She says that the hardangerfele has always been used as a dance instrument and is played today in much the same manner as it has been traditionally. “It is thrilling to be on stage with virtuoso Norwegian dancers and to watch their footwork as they twirl, leap, and spin about the room,” she says.

“I also perform on the viola, which resembles a contralto voice and vibrates near the heart. Mozart preferred to play the viola during string quartet readings and wrote exquisitely for the instrument in his later works. Navigating the sinuous inner lines of a string quartet on the viola and enhancing the efforts of the other instruments is pure pleasure. I am fortunate to play viola with marvelous colleagues in various chamber music settings as we explore the far reaches of the repertoire, past and present. My sister, Heather, is a violist in Seattle, and I admit to having learned viola by osmosis by listening to her practice during our formative years.”

Why does she love music?

“A life surrounded by music is an exhilarating one,” Bentley Pollick says. “For each performer, it is possible to perfect and share on stage a mere fraction of the repertoire one has heard as a listener, thus quenching the thirst for infinity and for connection through the muse only temporarily. The abundance of compositions and styles to explore both as performer and listener is expansive. Music is a life force, and I am blessed to have entered into a life in music from an early age. We tend to gravitate towards activities and events which trigger a sense of home and comfort. I was raised in a home where we listened to the Metropolitan Opera broadcast every Saturday and played many recordings of the great performers, especially pianists, violinists, singers, symphonies, and string quartets.”

Bentley Pollick says that she started playing in the Palo Alto Chamber Orchestra when she was 11. “A sense of community and healthy competition permeated the organization under the direction of conductor William Whitson,” she explains. “I proceeded throughout high school with the same crop of talented string players, and the friendships that were forged during those years in PACO endure to this day. My piano teacher in Palo Alto, Rusana Sysoyev, cultivated a respect for the lives of the great composers and emphasized the importance of loyalty to the score. Her passion for the piano repertoire and individual interpretation was an early influence and I was blessed to have her as my initial tour guide on the keyboard.”

When asked about passion, Bentley Pollick says it is what drives artists. “Perhaps passion is the driving force that propels an artist to manipulate the external world to conform to their inner ideals and create a utopian lifestyle through art and personal vision. We strive to brighten our corners of the universe on a daily, moment-to-moment basis.”

She’s impressed with Birmingham and its music scene.

“We toured and visited here three times before moving down from Pennsylvania in August,” Bentley Pollick says. “It is a homecoming of sorts because of my Southern roots. Plus, I enjoy the climate. We’ve enjoyed everyone we’ve met here. They’re all so warm and welcoming.”

Even before coming to Birmingham, Bentley Pollick had networked with local new music aficionados—BSC Assistant Professor of Music Dorothy Hindman and Professor of Music Charles Norman Mason. And she already has performed with BSC Adjunct Professor of Music Craig Hultgren and Adjunct Professor of the Conservatory Adam Bowles. She’s also connected through the Birmingham Art Music Alliance.

“I’m impressed with how people here come together and forge alliances,” she says. “We’ve also been attending the symphony as often as possible. I’m impressed with the local love for music and especially the large appetite for the Alabama Symphony and Opera Birmingham.”

“I hope to be a cultural ambassador within and beyond Birmingham. I am beginning a series of salon concerts that will feature chamber music and develop an audience in the city. Music is a social catalyst and by spending time with others in a common vibration we have the opportunity to bond and share a mutual experience which is unique. I hope to increase awareness of Birmingham and Birmingham-Southern while I travel by

From the San Francisco Chronicle:

“Karen Bentley’s violin represented the mind in creative tumult, a beautiful lyric performance in which her fellow instrumentalists joined in with comments, agreement and disagreement.”