

Peter Watchorn – Biography

Peter Watchorn has devoted himself to a study of the harpsichord repertoire, and early music in general, since 1974. His considerable gifts as performer were rewarded in 1985 by the conferring of the *Erwin Bodky Memorial Award*, presented by the *Cambridge Society for Early Music* in conjunction with the *Boston Early Music Festival*

After working with Margaret Lloyd, who nurtured his love for old instruments and music, and Nancy Salas in his native Australia, Peter Watchorn continued his harpsichord studies in Vienna with Isolde Ahlgrimm from 1985 to 1992. He was honoured by being named by Ahlgrimm as her “only successor”, and charged with writing her official biography (*Isolde Ahlgrimm & Vienna’s Early Music Revival*, Ashgate Publishing, published in 2007). He has written the principal scholarly articles about her life and career, documenting an important chapter of Europe’s revival of Early Music performance in the twentieth century. Much of that material may be found on this site. Like his teacher, he has devoted himself to a life-long study of the works of Johann Sebastian Bach, and has performed and recorded much of that repertoire. His recent acquisition of a pedal harpsichord by Hubbard & Broekman, Boston, has led to a specialized study of a medium that was well-known to Bach, and which effectively bridges the gap between the organ and harpsichord literature.

As co-director (with Julian Wachner) of the *Boston Bach Ensemble* (resident at Boston University from 1992-1999), a thirty-voice specialist choir and period instrument orchestra, he has made an outstanding contribution to the performance of Bach’s choral and instrumental music in Boston. With this ensemble he has performed the complete motets and several cantatas. He and Julian Wachner have also produced an acclaimed recording of Bach’s *Christmas Oratorio* (Titanic Ti-258). Peter Watchorn was awarded the *Doctor of Musical Arts* degree in Historical Performance from Boston University in 1995 and elected to the National Music Honour Society, *Phi Kappa Lambda*.

Watchorn’s skills in performing and improvising on organ and harpsichord are outstanding, and he has long enjoyed an international reputation as concert and recording artist. He has made numerous appearances throughout the USA and Europe as well as being a featured artist in the *Melbourne Autumn Festival* in 1984 and 1999 in his native country. During a thirty year career, he has performed with many distinguished musicians including Max van Egmond (baritone), Peter Matzka (violin), Emlyn Ngai (violin), Georg Nigl (baritone), Herwig Tachezi (baroque cello), Salvatore Accardo (violin), Stanley Ritchie (violin), Barthold Kuijken (baroque flute), Kate Clark (baroque flute), Fenwick Smith (flute), Peter Sykes (harpsichord), Owen Watkins (recorder and baroque oboe), Gonzalo Ruiz (baroque oboe), James O. Bolyard (bassoon and dulcian), Saskia Coolen (recorder), Genevieve Lacy (recorder), Sir Charles Mackerras (conductor) and Dame Janet Baker (mezzo-soprano). In addition to his position as Artistic Director of the *Boston Bach Ensemble* he has performed regularly with *The Handel & Haydn Society*, *Concerto Armonico, Wien* (co-directed with Peter Matzka), *The Publick Musick* (Rochester, NY), *Emmanuel Music* (Boston) and *The Washington Bach Consort*. He was harpsichordist to the *Sydney Symphony Orchestra* for ten years (1977-1987).

For many years (1992-1998) Peter Watchorn was a staff member of the *Baroque Performance Institute* at Oberlin Conservatory, America's longest-running summer Early Music program. He was tutor of harpsichord and chamber music at Mather House, *Harvard University* from 1991-2000.

Peter Watchorn is co-founder and a principal board member of *Musica Omnia*, an award-winning record label created in 2000 to promote awareness of historically informed musical performance from every era. He has served as principal producer, as well as performing artist, for recordings by many musicians, including Max van Egmond (baritone), Jaap Schröder (violin), Penelope Crawford (fortepiano), Emlyn Ngai (violin), Sally Pinkas (piano), Saskia Coolen (recorder) and Margriet Tindemans (viola da gamba).

In 2000, Watchorn's reputation as a Bach exponent of outstanding ability led to an invitation from Robert Levin to record three solo harpsichord cds for the recent best-selling *Edition Bachakademie*: a 172 cd collection documenting all the works of J. S. Bach. His discography also includes a well-received set of discs devoted to Tudor and Jacobean keyboard music as well as the first volumes in a series which will eventually encompass the entire solo, chamber and concerted harpsichord output of J. S. Bach.

Since 1998, Peter Watchorn has served as Organist and Music Director of *St. Mary of the Hills* parish in Milton, MA, building a strong music program with a choir of thirty voices. He was also Australian representative and, later, a member of the staff of *Hubbard Harpsichords, Inc.* for many years and is an experienced and internationally recognized harpsichord builder. He is a member of the *American Guild of Organists*.

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