

Early Music Consortium and Radio Station Collaborate in Regional Early Music Festival

What could be more gratifying to early music enthusiasts than five hours of continuous mini-concerts of Medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque music with a chance to visit with the hosts of a local classical radio station and participate in a "petting zoo" of early strings and winds, all amidst a beautifully landscaped sculpture park?

Such were the delights offered on a Sunday October afternoon when the **Guild for Early Music** (www.guildforearlymusic.org), which serves central New Jersey and central-eastern Pennsylvania, presented its fourth Early Music Festival, an afternoon of concerts in the museum building of **Grounds For Sculpture** in Hamilton, New Jersey. Regional ensembles, including professional, semi-professional, and amateur, performed short concerts, often demonstrating instruments and giving audiences a chance to pick up concert announcements and buy CDs.

The theme for this year's festival was "Myths and Legends," and free tours of the sculpture park featuring works on these themes were offered throughout the afternoon. Musical works reflecting myths and legends included "Clio" from the J.K.F. Fischer harpsichord suite played by Janet Palumbo, director of Le Triomphe de L'Amour; Boismortier's "Il Pastor Fido" suite played by the trio sonata ensemble, Gloria Consort; Giovanelli's "Ero cosi dicea," evoking the legend of Hero and Leander, played by the viola da gamba consort La Spirita; and "Como Poden" from the *Cantigas of Santa Maria*, which retells one of the Marian miracles, performed by the Engelchor Consort with voice, vielles, recorders, and percussion. Thanks to the imagination of Mary Benton, the "Early Instrument Petting Zoo" gave audience members a chance to try out viols, recorders, and more exotic wind instruments, such as the "lizard" in the wind band Spectra Musica.

At this year's event, "The Classical Network" **WWFM** (www.wwfm.org) was present in full force. As an official media sponsor of the event, the station aired announcements in the weeks leading up to the Festival. Allan Kelly, host of *Distant Mirror*, the station's weekly program of Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque recordings, spent the afternoon at the Festival meeting many of his devoted listeners. His



fans are not only local, but span the country, listening by streaming through WWFM's web site, where *Distant Mirror* shows may be heard at any time via webcasts. The master of ceremonies each year has been the intrepid morning host of WWFM, Bliss Michelson, who is also a busy bassist with regional orchestras. Alice Weiss, the station's program director, broadcast part of the station's October 19th morning show from the venue, including interviews with several of the performers. Much of this collaboration was the brainchild of Heidi Jamieson, WWFM's underwriting and development manager, who saw the opportunity for mutual support between the musicians, the station, and Grounds For Sculpture.

Participants in the 2008 and other recent festivals have included the Medieval ensemble Armonia, the Renaissance groups Engelchor Consort, Delaware River Consort (an a cappella quartet), and La Spirita viol quintet, Mostly Motets vocal ensemble, and the performing group of the Princeton Recorder Society, a chapter of the American Recorder Society. Baroque ensembles included Le Triomphe de L'Amour, Practitioners of Music, La Fiocco, and Musica Dolce. During some festivals, loud bands, such as Trenton Early Brass, have performed outdoors among the sculptures.

The Guild was founded in 2004 to facilitate cooperation among the area's many early music ensembles: collaborating on programs, coordinating concert calendars, finding new venues, and developing audiences. The Guild is centered in Mercer County, NJ (which includes Princeton and Trenton), and Bucks County, PA, just across the Delaware River, as well as contiguous counties on both sides of the river. It includes



Petting Zoo: Emily Delia tries Amy Warren's bass viol.

on its website a calendar of local concerts by its members and by visiting ensembles from NYC, Philadelphia, and other well-known centers of early music performance. The website also lists area teachers, performers, and providers of services such as instrument sales and repair. During the 2008-09 season, the Guild is presenting a series of free family programs (Colonial, Renaissance, and Medieval) as part of its educational outreach activities.

Grounds For Sculpture, (www.groundsfor Sculpture.org) is a world-class outdoor and indoor museum on 35 acres with over 250 contemporary sculptures in its collection. The staff, including Bonnie Brown, community and patron relations manager, and Rena Perrone, event coordinator, have welcomed the Guild and the radio station as part of the park's varied schedule of events. As John Burkhalter, director of Practitioners of Musick, says, "The Muses have been well pleased" by our music and our enthusiastic audiences.

The fifth festival of the Guild for Early Music is scheduled for Sunday, October 25, 2009.

—Judith Klotz