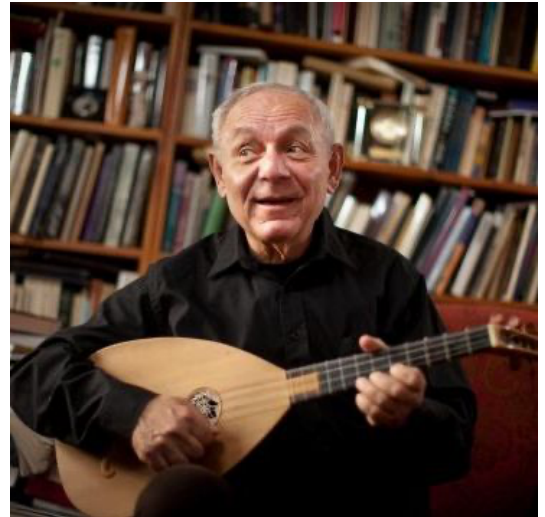


July 2026

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 26 July 2026 in Haverhill, MA.

A charismatic leader, Cohen 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 practices of music. As a lutenist, he accompanied numerous artists, including Hugues Cuénod, Christiane Jacottet, and Anne Azéma, his longtime 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.

Cohen'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 and narratives of the Middle Ages, including a retelling of the Tristan and Iseult legend (Erato, Grand Prix du Disque, 1987), *Le Roman de Fauvel* (1990), and *Le Voir-Dit* (2011).



Joel Cohen

Photo Credit: The Boston Globe

Very early in his career, Cohen contributed to the rediscovery and reevaluation of early American source material and through recordings and performance, placed 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 Shaker music. This production toured extensively in Europe (Finland, France, Germany, Austria, England, Sweden, and Italy), Oceania (Australia and 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, Cohen has been a narrator for several of The Boston Camerata's programs – *The Night's Tale*, *Le Voir-Dit*, *City of Fools*, and *Tristan & Iseult*. He has released over fifty recordings on the Erato, Nonesuch, and Harmonia Mundi labels.

Cohen 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 and talent in uncovering and collecting early prints and drawings.

Among the many honors he received are:

- Erwin Bodky Award
- Harvard University Signet Society Medal
- Howard Mayer Brown Award for Lifetime Achievement in Early Music
- Georges Longy Award
- American Critics' Circle
- Grand Prix du Disque
- Edison Prize

- 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 in due course.

The Boston Camerata

Anne Azéma, Musicians, Staff & Board

For questions, please reach out to communications@bostoncamerata.org