Spotlight: Elise Kuder, violin, Apple Hill String Quartet

I was born on the border of Vermont and Canada, lived in a farm house with one heated room for two years and went cross country skiing with my parents, moved to Florida for four years where I started playing the violin and ran away from lizards, and ended up in a small town near Worcester, MA until I graduated from high school. Musically speaking, I was very lucky to have such supportive and disciplined parents. We followed the Suzuki rule in our household— you practiced every day you ate! When I was 11, my violin teacher recommended Apple Hill which totally changed my life. I fell in love with everything there—the Schubert Octet, the woods, dancing to Earth, Wind & Fire under a starry sky, people from all over, and the feeling of possibility. I also met teachers who recommended auditioning for a youth orchestra in Boston and then Oberlin Conservatory. Music has literally moved me my entire life, from Oberlin to Juilliard (my first time living in a city) and then to a Fulbright year in London and back to NYC and touring the world with Apple Hill. I moved to New Hampshire in 2008 when I wanted to have a cat and when Apple Hill became full time. I love being part of a resident string quartet and an Artistic Director in NH, but of course miss the diversity and life of not-NH. Who else wants to move up here??!!! Join us!!

I was lucky to have amazing teachers who were full of love, humor, skill, and challenge. Looking back, I am full of gratitude; thank you Monica Kensta VanderBaan, Karen Wielsma, Marilyn McDonald, Joel Smirnoff, and David Takeno. And my mom and dad! I know that chamber music, the support and challenge of Apple Hill, and the worldwide Apple Hill community also shaped my philosophy and approach immensely. In addition, exploring, reading, and listening to many things throughout the years and decades is key. I played in the disco orchestra at Oberlin and a rock band in NYC in which my violin sounded like a vacuum cleaner. I performed with Apple Hill while enrolled in my Masters at Juilliard, getting to test out what I was learning at school, and met Quincy Jones in the process. I read The Artist Way and writers like Thich Nhat Hanh whenever I was filled with doubt or anxiety. I still play with spectacular colleagues in the Apple Hill String Quartet and all of our summer faculty. I still travel the world from Myanmar to down the street from the Kasbah to Fuller Elementary School in Keene, experiencing the brilliance, beauty, and generosity of spirit that circles the globe. I love learning music by composers from places we travel to, such as Ahmed Adnan Saygun (Turkey) and Celso Garrido-Lecca (Peru). Currently I’m experimenting with Hindustani scales and improv and also learning iMovie! I also practice scales and arpeggios. Still.

For me, Apple Hill social media is about community, connection, family, and fun. I want people already affiliated with Apple Hill to share in our year-round happenings and to let everyone else in the world know about Apple Hill! This includes fantastic music, our beautiful home in New Hampshire, and the Apple Hill community worldwide. Being a Gen Xer, I’ve loved learning the tricks of the social media trade from younger AH alumni. When the sharing becomes too much about comparison, competition, and selling, I leave the internet, do some yoga, commune with trees and cats, read a book, and eat a gluten free pizza from Athens Pizza with friends. It all seems to work out.

I always look forward to Apple Hill's artistic and educational visions and upgrades to our beautiful buildings and gardens. I think what I’m most excited about in the coming years is gaining enough financial roots and cushion to keep growing, giving, and exploring for the next 250+ years. I'd love to leave that legacy to the next generation when I retire. Working for and believing in a creative and social change non-profit is
supremely rewarding, but it can be exhausting. Having said that, I am grateful for those musicians, staff, board members, and supporters who have kept Apple Hill thriving for all these decades. Violist Betty Hauck and violinist Freddie Ortiz lived in apartment rooms in the Apple Hill Rehearsal Barn year-round when Apple Hill began where the heat didn't go above 50 degrees (inside)! Thanks to Betty and Freddie, Apple Hill still exists and I have my job today.