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Duke Performances Blog

# Jeannette Sorrell on Affekt, Apollo's Fire & Philippe Jaroussky

by [Brian Howe](#) on October 26, 2011

in [Brian Howe,Classical,Featured,Get to Know,video](#)



Jeannette Sorrell (photo:  
Roger Mastroianni)

France's [Philippe Jaroussky](#) is the world's leading natural countertenor—a rare, high vocal range that can handle the castrato parts common in Baroque opera. Jaroussky has achieved the unlikely feat of parlaying a mastery of early music singing into something like pop stardom. He is young, modern, and most importantly, a beautiful singer with an otherworldly voice that can appeal to fans of Vivaldi operas and [Antony Hegarty](#) alike.

The brilliant conductor and harpsichordist [Jeannette Sorrell](#) founded [Apollo's Fire](#) in Cleveland in 1992, and the ensemble is now easily the most highly regarded baroque orchestra in the United States. As patrons who caught [Duke Performances' presentation of the Venice Baroque Orchestra](#) saw last year, this music, which enjoyed a popular resurgence in the 20th century after a period of neglect and

decline, is above all an emotional experience, full of improvisatory spirit and human drama. Armed with a deep knowledge of early music history, Sorrell leads Apollo's Fire with passion and vitality, sidestepping coldly academic interpretations to stoke the emotional flames of the repertory.



Philippe Jaroussky (photo: Simon Fowler)

**Tonight at Reynolds Theater**, Apollo's Fire and Jaroussky perform a rich selection of arias from Vivaldi and Handel. As an *amuse-bouche*, we caught up with Sorrell via email while she was in transit between Cleveland and Durham to get a few of her thoughts, in a nutshell, on the open-ended nature of baroque music, the philosophy of Apollo's Fire, and hooking up with Jaroussky, which was "kind of like Internet dating." That's right: early music collaborations are now being booked *via YouTube*. Read on for Sorrell's thoughts and a couple videos where the power of the music speaks eloquently for itself.

### **Jeannette Sorrell on the *Affekt* of baroque music:**

In baroque music, what you see on the page is only a clue to what the music should—or can—sound like. Baroque composers only wrote down the skeleton of the music, the pitches and the approximate rhythm, and occasionally a suggestion of soft or loud. They did not indicate the phrasing or crescendos or diminuendos, nor the articulations—how the notes begin and end. Often, the instrumentation is not clearly indicated. What they *did* usually indicate, which is not so often indicated by later composers, is the emotional character of the music—the *Affekt*.

### **On Apollo's Fire:**



Apollo's Fire (photo: Roger Mastroianni)

What we do in Apollo's Fire is try to understand the *Affekt* that the composer intended and communicate that emotional mood to the audience. Our goal is emotional communication, which was the goal of baroque performers. I don't believe in historical authenticity as goal in itself. I do quite a bit of historical research, but the historical nature of what we do is a tool for creating art that communicates. It is not an end in itself.

**On countertenor Philippe Jaroussky:**

[Meeting him] was kind of like Internet dating. I discovered Philippe's videos on YouTube about four years ago and fell in love with his singing. I contacted his agent, and then he went and looked at our videos on YouTube. And then his agent wrote to me and said, "Philippe totally adores your work." And so he proposed to do this tour with us, in the U.S. and Europe. Philippe's range is higher than most countertenors. He is somewhere between a countertenor and a soprano. But what stands out about him the most is that he is above all a great musician—the music-making is more important to him than just singing.

Apollo's Fire:



Philippe Jaroussky:



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