

Biography for Programs: Full

Leah Gale Nelson, violin, specializes in historical performance practice of the 17th and 18th centuries. She has been called, an “expert in her field” by the New York Times, and the Philadelphia press has called her “a rising star in the early music scene.” Based in New York City, she has performed as a chamber musician and soloist in both North America and Europe, and is in demand as concertmaster throughout the United States for her interpretations of baroque and classical music, from Monteverdi to Mozart. For some of the finest choirs in New York, she has led performances of Monteverdi’s *Vespers of 1610*, Bach’s *St. John Passion* and *Mass in B Minor*, numerous mass settings of Haydn, Mozart, and Schubert, and the New York premier of a Telemann *St. Matthew Passion* for the Church of St. Luke in the Fields, where she is often a featured player.

She has served as concertmaster with Chicago Opera Theater and conductor Jane Glover in critically acclaimed productions of Monteverdi’s operas in Chicago and New York; as guest director for Lyra Baroque Orchestra in Minneapolis; and has led Handel’s *Messiah* in countless performances throughout the country. She founded and co-directed Gotham City Baroque Orchestra, and a chamber group, Louis Louis, presenting three seasons of concerts, culminating in her concept and production of, “A Day in the Life of Louis XIV.”

These days, Leah can be found collaborating with dancers, filmmakers, as well as other artists, stage and choral directors, joining early music and historical practice with modern performance. With dancer Carlos Fittante she created *Fandango Fantasie*, performing her solo violin arrangement of a Boccherini guitar quintet, and her rendition of the Biber *Passacaglia* is in the repertoire of the dance company Isabel Gotzkowsky and Friends. In Minneapolis, she served as founding concertmaster and Artistic Director of Ensemble Sebastian, and in 2004 she was appointed String Artist in Residence at the Basilica of Saint Mary.

A highlight this season is the continuation of her traversal of the 16 “Mystery Sonatas” of H.I.F. Biber in concerts at the Church of St. Luke in the Fields in New York, and in Minneapolis at the Basilica of Saint Mary.

Ms. Nelson teaches privately and is the string coach for the New York Continuo Collective. She is regularly called upon for teaching and coaching engagements, and has been a guest lecturer at Columbia University, Vassar College, the College of St. Benedict/St. John’s University, and the Schubert Club in St. Paul.

She has been a principal player for the Clarion Music Society, Concert Royal, the New York Baroque Dance Company, the Boston Camerata, the Connecticut Early Music Festival, the Smithsonian Chamber Orchestra, and the American Classical Orchestra; and has performed as a soloist and chamber musician in Alice Tully Hall, Carnegie Hall’s Weill Recital Hall, and Chicago’s Orchestra Hall. Her leadership and passion for historical performance practice have been influenced by her professional work with Jane Glover, Paul Goodwin, Frederick Hammond, Monica Huggett, Michael Sand, Kenneth Slowik, Frederick Renz, James Richman, Catherine Turocy, and the late and terribly missed Newell Jenkins, and Paul Echols.

As a modern violinist, Leah’s performing career began in Chicago where, through the Civic Orchestra of Chicago and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, she worked extensively with then CSO Assistant Conductor Michael Morgan, and with other preeminent conductors including Daniel Barenboim, John Corigliano, Christopher Hogwood, Leonard Slatkin, and the late Sir Georg Solti. While musically inspiring, this training also offered regular exposure to behind-the-scenes operational details of a symphony orchestra.

Born in Texas and raised in Minnesota, she holds a Bachelor of Music degree from Chicago Musical College/Roosevelt University and a Master of Music degree from the Mannes College of Music in New York, where she studied violin with David Nadien, baroque violin with Nancy Wilson, chamber music with Arthur Haas, Julius Levine, and Martha McGaughey, and played in masterclasses for William Christie, Jordi Savall, and Stanley Ritchie.