

Javier Caballero

The Board of Trustees is pleased to announce that Javier Caballero will be Apple Hill's next Director, starting March 2022.

How did you first become involved with Apple Hill?

In summer 1998, I had just finished my first year of undergrad in Florida. I'd been working quite seriously with a clarinet, cello, and piano trio and we wanted to keep playing through the summer. I asked my teacher at the time, Scott Kluksdahl, for recommendations for summer festivals and he directed me to the Strings magazine summer festival guide. I was looking for two things: festivals that took pre-formed groups, so I could attend with my trio, and festivals as far as possible from Florida. That narrowed it down to a few, including Apple Hill, and I reached out to all of them. This was in the early days of websites and email, so we had to rely on calling and mailing brochures. The other festivals all sent me a brochure, but Lisa Tateosian, who was Apple Hill's summer director at the time, went out of her way to speak to me on the phone, send information, and really connect. That special touch got my attention, so I looked into Apple Hill's summer program. My trio had bailed on our summer plans by that point, but I decided to attend by myself—flying with my cello for the first time! —and loved it. I returned to Apple Hill for the next 12 summers as a student, later joining the faculty. Back then, no one I knew had heard of Apple Hill, but I took a chance, and the rest is history.



*Javier Caballero.
Photo: Robert Torres Photography*

What administrative/arts leadership jobs have you had, and how do you balance performing and administrative work?

I have been with Project STEP for 11 years collectively, working in six different roles. STEP was my entry into arts administration and leadership, having previously been focused on performing and teaching. I was introduced to STEP by Tony Rymer, who I had met at Apple Hill. Project STEP was planning a Gala performance at Boston's Symphony Hall of Bachianas Brasileiras No. 5 for Eight Celli and Soprano by Villa-Lobos and needed one more cello. Tony recommended me and I volunteered to play the concert. The Artistic Director at the time, William Thomas, was so grateful that he invited me to become their instrument manager, working five hours a week. (Project

STEP provides instruments to their students.) I said of course. It turns out that I connected well with the families and had a knack for administrative work. A year later when their program coordinator left, they thought I'd be a great fit for that position. But I wasn't interested because it was full time. I was a post-graduate at that time, teaching and performing, and didn't have time for a full-time job. That was in 2008, though, during the financial crisis, and STEP had to cut the position to half-time. That was key and all of it was happenstance—I had been offered this job and I was curious but not available, but then due to the market the job changed and it worked for me. Any one of those factors could have changed and I wouldn't have done it. I did that role for a year and a half and I loved it. Next, I became the artistic administrator. That was a lot of learning on the job. I didn't go to school for arts administration, I've just been an open, curious, organized, and nice (most of the time!) person, and as a result, STEP kept putting more on my plate. When you work for a small organization, there are opportunities to do tasks that are beyond the scope of your job, and the job can also transform around you and your skills and interests. Next, I became the co-artistic director and eventually the Artistic Director. One organization, many jobs.

After that, I worked at From the Top, the NPR program, as the scholarship and recruitment manager. Moving from a local/regional non-profit to a national arts organization was a huge step with a lot for me to learn—new systems, recruiting, and managing large teams. At STEP, I managed one or two staff members plus teachers, but at From the Top, the teams were bigger and had a national scope. After a few years there, I returned to Project STEP as the Artistic Director.

I have always said I have three careers: performing, teaching, and arts administration. And there are three things that help me balance it all: First, staying on top of the calendar. There are so many moving parts, you just have to. Second, I consider myself a perpetual learner. Learning doesn't stop after you graduate from school or because you're the director; learning takes place in academic, professional, and social settings and it is never finite. I've learned that from music. And third, the interconnectedness of working in the arts. Doing one thing—teaching, or performing, or administration--makes you better at the others. I believe that and I live it. You immerse yourself in a life in the arts. But of course, balance is a never-ending process, you always have to reassess, add this, cut back on that. Once I start my job at Apple Hill, my balance will change. For example, I won't be able to teach at other festivals or perform as much. The responsibility of Executive Director is much bigger than any other role I've had before. I will remain somewhat active in teaching and performing, but my central focus will be my commitment to Apple Hill.

How has what you learned at AH helped you in what you do in your career (performing, teaching, and administration)?

The fundamentals of being a good chamber musician apply to life, whether it's in professional, social, or educational settings. At the top of that list is listening. You have to learn to listen. Good listening has many layers. It's not just hearing, it's understanding what the other person is saying and how you can be of help. I learned and honed the listening skills I use in my performing, teaching, and leadership work at Apple Hill. Second is communication.

Learning how to communicate is also multi-dimensional. It's not just what to say but how to say it, considering who you're speaking to, what they bring to the table, how they feel. Someone may be hesitant, so you voice your ideas in different ways than you would to someone already on board with what you're saying. Third is the importance of traveling, both physically/literally and figuratively. The Apple Hill community transcends so many



Javier with friends at Apple Hill in 1998

boundaries by design—age, gender, race, culture, language, nationality, music experience, or whether you prefer to dance to slow jams, salsa, or Stevie Wonder. You 'travel' figuratively by meeting and working with so many people right here at Apple Hill. So much of the world is represented here, and I've experienced and learned so many things from so many people. I have even literally traveled the globe thanks to AH—I've been to Palestine, Ireland, UK, Turkey, Jordan; my first visit to Europe was to visit AH friends. Everywhere I go there are dear friends from AH. Traveling helps you understand, connect, and empathize. Those are key elements of life, and have translated, for me, to key elements of being a musician, a teacher, a leader, and a human being.

After many years in Boston, you'll be moving to rural New Hampshire when you start at AH. What drives you to make a big change like that?

Anyone who knows me knows how much I love Boston, so moving is a big decision that took a lot of thought. But I am ready and excited to focus on leadership, continuing work that I love. This next chapter for me is all about impact. When you perform, you have an impact on your audience. When you teach, you have an impact on not only your students but on all the performances they give as well as on their respective audiences. When you are a leader of an organization like AH, you have an impact on a more global level—teachers, artists, students, partner organizations, and audiences—

and you play a role in making it happen for all of them. It also enables me to pay it forward. There are so many people who have paved the way for me, and now I want to pave the way for others. As for moving to New Hampshire—I've known the area for 23 years! It's a beautiful region with great people, and it is close to Boston. When I lived in Boston, I was visiting Apple Hill all the time, so when I live in New Hampshire, I will maintain my love for Boston and visit often too. Plus, Apple Hill is active in Boston, with residencies and partnerships and concerts. Yes, I will be based in the Monadnock region, but everywhere I go, anytime I travel, Apple Hill always seems to come with me. I've already been living that for many years, and I expect I'll experience it even more with this next chapter!

What are your goals as Director and what are you most looking forward to?

I feel proud to celebrate the legacy that has come before me of so many great people. Not just Lenny's incredible leadership, which is humbling to follow, but also the entire team at Apple Hill, the Apple Hill String Quartet, and the vision of the founders. My goals are to continue honoring that legacy, and to preserve that spirit, which is the reason why so many of us keep coming back. On the other hand, continuing the founding spirit of inclusivity while also building community in the 21st century means always changing and adapting. Radical inclusivity looked different in the 70s/80s versus in the 90s versus today. Apple Hill has always been at the forefront of what it means to create space for everyone to have a voice, to feel valued, and to feel a sense of belonging across boundaries. Authentic inclusivity goes beyond race, ethnicity, age, experience, language, nationality, or gender to include all the many identities we all have that make up who we are. The spirit and mission of Apple Hill don't just happen automatically, it's something we must continue to explore and nurture. We need to think boldly about how to keep deepening our mission, building community for the next 50 years, and transcending boundaries, all in the unique, genuine, and transformative way that you can only find at Apple Hill.

What are your favorite Apple Hill memories?

This is the hardest question—I have 23 years of incredible memories! Twelve years of being a student, and after that, attending so many Tuesday concerts and being on the faculty. Another thing: Anyone who knows me well knows that I have to mention the dance parties at AH—they are such a defining experience. Then there's traveling. AH has shown me the world, literally and figuratively. I've met so many friends from all over the US and around the globe at Apple Hill, and then visited them in their home states or countries. The late-night ping-pong games were never just a simple game; you think you're just playing ping-pong, but it's much deeper. You're talking about life, discussing the meaning of life, and making connections. Those are the moments that put in context what life can and should be about. And of course, that's not even

scratching the surface of the incredible musical learning and coachings. It goes beyond music education and chamber music, it's that AND life education. At the end of a summer session it's always bittersweet and we would always say that now we have to go back to 'real life' back home, but AH is real life, reminding us how we can and should connect.

I can see that sustaining the spirit of Apple Hill is a huge responsibility. We all need to do it together and I realize my role is substantial. I am excited and thrilled and humbled to be the next Director of Apple Hill and I feel the love and support.