



Date: July 27, 2026

Press release, FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

It is with immense sadness that The Boston Camerata, its Artistic Director, Musicians, Staff and Board announce the death of Joel Cohen (1942-2026) on July 26 in Haverhill, Ma.

A charismatic leader, he directed the Camerata from 1963 to 2008. His talents as a musician, conductor, composer and musicologist, along with his unique programming style, brought the Camerata renown in the United States, as well as in Europe and Asia. Throughout his career he promoted the performance of earlier styles and historically informed performance practices. As a lutenist, he accompanied numerous artists, ranging from Hugues Cuénod and Christiane Jacottet to Anne Azéma, his long time partner and collaborator. He appeared as a guest conductor at La Monnaie in Brussels, at Tanglewood, and in Aix-en-Provence, as well as at numerous international Festivals.

Joel's immense talent brought Medieval and Renaissance music to a wide, non-specialist audience. He created fresh, energetic approaches to the performance of Medieval French, Provençal, and Iberian monody, with particular attention to the relationship between text and music. His forays into Baroque repertoire have been more episodic, but attracted widespread comment and attention, especially the first early-instruments recording of Purcell's *"Dido and Aeneas"* (Harmonia Mundi, 1980), *"Jewish Baroque Music"* (Harmonia Mundi, 1978) and a well-received recording of Jean Gilles' *"Requiem"* (Erato, 1990), among others. From 1986 forward, many of his new Eurocentric projects dealt with music of the Middle Ages and narratives, including a medieval retelling of the *"Tristan and Iseult"* legend (Erato, Grand Prix du Disque, 1987), *"Le Roman de Fauvel"* (1990), and *"Le Voir-Dit"* (2011).

Very early in his career he contributed to the rediscovery and reevaluation of early American source material, and, via performance and many recordings, placed the American works in a context and continuity with early European music. In 2004, Cohen and the Finnish choreographer Tero Saarinen collaborated in the creation of a dance piece, *"Borrowed Light,"* using live Shaker music. This production toured extensively in Finland, France, Germany, Austria, England, Sweden, Italy, Australia, New Zealand and the United States. In his later years, he continued to create positive environments for interchange and collaboration among European-trained and Middle Eastern musicians and researchers. In recent seasons, Joel Cohen had been a noted narrator to several of The Boston Camerata's new programs - *"The Night's Tale"*, *"Le Voir-Dit"*, *"City of Fools"*, or reprises like *"Tristan."* He had released over fifty recordings on the Erato, Nonesuch, and Harmonia Mundi labels.

Joel devoted himself with equal energy to his work as a lecturer and commentator for French and American radio and television. His program notes and essays are numerous and most informative, exploring the social and cultural context of the works presented. His love for music was equally matched in his later years by his deep interest for and talent in uncovering and collecting early prints and drawings.

Among the many honors he received are:

- the Erwin Bodky Award
- the Harvard University Signet Society Medal
- the Howard Mayer Brown Award for lifetime achievement in early music
- Georges Longy Award
- the American Critics' Circle
- the Grand Prix du Disque
- the Edison Prize
- the title of Officier des Arts et des Lettres.

By his trailblazing and pioneer work, Joel Cohen helped create a field and joyfully opened paths for several generations of musicians.

A memorial service will be announced at a later date.

The Boston Camerata
Anne Azéma, Musicians, Staff and Board

A more complete bio is available here: <https://bostoncamerata.org/about/joel-cohen/>



Photo credit: Boston Globe

For more information:

Dagny von Mering, communications@bostoncamerata.org