From The New York Times:
“Musically, the most riveting moment of the evening came in the Largo of a Leclair Sonata in A for Flute and Violin, with its sinuously, sensuously intertwining lines. Karen Bentley was the fine violinist.”

She has explored her musical ancestry.

Six years ago, Bentley Pollick began an exploration into her musical ancestry—playing the hardangerfele. She first encountered the Norwegian folk instrument as a child, where she lived near a large community of Norwegians.

“In addition to my mother’s family being third-generation Norwegian immigrants, we had neighbors whose father made a hardangerfele,” she recalls. “Usually an heirloom passed down between generations, old hardangerfeles are extremely difficult to procure. Our neighbor had a display case in her foyer full of violins, which her father had made at the turn of the century, including one hardangerfele. I spent much time at their house playing violin duos with one of the grandsons whenever he visited and we would take out the violins to give them all a test drive. We were both intrigued by the hardangerfele and would attempt to play it like a violin. It was not until July 1998, when I first visited Norway and had lessons with Tarjei Romveit, that I learned more about playing it. Upon returning to the United States, I went to Norwegian fiddle camp at Julian in the mountains near San Diego and began to fraternize with the Scandinavian community in the San Francisco Bay Area. I took lessons with fiddlers as they passed through town and spent many late nights at the dance hall with an expert fiddler, who showed me his personal arsenal of tunes from his home region. I then began to improvise on the hardangerfele alongside my percussionist, Ian Dogole, who usually joins in on the udu (Nigerian clay pot). We later added a cellist to the mix for a Nordic romp.”

The Birmingham News’ Music Critic Michael Huebner describes her hardangerfele as “a beautiful instrument made from thickly lacquered wood with mother-of-pearl inlay and a scrolled animal head and nine strings which has a mellow, almost viola-like tone. It was made in 2000 by Oslo instrument maker Erling Aaning. The four bowed strings can be tuned in a variety of ways, and the remaining sympathetic, or vibrating, strings are tuned to reflect the notes of each piece of music.”

The hardangerfele was invented in the mid-17th century and is named for the western Norwegian region near Hardanger Fjord. Bentley Pollick recorded hardangerfele tunes on a digital recorder when she visited there in 1998.

“The hardangerfele is one of the few folk instruments that still exists in its original condition,” she says. “Each region of Norway has a unique style and repertoire of tunes which are transmitted by example from one fiddler to another. Many of