

INTRODUCING WESTFIELD'S NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, KATHRYN STUART

Kathryn Stuart will become Executive Director of the Westfield Center in January 2018. Kathryn introduces herself to our readership and reviews her career.

In August 2015, we traveled to Ithaca for *Forte/Piano*, a festival celebrating pianos in history. For me, this spectacular event well illustrated the important role the Westfield Center for Historical Keyboard Studies plays for those of us who are passionate about keyboard instruments, their history, design and construction as well as performance, performance practice, and scholarship.

My own interest in this field began in the mid-1980's when I attended a fortepiano workshop with Malcolm Bilson and subsequently enrolled in the DMA program with him at Cornell. I also purchased my first instrument, a six-and-a-half octave Graf replica built by Tom McCobb. My study with and mentorship from Malcolm, Jim Webster, Neal Zaslaw and inspiring relationships with fellow DMA and PhD students provided me with an invaluable educational experience I continue to appreciate. I learned about Westfield while at Cornell, and took part in the Haydn conference at Smith and Schubert symposia at the Smithsonian. I was honored to join the Westfield board in 2015 and now very much look forward to becoming Executive Director in January 2018.

Here is a bit more detail about my musical education and career. I grew up in a suburb of Washington, DC, the only child of two musicians, a pianist and a percussionist. At 94, my mother continues to play for church services in her retirement community; my father, who died in 2008, served as timpanist in the Dallas Symphony under Antal Dorati, followed by positions as principal percussionist in the Washington Air Force Band, and finally 22 years in the Washington Marine Band. My parents were consistently supportive of my interest in school in general and music in particular.

I loved my years at the Eastman School of Music where I studied piano with Eugene List and then Barry Snyder. Throughout bachelor's and master's degrees, I very much appreciated my courses in music theory and music history as well as many opportunities to accompany and play chamber music. As a master's student, my teaching assistantship in class piano served to reinforce my dream to

teach piano and related subjects. For the first 20 years after completing my Eastman degrees, my career was devoted to the making of music and the education of musicians. At both Plymouth State College of the University of New Hampshire and then at the State University of New York at Plattsburgh, I took very seriously the responsibility of introducing students to classical music for the first time (hoping that a positive first experience would ultimately encourage them to support music in their own children's schools). I believe this was the most important work I have done as a music teacher.

It was a sabbatical leave from SUNY Plattsburgh that enabled me to study at Cornell. After two years there, I returned to Plattsburgh with my new spouse, pianist David Breitman, also a student of Malcolm Bilson. But Oberlin called that very first fall, and offered David a position to replace musicologist Tom Kelly. The following year, I, too, was offered a replacement position teaching class piano. In contrast

to my previous college students, at Oberlin Conservatory I worked with students who were headed for musical careers at the highest level. I loved the teaching—class piano at Oberlin allowed non-keyboard majors to learn to use the piano to reinforce the music theory they were studying concurrently—and I adored the students.

During the second 20 years of my career, I focused on leadership positions at Oberlin. My first year, I assumed a lead role in the Keyboard Division's program review which led to my appointment as associate professor of piano pedagogy and conservatory associate dean for academic affairs, a position I held for six years. During that time, I chaired the curriculum committee, numerous search committees, and led a successful accreditation review process. In addition, I designed the conservatory's first faculty handbook, mentored new faculty members, and worked with student performers who represented the conservatory at special events on and off campus.

I served as acting dean of the conservatory for six months during the 1996-97 school year, replacing the dean on sabbatical leave. In this position, I supervised approximately 100 faculty and staff, oversaw the conservatory budget, actively participated in the College's strategic planning process, spoke frequently to large and



Kathryn Stuart
Photo: John Seyfried

small groups, and represented the conservatory both internally—to the president’s staff, the board of trustees, and to many faculty committees—and externally to alumni and other potential donors, prospective students and parents, and professional organizations.

In 1998, Oberlin’s president invited me to become her assistant, a position I held for four years. This opportunity allowed me to become directly involved in the college’s decision-making process and I also learned a great deal about higher education overall. A few of my most favorite tasks in this position included organizing an annual series of college-wide convocations featuring nationally prominent speakers, representing the college at a variety of events on and off campus, and most importantly, leading a task force of faculty and staff working with outside consultants to create a plan for increasing student retention and improving the graduation rate. My work on retention led to my appointment as dean of studies, a position charged with working with a wide range of campus offices to ensure student success and persistence to graduation. My office coordinated advising for students in the College of Arts and Sciences and I supervised the offices of international student advising and services, off-campus study, leaves and withdrawals, winter term, registrar, career center, fellowships advisor, Bonner center for service and learning, and institutional research.

Finally, I served as vice president for strategic initiatives during my final years at Oberlin. Tasks included tracking college-wide progress on the 2005 strategic plan for the Board of Trustees, preparing for a new strategic planning process in collaboration with the president’s senior staff, identifying and interviewing potential consultants, and, with Oberlin’s president and a Board member who served as co-chairs, coordinating the strategic planning process that was successfully completed in June 2016. After 40 years in higher education of which 26 were at Oberlin College and Conservatory, I retired, happily, at the end of June 2017.

It is with great pleasure that I prepare, with the wonderful support and mentoring of Annette Richards, to assume the position of Executive Director of the Westfield Center for Historical Keyboard Studies in January of 2018. Throughout my years of higher education administration, the satisfaction I found in this work always flowed from the wonderful, creative, and hard-working colleagues with whom I collaborated. The Westfield membership and its Board members are terrific. I very much look forward to our work together, to getting to know many of you, and to advancing Westfield so that future generations of historical keyboard players, scholars, and lovers of keyboard music have a robust community for dialogue and advocacy.