

Oboist Stephen Hammer

in conversation with Elizabeth Blumenstock

Our artistic director, Elizabeth Blumenstock, talked with some of the artists appearing in the 2019 Baroque Music Festival, “Bach: The Master and His Milieu.” We hope you enjoy these two-minute reads!



EB What art form besides music do you find most compelling, and why?

SH I have no particular talent in other disciplines but admire a lot of them. I appreciate the elegance of good writing and painting, and love wandering around museums and watching plays and films. I have a special fondness for great architecture of all periods, especially the ornate buildings that still exist in Lower Manhattan and the stylish Craftsman homes and whimsical mid-century stuff to be found all over Southern California. There’s something wonderful about the care builders took in the past to bring visual elegance and diversion to future generations that they would never meet in person.

EB Why do you love the music of Bach? Yes, I’m making an assumption here, but I bet it’s a safe one!

SH Bach is my desert-island composer. He offers it all — cerebral complexity, transcendent spirituality, rhetorical word-painting, mystifying structural puzzles, earthy exuberance and humor. He gives us musicians technical challenges and opportunities to express ourselves individually, to rejoice in our colleagues’ triumphs, to make something beautiful communally, and to share all that with an audience. When this is all happening at the same time, there’s nothing like it. Masterpieces great and small, from the St. Matthew Passion to the Minuet in G — all accessible even to kids, yet scholars still struggle to comprehend the depths of his genius.

EB How do you find teaching has impacted your own development as a musician and performer?

SH I haven’t had many opportunities for teaching or coaching since moving to the West, but it’s always a growing experience when I do. Teaching something to somebody else is often the best way to remember and refine it yourself! And it’s important to “pay it forward.”

EB

If you could time travel to one particular place in Europe, and see one composer or performer at work, who and what would you most like to see?

SH

I would have loved to be at Frederick the Great's court when Bach got challenged by the king to improvise on the "royal theme" that became the basis for the *Musical Offering*. And then to buy him a drink afterward!



For the 2019 Festival, [Stephen Hammer](#) performs in our Wednesday "Gardens" chamber concert (Wednesday, June 26, 2019 at 8 p.m., Sherman Library & Gardens, Corona del Mar, CA) and in our Festival Finale, "Bach the Magnificent" (Sunday, June 30, 2019 at 4 p.m., St. Mark Presbyterian Church, Newport Beach, CA).

For information about tickets and subscriptions to this year's Baroque Music Festival, Corona del Mar, visit the Festival [website](#).

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