano to neighbourhood children. I was drawn to the instrument from the outset. Whether at that point it was an innate desire to make music or simply a question of imitating my mother I don't know, but it stuck. Formal lessons, of course, started somewhat later!

What made you decide to choose the harpsichord?

My father built a harpsichord when I was fourteen, and I started to explore the instrument while still studying piano. I think the main factor in the decision to focus on harpsichord was my experience with the London Youth Symphony Orchestra. I played a piano concerto with them, both at home and on a tour to Great Britain, when I was sixteen. I loved the experience of working with an orchestra, but wasn't so keen on being set apart as a soloist, with my own dressing room, etc. I realized that playing in, rather than in front of, an orchestra was what I really wanted to do. Playing harpsichord would allow me to do that, so when I enrolled in university a year later it was as a harpsichordist. I gave up the piano, and soon discovered that the baroque repertoire is where my heart lies.

You are married to Choir Director Ivars Taurins. How did you meet?

We met at UWO. I was doing my Bachelor degree, and he arrived from Toronto to study conducting with Simon Streatfield. He had a new-found passion for baroque music and performance practice, and started up a baroque orchestra. He needed a harpsichordist, friendship blossomed into romance, and here we are 31 years later. It's sometimes challenging to live with someone with whom you share not only your life but also your work, but it's fantastically rewarding. He is not only my best friend and my beloved, but also an inspiration. He has remarkable ears – his responses to my playing have guided me in my music-making more than any teacher.

How did you first get involved with Tafelmusik?

Ivars played viola in the very first Tafelmusik Orchestra concert in May 1979 and I was in the audience cheering him on. We went to Holland a few months later to spend a year at the Royal Conservatory in The

Hague, and while we were there Kenny Solway and Susan Graves [Tafelmusik founders] sent letters to Ivars imploring him to join Tafelmusik when he returned to Canada. In one of those letters they added a carrot – that if he joined, they would also hire me as harpsichordist. So I got my dream job – of playing in a baroque orchestra – as a result of pure nepotism. I was just 21 when I joined the orchestra, and still at school (doing a Master’s degree at UWO). I consider myself incredibly lucky to have found my musical ‘family’ so early.

What was your favourite Tafelmusik concert?

I can’t possibly narrow it down to a favourite. I love the magic of live performance, and have had the luxury of playing alongside the fantastic musicians who have made up the Tafelmusik Orchestra and Choir over the years, as well as countless guests. I admit to a weakness for large works with choir and soloists – the final Amen of *Messiah* gets me every year, Bach’s Mass in B Minor and the Passions ...

Who is your favourite composer?

J.S. Bach, whose music challenges and fulfills the mind, heart and hands in a way that no other music does. I also can’t imagine life without Monteverdi, Purcell, Handel and Louis Couperin (a 17th-century ‘poet’ of the harpsichord).

What kind of music do you listen to besides baroque?

I have a playlist on my computer called “Charlotte’s favourites” that I play in random order. It has an eclectic mix of classical music (from Tallis to Poulenc, though admittedly with lots of baroque!) and music with a folk bent: Joni Mitchell, Gordon Lightfoot, Judy Collins, Stan Rogers, Leonard Cohen ...

What are your favourite touring memories?

A few concerts stand out – playing on a fantastic harpsichord in a baroque church in Prague, playing on a moonlit night in an ancient amphitheatre at the foot of the Acropolis in Athens – and touring in what was then East Germany in the mid-1980’s was a potent experience. Many of my touring memories are tied up with my children. With both Ivars and me on the road (Ivars played viola in the orchestra until 2002), we decided to keep family life as intact as possible by bringing our daughters on tour, with the incredibly generous support of my parents, who took turns coming along as babysitters. The fact that there is a five-year age gap between the girls is because of the touring. It is exhausting touring with a baby or toddler, and we couldn’t quite imagine having two young ones along at once. By the time Madeleine came along, Larissa was five and could stay home with her Nana for short periods, or could help with her little sister when we were all together on the road. The girls are young women now (aged 24 and 19), but both love travelling – whether that’s because of the touring or despite it I’m not sure!

What else do you do at Tafelmusik besides play the keyboard?

Over my 30 years at Tafelmusik, I seem to have accumulated many responsibilities. From the beginning I assumed the role of librarian, and I still enjoy the challenge of creating editions of ‘new’ works for the orchestra. Soon after I started writing programme notes. Somehow the latter morphed into typing and laying out the house programmes, something I still do, though now of course on computer (despite having absolute no training or skill as a designer!). As Tafelmusik grew, Jeanne needed help with administrative tasks, and I took on the role of her assistant: I help with research and programming, do the nitty-gritty of rehearsal scheduling, and work closely with the Operations and Production teams. Nine years ago I was asked to take on the role of coordinator of the Tafelmusik Baroque Summer Institute, the most challenging and rewarding of all the hats I wear at Tafelmusik – except for playing, of course!

What do you like to do in your free time?

In recent years I have taken to starting each day with a crossword puzzle (the *New York Times* Sunday to Friday, the *Globe and Mail* Saturday) – ostensibly to ward off the Alzheimer’s from which my father suffers, but also for pleasure. I am an avid listener to talk radio – CBC Radio 1 and BBC Radio Radio 4 are on in the house more often than not (I still miss Peter Gzowski, and keenly listen to Eleanor Wachtel interview most anyone). I love reading both prose (fiction) and poetry, and find my bookshelf is peopled by a disproportionately large number of Canadian writers. I am blessed to share a family cottage with my siblings on a northern lake. You’ll find me reading in the hammock under the trees, hiking, swimming, or working on a traditional quilt on the trestles I inherited from my grandmother’s farmhouse.