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A PHILADELPHIA

The City of Brotherly Love Gives Early Music a Great Big Hug.

Story

Without a whole lot of hullabaloo, Philadelphia has become a vibrant early-music center. Its early-music population is big, getting bigger every day, and includes landmark groups in mid-career, new groups starting to hit their stride, and a seedbed of exciting startups and ad hoc happenings.



Tempesta di Mare

Without a whole lot of hullabaloo, Philadelphia has become a vibrant early-music center. Its early-music population is big, getting bigger every day, and includes landmark groups in mid-career, new groups starting to hit their stride, and a seedbed of exciting startups and ad hoc happenings.

Add to that Philadelphia itself, suddenly the coolest place in the known universe. We're No. 3 on the *New York Times*'s Places to Go in 2015, right after Milan and Cuba (apple-polishers!). We're *Travel + Leisure*'s "next great food city," and we're getting encomiums from every side that you wouldn't have believed if you were here twenty years ago.

More to the point for early music, we're attracting millennials by the bucket load. They're pouring into our affordable neighborhoods and bicycle-able downtown at what *Philadelphia Magazine* calls "an insane rate of gentrification." And a lot of them play early music.

Just check out a quick little survey of what was on the stages early in 2015:

Baroque orchestra Tempesta di Mare was at its big-band size in March for "Purcell, Charpentier & Jazaruella!" with local mezzo Maren Montalbano, then went down to chamber size for French salon songs with D.C. soprano Rosa Lamoreaux, and then back up to orchestra for Leclair and Rameau theater music, complete with drums and trumpets and recorded for release on Chandos.

Also in March, thirty-year veterans Piffaro showed off their wind, reed, and brass playing in "At the Court of Ferrara," then came back in May with an all-Cipriano de Rore show. Playing that old master-songwriter gave them a chance to invite along one of the exciting new groups, vocal quartet The Laughing Bird.

Opera star soprano Julianne Baird hosted the Amherst Winter Weekend Workshop at Rutgers University-Camden, sang with Laurie Heimes in a 1784 *Robin Hood* at Brandywine Baroque, and directed a humongous, fully-staged Handel *Acis and Galatea* with the Madrigal Ensemble she directs at Rutgers-Camden. The Bach Festival and Choral Arts Philadelphia did Cantata 170 with Anonymous 4's Jacqueline Horner-Kwiatk in April and paired Cantata 4 in May with the Biber Resurrection sonata, featuring Rebecca Harris on violin.

And then, honestly, the list-making breaks down. There are just too many events. Superstar keyboard performers strutted their stuff at Brandywine's Harpsichord Heaven in April. There were Vox Ama Deus, La Fiocco, the Aurelio Ensemble, La Bernardinia, Mélomanie, the five college collegiums—Penn, Temple, Rutgers-Camden,

West Chester, and Curtis—and more, more, more. Thirty-five groups play early music in this area, at a conservative estimate, and it seemed like they all put on shows last spring. The house concerts. The debuts-in-planning.

Almost anyplace else, this would be a festival. But in Philadelphia, it's early-music business as usual. And there's no reason to think that Philadelphia early music is peaking, or even close.

THE BEGINNING OF NOW

It didn't come from nowhere, exactly. Philadelphia had its moments early on, in the 1920s and 1930s. But in the '60s and '70s, when things were hopping in Europe, Boston, and New York, Philadelphia apparently was taking a little snooze. When soprano Baird arrived in 1978, straight from Stanford and singing in the Waverley Consort, she was impressed by Philadelphia's historic district.

But, Baird says, "I was a bit puzzled by the lack of interest in early music. One group auditioned me in some Bach arias and the accompanying obbligato

instrumentalist played a flugelhorn, which astonished me." She built a huge international career, but she's always lived here and sings constantly with Philadelphia groups.

In those early years, "I was often the lone voice asking for more blend and less vibrato in the sound, for Philadelphia was a city in which the 'operatic voice' was prized."

Soon, strong figures emerged to get early music going in Philadelphia. In 1971, Mary Anne Ballard started a Collegium Musicum at the University of Pennsylvania. It would be the city's most visible early-music entity for more than a decade and include many of the figures who would continue to shape the scene: Joan Kimball and Robert Wiemken (Piffaro), Gwyn Roberts (Piffaro and Tempesta di Mare), and Baird herself. In the bicentennial year, 1976, Elissa Berardi, recorder and flute player and a student of New York Pro Musica's Shelley Gruskin, and harpsichordist and maker Bruce Bekker founded the baroque ensemble Philomel.

The community was tiny, but tenacious. Harpsichordist Kim Heindel took the bull by the horns in 1984 and put together the Philadelphia Baroque Orchestra. Almost every musician had to be brought in from out of town, though, and they were heavily committed elsewhere. After juggling his schedule with Tafelmusik's and so on, Heindel let it go.

"There was a lot of disappointment," he says now, "but I just didn't see any alternative. It was before its time, really."

Early music continued to gather strength. Kimball and Wiemken split off from Ballard's Penn Collegium in 1980 and Piffaro, then called the Philadelphia Renaissance Wind Band, was born. Steady performing in the city and on tour allowed them to discover and fine-tune ways to engage audiences in 14th- to 16th-century repertoire.

It also revealed the limitations of the cranky '70s-era historic instrument reproductions everybody used back then. Early on, Piffaro began the long process of upgrading the shawms, dulcians, and bagpipes they play on, working closely with instrument makers to approach the performance standards of originals.

As for baroque music, Philomel developed an ambitious series schedule and a strong and loyal audience, and began bringing in important guest artists, including Baird in a series of collaborations that would continue for years. Philomel's Cynthia Roberts and Allen Whear went abroad to retool in the Netherlands, as did Roberts, then with Piffaro.

When they all returned in the 1990s, it was to a growing and maturing early-music population. The time seemed ripe for another try at a baroque orchestra.



This one almost worked. Sponsored by the Bach Festival of Philadelphia, organized by Mary Anne Ballard, it was composed almost entirely of local players, save for concertmaster Stanley Ritchie. It premiered in 1991 and is remembered with fondness, but when Ballard moved away from Philadelphia during the second season, it folded. The Bach Festival's director, Michael Korn, had never been completely convinced about period performance—"It's the music, not the instruments," he told a *Philadelphia Inquirer* reporter—and the Bach Festival quickly went back to modern.

It was a minor setback. The pace was quickening. Interest increased, players moved in, local players mentored new players, and modern players retooled. In 1993, an appearance by Piffaro at the German festival Tage Alter Musik Regensburg led to a recording contract with Deutsche Grammophon Gesellschaft Archiv and international recognition. They began regular tours abroad, along with a busy national schedule.

Players met each other in pit bands and choruses around the Delaware Valley. They attended events like Baird's early-music weeks at Rutgers University-Camden in 1990 and 1991, the Athenaeum for early music. Some of the out-of-town-ers attending, such as violinist Daniel Elyar, eventually came back to stay. News of Philadelphia spread. Amherst Early Music started holding Winter Weekends at Penn. Attending a Madison Early Music summer festival, Texan-Chicagoan violinist Edmond Chan met Piffaro and Tempesta di Mare. A year later, he moved here and was playing.

"Going into the '90s, we felt a growing supportive professional community," says Piffaro's Wiemken. "And a growing audience, too. The audience continued to expand early on, which fuelled a sense of home base and home crowd."

Funders played a large part in helping early music grow. The city's Philadelphia Cultural Fund and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts provided major support to groups for many years, and the National Endowment for the Arts was receptive when it could be. Private foundations have been very generous: the Presser Foundation, the William Penn Foundation, Fels, the Musical Fund Society, and the Pew Center for Arts and Heritage. They allow Philadelphians to show what they can do with "what if" projects, such as Piffaro's "East Meets West" in 2011, which followed the curious travels of Old World Spanish music in the New World.

Somewhere around Y2K, Philadelphia turned the corner from "could be" to "arrived." When Roberts and lutenist Richard Stone established the baroque orchestra Tempesta di Mare in 2002, with Emlyn Ngai as concertmaster, the structure was in place for the new group to grow quickly to orchestral size and gather a steady roster of musicians who were, increasingly, Philadelphians. Tempesta was immediately able to focus on work they'd been dying to do, like rediscovering lost repertoire by Johann Friedrich Fasch and Johann Gottlieb Janitsch and more of what Stone calls "the best baroque music you've never heard."

If you're looking for a symbol for the new Philadelphia early music, you might find it in a show in the 2015-16 season recognizing a high-water mark in 17th-century music: Dresden in 1619. It's a project that requires a rarified skill set, the sort of thing that not long ago would have demanded shipping in a gaggle of specialists. But instead, it'll be an inside job, bringing together Piffaro, Tempesta di Mare, and Choral Arts Philadelphia—locally sourced, just like the high-end restaurants. Watch out, *Travel + Leisure*. Here comes the next big early-music town.



COMING OF AGE

In 2013, after forty years of gradual building, Philadelphia has achieved early-music critical mass. New players are moving in, players who've been here all along are staying and making new connections, and players who left the city are finding ways to move back.

In fact, they seem to populate certain neighborhoods en masse. "I played with Tempesta once," says Piffaro's Priscilla Herreid, "and most of the people in the

Along with Bach Collegium, Choral Arts, Tempesta di Mare, Piffaro, and the redoubtable Vox Ama Deus, which at thirty years of age is a steady employer of period musicians, there are the smaller groups, stand-alone events, ad hoc groups, and startups. And there's the significant population of churches that keep highly skilled choirs and assemble orchestras on a regular basis, such as First Presbyterian Church right off Rittenhouse Square, Chestnut Hill Presbyterian, St. Clement's, St. Mark's, and Bryn Mawr Presbyterian.

community—Piffaro, Baird, Tempesta di Mare (which gets grandfathered in because Roberts is an '80s alum).

The class of '15 doesn't seem to be rushing in to set up the new establishment of tomorrow, however. La Bernardinia, in Center City, is perfectly happy to remain a "mom and pop" indefinitely. "We don't have a complicated financial structure, but we get to play regularly and we love bringing other folks in to try out repertoire," says gambist Donna Fournier, a long-time player in many groups in the area.

A surprising number of colleagues, both veteran and starting out, agree. Maybe the recent global financial disaster makes people gun shy, and for good reason. It took its toll in Philadelphia. Philomel, after thirty years, ceased operations during that period.

The time will come, of course, when some of them will throw their hats in the ring and gear up for the kind of big projects that need traditional structure and support.

But for now, musicians are reveling in each other's musical company. The city is awesome, the food is wonderful, gigs are plentiful, and "it's a fabulous life," says bassist and gambist Heather Miller Lardin, former director of NYS Baroque in Ithaca, who recently moved back to Philadelphia.

"It's so exciting," she says. "I have days when I know at the end of the day I'm going to go and rehearse a Bach cantata and then next week it'll be Rameau. And in between I'll teach bass and coach a consort and maybe grab some friends to plan a show. The fact that this is where this sort of thing happens—that's why I wanted to be here."

And then she got back to work.



group live in South Philadelphia and just walk to work. You look behind you on the sidewalk and you see a baroque orchestra walking over to rehearse. It's so cool."

"What I find most exciting," says Bach Festival and Choral Arts Philadelphia director Matthew Glandorf, "is that we have a real community of excellent period instrumentalists and historically informed singers. Having that community of folks is the most important ingredient and by far the biggest boon for our city."

Glandorf's Bach@7 Cantata Series, a co-project of the Bach Festival and Choral Arts started in 2013, is one of these new opportunities, with the new Bach Collegium at the Curtis Institute of Music as its house band. It has a lot of familiar faces.

Having a group that plays together all the time makes a difference in what you hear on stage, says Tempesta di Mare's Roberts. "When people play together on a regular basis in different contexts, they start to have a common language," she says. "I think there's a thing here we can almost call a Philadelphia sound—at least in baroque playing. It's about a certain ensemble sense and way of playing that is not just about that particular ensemble or its name, but about the scene that has developed here."

What's happening today in Philadelphia is reminiscent of what happened in the '80s: excitement, friendship, lots of playing, lots of good music. You have to wonder what the long-term ramifications will be. After all, the Class of '80 produced figures who are now pillars of the

