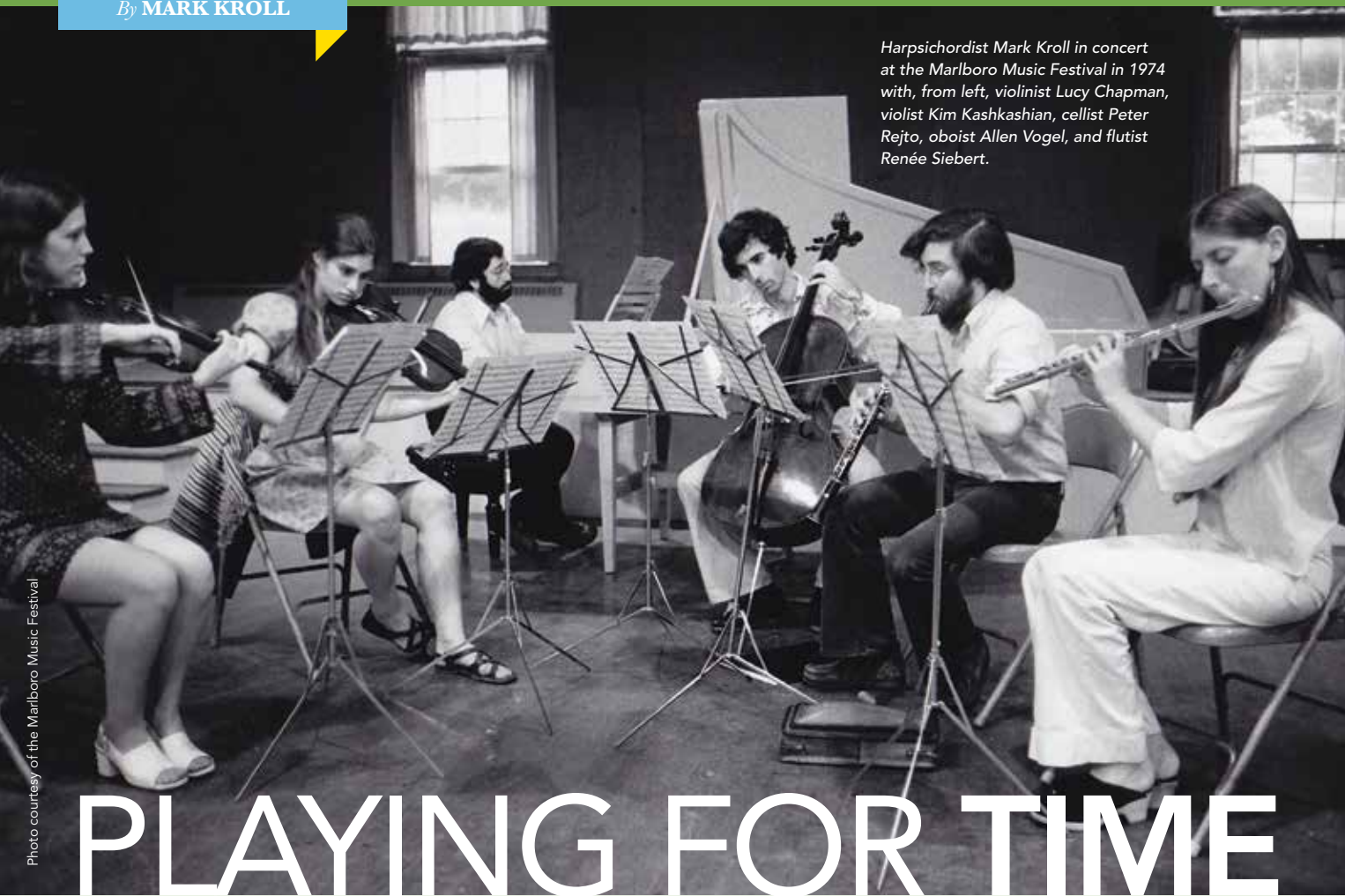


A harpsichordist traces a 50-year career of performance, education, and scholarship.

By MARK KROLL

Harpichordist Mark Kroll in concert at the Marlboro Music Festival in 1974 with, from left, violinist Lucy Chapman, violist Kim Kashkashian, cellist Peter Rejto, oboist Allen Vogel, and flutist Renée Siebert.



PLAYING FOR TIME

What is that old saying about time? It flies when you're having fun. This is true for most musicians and, more importantly, for the people who listen to them perform. It certainly has been true for me. This season, I celebrate two anniversaries: 50 years of playing the harpsichord professionally and the 40th since my Carnegie Recital Hall debut. It all started when I was a 17-year-old wannabe virtuoso pianist trying to play the octaves in Liszt's 6th Hungarian Rhapsody as fast as Teresa Carreño. But at the same time I found myself attending more early-music concerts than piano recitals, especially those of the New York Pro Musica and harpsichordists like Ralph Kirkpatrick, Fernando Valenti, and Sylvia Marlowe. I soon made a musical U-turn and became just as fixated on the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book and the pièces de clavecin of François Couperin.

Playing this music on the piano just didn't sound or feel right, however, and I knew I needed a good harpsichord and a good harpsichord teacher. Living in New York, I was lucky to find both. I started studying with Louis Bagger, who taught me all kinds of important things about articulation, style, and the repertoire. I also was fortunate to meet the harpsichord maker William Hyman, who was not yet the iconic builder he became just before his premature death. Bill actually let me work with him in his shop, which then was in the basement of his parents' house in Queens, to earn some money to pay for my harpsichord and learn something about how the instrument actually works. After a year of banged thumbs, ruined jacks, and an occasional sliced finger from a voicing knife, I became the very proud owner of one of Bill's first Flemish singles. Built very much in the historical style (in 1965!), it had two 8-foot stops, a light action, wooden jacks, and lovely decorated paper throughout. It was this instrument on which I was able to refine what I was learning about touch, and which I dragged around New York for my first paying gigs.

During this time, I was an undergraduate at Brooklyn College, where I received a superb musical education. How could I not? Much of the faculty consisted of great artists and scholars who had fled Nazi Europe—people like Robert Starer and Sigmund Levarie—plus the early-music specialists Jean Hakes, who had sung with the New York Pro Musica, and the choral conductor Robert Hickok, with whom I cut my teeth playing continuo in works of Schütz, Bach, and Handel.

After graduating, my next stop was Yale, where I received a master's degree as a student of Ralph Kirkpatrick. I wrote a bit about those experiences as an "Afterword" to the recent

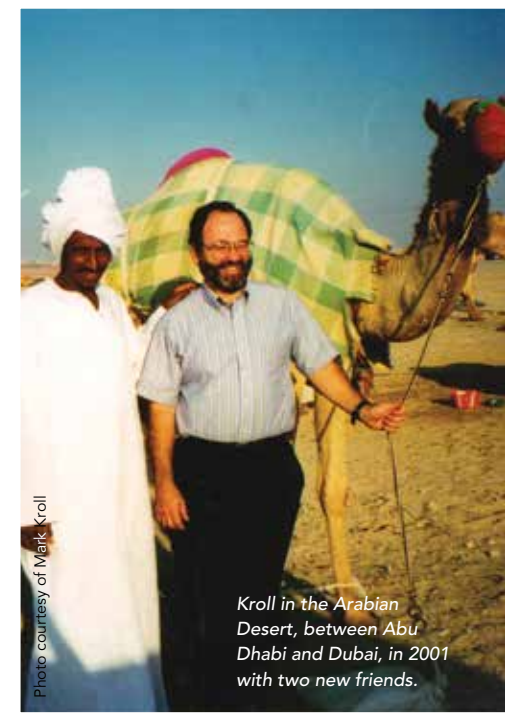
publication of Kirkpatrick's letters edited by his niece, Meredith (University of Rochester Press, 2015), so I won't repeat them here. What I should add is that in addition to playing the harpsichord, I learned more about culture, history, and scholarship from that complex but brilliant artist than I can begin to describe.

It was also at Yale that I met the person who would become central to my musical and personal life: the violinist Carol Lieberman. She was at the School of Music studying for her DMA, which she received in 1974—the first violinist to be awarded that Yale degree. It is still a mystery to me why someone who played Brahms and Bartók so magnificently would want to have anything to do with a harpsichordist; it was a mystery to her, too, as she never fails to remind me. Nevertheless, it all seems to have worked out quite well. We have been together since that first meeting in 1969 as colleagues, performing partners, and husband and wife. What did I say about time flying and having fun?

Balancing Act

One of my career goals has always been to maintain a balance between performing, teaching, and scholarship, and time has been kind to me here as well. I have performed and taught on five continents and published some noteworthy books and editions. All three activities have produced their share of "firsts." For example, I was the first American harpsichordist to perform and teach in a number of cities and countries, including Abu Dhabi and Dubai of the United Arab Emirates; Bangkok, Thailand (so my sponsors told me); and Israel's Jezreel Valley Center for the Arts, where Carol and I taught performance practice to a talented group of Arab, Christian, and Jewish teenagers.

As so often happens when you're a traveling harpsichordist, many of these trips provided some real adventures. One occurred while driving between Abu Dhabi and Dubai across the Arabian desert with the harpsichord in the back of a truck—with no air-conditioning. The humidity level could not have been more than 5%, so you can imagine the tuning job I had after arriving in Dubai. We stopped only once on the drive: to get some water



Kroll in the Arabian Desert, between Abu Dhabi and Dubai, in 2001 with two new friends.

(for the truck) and to visit some camels at the side of the road (my request). I still use a picture of the camel and me on my website (markkroll.com).

It appears that I was the first (only?) harpsichordist invited to perform as the official guest of the City of Barcelona. I remember nothing about the concert, but how could I forget my only time on the "red carpet," with the limos, photographers, and street interviews? There was also an extravagant dinner at the house

of Barcelona's mayor, who was, I was later told, voted out of office shortly after my concert. I hope it wasn't because he invited a harpsichordist.

Teaching can also be a great source of fun and gratification, and it occupies an important part of my career, as it has for musicians throughout the centuries. My first teaching job after Yale was at the University of California, Santa Cruz, a beautiful place indeed, especially since I was coming directly from snowy New Haven. I lived in an apartment in a Redwood forest overlooking Monterey Bay with a good morning view of the fog, seals, and surfers. I taught history, theory, harpsichord, and chamber music to a really impressive group of young students. They included the cellist Tod Machover, before he became the famous composer; Kent Nagano, before he became the famous conductor; and John Phillips, before he became the great harpsichord builder.

I can't take much credit for that last one, but I did supervise John in a course listed as "The Baroque Instrument-Making Guild" (remember, it was California in the '70s). We built a Hubbard French double kit that is played at the university to this day. It quickly took on the name "Green Meanie," but not for the reason one might assume, although the case is indeed painted green. Rather, the culprit is the soundboard. After the case was finished, we gave the board to a fine local artist for decoration. Knowing that her mother was a harpsichordist, we were confident that she would understand what we wanted and let it go at that. However, when she proudly returned the finished soundboard, we were astonished to discover that she had painted it completely green—all of it, back and front—with a few lovely California wildflowers planted in her soundboard meadow. The chances are good that no other soundboard has ever

been decorated in this manner, in any national style or era.

On the move

Thinking I'd had enough of the paradise of sun and surf after three years (silly me), I moved to Toronto, where Carol was teaching and playing. We loved that city (including its clean and

including playing harpsichord, fortepiano, and even electric (!) harpsichord with the Boston Symphony since 1979 and with the Boston Pops the few times they needed me (see clip from a concert with Yo-Yo Ma and John Williams at [youtube.com/watch?v=E-sb7VvFFGk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E-sb7VvFFGk)).

A few years after arriving in "The Hub," I was asked to join the Boston

literate." That is, to learn the basic touch and repertoire, how the instrument worked, and how to realize a figured bass. Or to put it another way, to develop survival skills when they might be asked to play or teach the instrument. Thanks to the enthusiastic support of my colleagues, the piano faculty in particular, I instituted the course "Harpsichord for Keyboard

programs continue to thrive at BU, thanks to the dedication and skill of my successors, Peter Sykes and Martin Pearlman.

Concerts galore

But I had one more thing to do at BU. I believed our students and faculty, and the Boston community at large,

Moreover, as part of the series, and in line with that balance between scholarship and performance I mentioned, we presented a number of conferences featuring scholarly papers and recitals. One was in 1987 in honor of the 300th anniversary of the death of C. P. E. Bach. It featured the editors of the nascent C. P. E. Bach edition and concerts of his symphonies, songs, keyboard works (on harpsichord, clavichord, and fortepiano), and chamber music. Another conference was devoted to Beethoven's violin sonatas. This resulted in a book on the subject, co-edited by leading Beethoven scholar Lewis Lockwood and myself.

Realizing that time does fly and having accomplished at BU what I had been asked to do, I made the difficult choice to give up my position as tenured full professor and retire in order to devote more time and energy to longer periods of touring (for example, in Asia) and to writing and research. It was the right decision, but I did miss having the opportunity to pass on to the next generations what I knew about expressive harpsichord playing. When I complained about this to Professor Wendy Heller of Princeton University, a dear friend and a real musicologist, she asked, "Well, why don't you write a book about it?" Me? A book? I took up the challenge with *Playing the Harpsichord Expressively*. It has served its purpose, both in the U.S. and abroad; in fact, it recently was translated into French, and a Chinese version is in process. I've also written the only English-language biographies of J. N. Hummel and Ignaz Moscheles and many editions of music that performers and audiences don't know well enough, but should.

What's next? Among my projects is a recording of the complete harpsichord works of F. Couperin, a repertoire particularly dear to my heart. *27 Ordres* is a lot of music to record, but I think I have the time.



Violinist Carol Lieberman and harpsichordists Mark Kroll and Marina Minkin, standing in back, teaching class of Muslim and Christian Arabs and Jews in Israel in 2014.

quiet subway) and thought of settling there, but this was not the best time for Americans. The government had decided to institute a policy of "Canadian Content," making employment difficult for American artists. Nevertheless, we managed another "first" in Toronto that year (1974): according to our producer at the CBC, Carol and I gave the first baroque violin and harpsichord recital in the city.

But Boston beckoned. The city is best known for "The Curse of the Bambino" inflicted on the Red Sox, but it had also been dubbed the "Early Music Capital of America." This was not far off the mark. Boston and its neighboring cities and towns supported 11 full-time harpsichord builders, among them Bill Dowd, Frank Hubbard, and Eric Herz, not to mention the woodwind workshop of Friedrich von Huene. It was a harpsichordist's playground. In other words, more time for fun,

University faculty with the mandate to create and build its harpsichord and early-music program. There was neither just a 1960 Dowd in barely playable condition and not a single early-music course. I had my work cut out for me, but this was a very good time to do it, since the harpsichord was beginning to reach the peak of its popularity in the mid-1970s. My first mission was to create the harpsichord and fortepiano department, including the mundane but necessary act of putting course numbers in the catalogue for both hour and half-hour lessons.

I then set out to realize a long-held goal: to require all piano and organ majors to study harpsichord as part of their undergraduate curriculum. Not to make them harpsichordists, of course, but to teach them enough so that they could become what I called "harpsichord

Majors," a one-semester requirement in the School of Music curriculum for pianists and organists. It was the first of its kind in any university or conservatory in the United States and became so popular that many students elected to take a second semester. A few actually switched their majors from piano to harpsichord.

Next on the agenda was another innovation: a required "Baroque Chamber Music" course for all instrumentalists, with singers warmly invited to enroll (and many did). This also became popular, especially among wind players who discovered that a lot of their great repertoire was written in the 17th and 18th centuries. Building on these successes, I eventually established the Department of Historical Performance, offering the DMA in baroque violin and cello, viola da gamba, baroque flute and oboe, and, of course, harpsichord and fortepiano. All of these courses and

would enjoy and benefit greatly from hearing as many different approaches to the harpsichord and early music as there were performers. I thus established the Boston University Early Music Series, which I directed throughout my 25-year tenure at the university. It would ultimately feature more than 200 concerts performed by as diverse a roster of early-music artists as we could afford (which was very little). We heard, and learned, from so many great musicians, some at the beginning of their careers, others at the middle, and one at the end: the long list includes Jaap Schröder, shortly after the release of Christopher Hogwood's complete recording of Mozart symphonies, for which Schröder served as concertmaster; the London Serpent Trio (the most popular concert of any season); and a final concert by the legendary viola da gambist August Wenzinger on his farewell tour.

Based on a true story adapted by playwright Arthur Miller, "Playing for Time" won four Emmys and a Peabody Award. [More Details.](#) Watch offline. Available to download. Genres. Movies Based on Real Life, Biographical Movies, Movies Based on Books, Dramas, Tearjerkers. This movie is