

# EARLY MUSIC

## IN THE HOUSE



Photo by Lisa Terry

Homestay host Nancy Wright surprised her guest, cellist-gambist Lisa Terry, with gifts on her birthday.

By ANNE SCHUSTER HUNTER

Homestays are key components of the field

Life on the road. It's the stuff of rock 'n' roll legend: town after town, show after show, homesick regrets, your sweetie on your mind. But rockers don't have an exclusive on the itinerant lifestyle. Pretty much every day of the year, early-music specialists are traveling. They're heading to gigs, workshops, and tours all over America and beyond. They're buying second tickets for cellos, arguing with flight attendants about stashing sackbuts in the overhead, stuck in traffic jams on I-95, I-90, I-405, and I-495 with a hatchback full of theorbo.

At the end of their journeys, however, early-music artists are spared the archetypal rock 'n' roll fleabag motel with flickering neon out the window and brawls in the hallway. What's usually waiting for gambists, lutenists, and baroque violinists, thanks to the goodwill of early-music supporters, is a comfortable bed in someone's well-kept home.

Simply put, early music runs on homestays. Practically every early-music group and every early-music presenter in the U. S. and Canada relies on local supporters and fans to open their doors and provide lodging, *gratis*, to out-of-towners.

They can be oases for the weary traveler, according to Debra Nagy, artistic director of Cleveland-based Les Délices and principal oboe of the Handel and Haydn Society: "If there's a place you can go which you know and can go to time and time again, where you understand the rhythm and your hosts, and you care about them and they care about you, and you've created a symbiosis that doesn't drain your energy, there can be stability and predictability, and that's a beautiful thing."

Homestay hosts are more or less invisible to audiences, except as named among "volunteers" in concert programs, but they provide a major portion of the complex operation that has made early music the vital and exciting force it has become.

Musicians are the stars of American early music. But homestay hosts are unsung heroes. Without homestays, America's vibrant early-music activity would be much diminished.

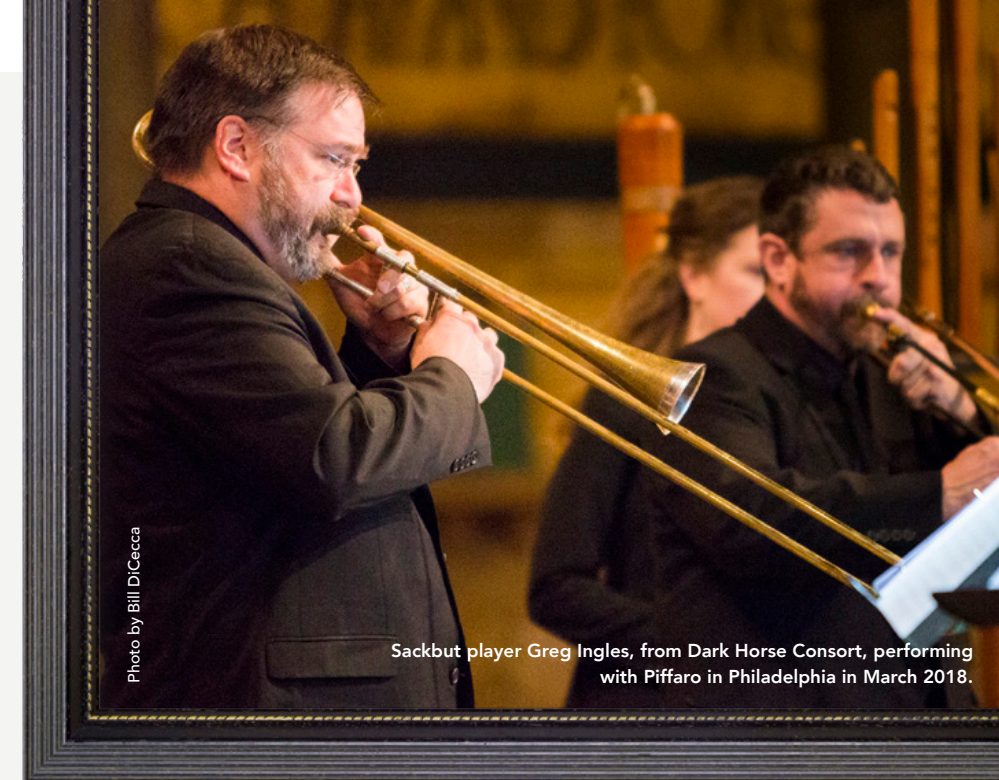


Photo by Bill DiCecca

Sackbut player Greg Ingles, from Dark Horse Consort, performing with Piffaro in Philadelphia in March 2018.

Homestays are such an unquestioned part of early music that even those who have offered them for years don't really know much about what other providers do or why they do it.

As it turns out, homestays vary greatly in length and accommodations. Musicians may need a place to stay as brief as an overnight or as long as—for an opera production—several weeks. Spaces may be as modest as a spare room, a home office with furniture shoved aside, or the room a child left to go off to college. There are grander homestays

out there, too, in Main Line mansions and the occasional 21st-century architectural showpiece.

People become hosts for reasons as varied as the lodgings they offer. Some are already deeply involved in the music of a particular group and eager to learn more about their own organization or others the musicians work with.

Some enjoy showing their area off to people they admire. Hawaii Early Music has brought in an impressive series of groups for concerts and workshops over the years and shares its tropical paradise by arranging homestays in Kona, near the beach. "We've got a reputation for really treating groups with the traditional *aloha*," says HEM's Ian Capps, singer, public radio host, and retired media executive.

And some get to meet personal heroes. A veritable *Who's Who* of stars like the Flanders Recorder Quartet, Quicksilver, and members of Anonymous 4 have trooped through the spare rooms of North America over the years. "I like to joke that our guest room absorbs musicianship," says law professor Deborah Malamud, who hosts in Manhattan with her partner and fellow singer, Neil Plotkin, a retired computer administrator. "We like to think some comes back to us!"



Ciamarella (Jason Yoshia, Aki Nishiguchi, Rotem Gilbert, Adam Gilbert, Malachi Komanoff Bandy) in the Kono district on the Big Island of Hawaii.



Photo by Jon Snyder

Tempesta di Mare percussionist Michelle Humphreys and host Larry Lindsay, an attorney, in the Kimball Street Community Garden in Philadelphia.

Once started, many people continue offering homestays for years or decades. Some guests who've moved on to other groups or other lives keep up friendships with their former hosts, staying in touch about children, family, accomplishments ("She just finished her CD! I'm so proud! Here's the link!" says a homestay provider).

One thing guests and hosts have in common is the belief that homestays are essential to the ongoing health and vitality of early music. And they're right.



Homestay makes early-music travel possible. And early music has to travel.

American early music's player population, while growing, is still stretched thin over a very big country. Virtually no American city has sufficient numbers of local early-music specialists to fill a roster. Not even strings are immune to the scarcity of early-music expertise, but baroque winds are in particularly high demand. Bassoonist and multi-instrumentalist Anna Marsh, for instance, has spent as many as 200 days a year in jobs away from home.

People who play the rarest instruments are, not surprisingly, rare. "The more esoteric it gets, for example, if you do Renaissance winds or vielle consorts, the more you have to pull people from different cities together," says Greg Ingles, sackbut player and multi-instrumentalist. Members of his Dark Horse Consort, specialists in 17th-century brass, don't even live in the same time zones when they're at home.

Meanwhile, with fees as modest as they are, constructing a full-time professional career requires almost all players to freelance with several—or many—organizations, bouncing from group to group over the course of every year.

And then there's touring, which allows audiences around the country to sample early-music flavors from elsewhere and helps regional groups establish a national presence. Touring brings Blue Heron to West Virginia, Musica Pacifica to Austin, Ciaramella to Honolulu, and so on.

Add to that the desire for challenge that drives people into this field in the first place and the creative affinities that draw colleagues together even when they

live hundreds or thousands of miles apart, and, all told, you get a massive heap of frequent flyer miles.

If you consider early music as a large and growing entity, then homestays are one of its essential weight-bearing supports. Administrators say hotel lodging for a small group of, say, five to ten players offering a local series of four to five programs a year would easily cost \$20,000. Organizations with a large musician roster like Apollo's Fire, which relies heavily on homestays for out-of-towners, estimate the amount to be greater than \$100,000.

That's real money for many music groups. Without the support homestays provide, they would have to offer fewer, less varied programs with smaller ensembles, less challenging repertoire, less incentive for young musicians to join the field, just—basically—less. And if the sum that homestays represent did, miraculously, fall from the sky one day, self-respecting groups would never in good conscience spend it on lodging when it could go to program expenses or artist fees—not if a comparable alternative is available.



But are homestays, in fact, comparable? Hotels remain a recurrent fantasy on the early-music travel circuit. As private, anonymous places to creep away to after a long day's work, the idea of hotel rooms exerts a strong draw. And to know that chamber ensembles, such as string quartets, are staying in hotels when early-music groups on the exact same series stay in homestays can seem just plain mean. This happens because fee structures aren't fair; a string quartet is smaller than some early-music groups, and, yes, on occasion they are paid more.

And it's true that not every homestay is great. There are plenty of stories out there about bad homestays involving unreasonable expectations or conflicting personal boundaries between guest and host; sleeping arrangements that are fine for millennials but not for boomers; malfunctioning home security systems; dogs. These stories are the folk legends of the early-music trade.

But homestays and hotels aren't really a fair comparison. They're like apples and oranges: they each have their ups and downs. The Ritz-Carlton is a totally appropriate object of fantasy, but reality would far more likely be a Holiday Inn Express miles away with a bachelorette party next door starting shot games at 3 a.m.

And when homestays work, they work. Over and over, musicians tell of how much homestays mean to them. Just the basics are deeply appreciated: a comfortable bed, temperature control, the Wi-Fi password, space in the refrigerator, a dependable way to get in and out of the house, the sense that adults are in the vicinity who know where you are and care about your well-being—the latter invaluable when a guest needs help in a far-from-home crisis like car trouble, a broken tooth, or illness.

And then there are the extras. Hosts, and getting to know them, can provide musician guests with real insight into what their audiences are thinking. Plus,

early-music homestay hosts are often exceptionally nice people who lead interesting lives. Retired engineer Neil Seely, for example, and Liz Neureiter-Seely, a professor of languages and both gambists and recorder players, provide homestays in Rochester, NY, where Neil has designed and built beautiful wooden pull toys—a delightful diversion for a musician guest coming home after a hard day's work.

Degrees of sociability can differ between different guests and hosts or even the same guests and hosts at different times, although simple cordiality is, of course, *de rigueur* for everyone. There's an incredibly wide range, from sharing a periodic glass of wine or a couple of minutes with the family in front of the Academy Awards to shared meals and celebratory brunches and even to vacationing together.

Some homestay guests and hosts have been part of each other's lives for years. Hosts like Miriam Indenbaum and Wilfredo Rodriguez, psychologists in Philadelphia, and violinist Emlyn Ngai, who's guested with them for 16 years, have known each other since everybody's children were little. "We have this other unusual connection to another person's

life in addition to the portion we share by hosting a musician," says Indenbaum. "It's a fun thing."

Making those matches and finding the right chemistry between guest and host can be an art form in itself. Most organizers who are themselves musicians and long-time homestay veterans get really good at it; they also keep close, ongoing tabs to be sure that everything's running smoothly—and have no compunction about knocking questionable stay sites off the list or dropping musicians who are not good guests.

But basic relationship smarts is really what makes homestays succeed, people say. If all parties allow the household to keep operating smoothly and adjust meal and practice schedules accordingly, keep an appropriate level of tidiness, remain sensitive to when guest or hosts want company or to blow off steam or to be left alone, and provide a periodic "thank you" (within reason), they may have truly made music together.



A rich vein of idealism has run through early music from its modern beginnings, some say, during the hippie years of the '60s and '70s—a sense that

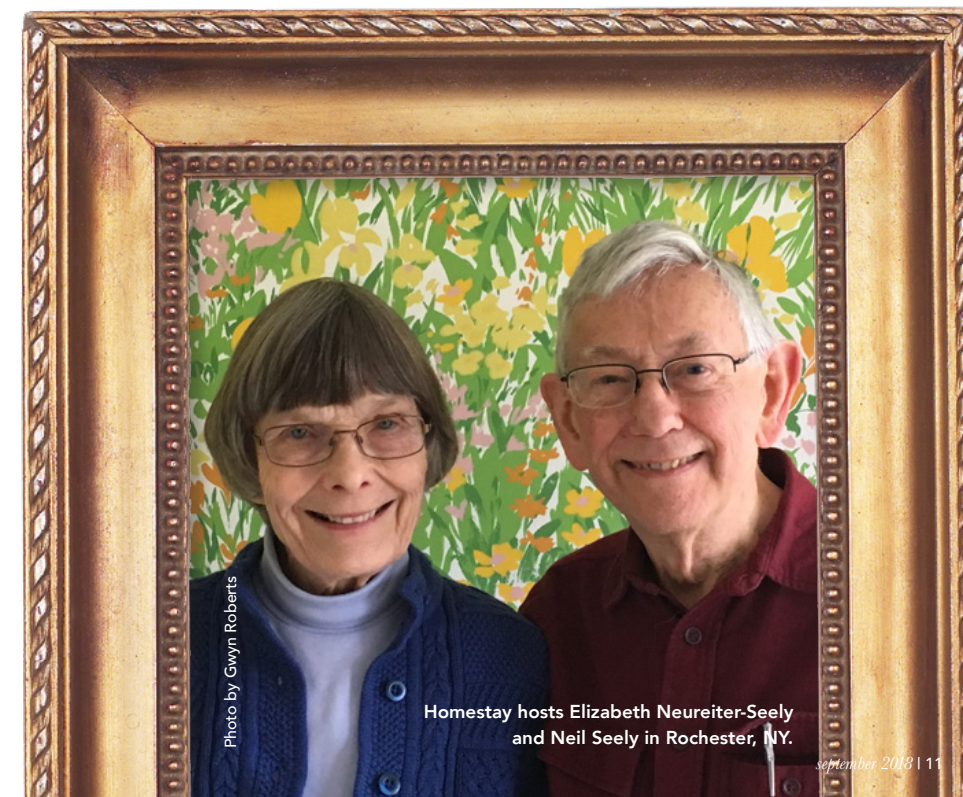


Photo by Gwyn Roberts

Homestay hosts Elizabeth Neureiter-Seely and Neil Seely in Rochester, NY.

the early-music world is fairer, perhaps, and more egalitarian than the world outside. After all, homestay providers have space and love music, and musicians have music and need space: “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs,” as written by Karl Marx—the political theorist, not the composer.



“It seems embedded in the whole idea, doesn’t it?” says Neureiter-Seely, the Rochester host. Like many homestay providers, the Seelys are involved in music-making activities organized by groups like the American Recorder Society and the Viola da Gamba Society of America, in which musicians of all degrees of expertise co-exist in harmony, as do homestay guests and hosts. “It’s so democratic, just like polyphonic music: everybody gets to play a melody part,” she says.

“We couldn’t do it without the hosts, and the hosts become part of the community,” says Deborah Fox, lutenist and director of upper New York State’s Pegasus Early Music and NYS Baroque. “They come to concerts and bring friends and make financial donations, the community builds, and then we can do more concerts. So it’s about necessity, but it’s also about community. They go nicely together.”

Some communities have made their local early-music organization a real focus of civic cooperation. A number of neighbors in Philadelphia around Tempesta di Mare’s offices, for instance, take local participation seriously: they founded a community garden in a vacant lot, champion a public park, and, almost 20 years ago, started providing homestays for Tempesta.

“I think it’s really warming,” says one of their guests, Ngai, concertmaster of

Tempesta. “I think it’s in a way civil. It pulls the arts and daily life together, intertwining them at the most basic level. It becomes much more than the sum of its parts.”

At a time when large, old music organizations like orchestras are searching to find new ways to connect with audiences and communities, early music may have something to teach them. At some point, early music may outgrow its homestays. For the sake of the movement’s maturity and stability, that would be a gain. But if homestays went away, there would be losses, too.

“We’ve had so many positive experiences,” says art historian and neighborhood activist Carla Puppini, one of the Philadelphia hosts. “You meet wonderful people, and sometimes they rehearse or practice in the house and you have all this wonderful music coming through.”

And that’s a beautiful thing.

*Anne Schuster Hunter is a writer, art historian, and teacher of creative writing in Philadelphia, where she has provided many early-music homestays. One of her fondest memories is listening to Grammy Award-winning tenor Aaron Sheehan making coffee in the kitchen and talking to her cat.*



Photo by Anna Lewinbart

Pegasus Early Music

The *Lyra*  
BAROQUE ORCHESTRA  
Jacques Ogg  
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Twin Cities, MN  
LYRABAROQUE.ORG

H. F. Grabenstein  
Bowmaker

Renaissance  
Baroque  
Modern

Williston, VT 05495  
(802) 872-8923  
www.hfgbowmaker.com

**Lost in Time Press**

New works and arrangements for recorder ensemble

Compositions by  
Frances Blaker  
Paul Ashford  
Oregon Coast Recorder Society  
Harold Owen  
and others . . .

Inquiries  
Corlu Collier  
PMB 309  
2226 N Coast Hwy  
Newport, OR 97365  
www.lostintimepress.com  
corlu@actionnet.net



**Fall Texas Toot  
Nov 16-18, 2018**

Enjoy a weekend of classes and ensemble playing for viols, voice, recorders, lute, harp, and more, in the beautiful Piney Woods of East Texas! The best parts: wonderful music, seeing friends old and new, enjoying the fresh air, and after-hours activities. Please join us for an early music (and more!) workshop experience.

Danny Johnson, workshop director; Susan Richter, administrator. Faculty, classes, and more info will be on the Website in late October:

<http://www.toot.org> or email [info@toot.org](mailto:info@toot.org)

Mark your calendar – the 20<sup>th</sup> Summer Toot is coming in early June 2019!

*Les Voix Humaines*  
Consort of Viols & Nigel North, lute

On tour : Dowland’s Lachrimae  
Booking : [info@lesvoixhumaines.org](mailto:info@lesvoixhumaines.org)  
[www.lesvoixhumaines.org](http://www.lesvoixhumaines.org)