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## Early Music Fest celebrates 10 years with astronomy-inspired concerts

Lindsay Christians

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The members of the Venere Lute Quartet, (from left) Christopher Morrongiello, Phillip Rukavina, Gail Gillispie and Douglas Freundlich, will play an all-new program of lute music from Galileo's family on July 17. They will spend a week in residence at the Madison Early Music Festival. - File photo

Care to learn the lute? Always dreamt of playing the krumhorn? Hoping to polish up your recorder skills or master a few madrigals?

Aspiring musicians and Renaissance enthusiasts can enjoy and practice the music of the 15th through 17th centuries for a full week at the upcoming Madison Early Music Festival (MEMF), which celebrates its 10th anniversary this month and begins Saturday, July 11.

"The first couple years we were just trying to see what would happen and if it would work," said baritone Paul Rowe, who founded the festival with his wife, soprano Cheryl Rowe, and arts administrator Chelcy Bowles. "Who would've thought we'd get here?"

The festival explores Renaissance and early Baroque music in a series of workshops, performances and lectures, held at Mills Hall and hosted by the UW-Madison School of Music and the Division of Continuing Studies. Visiting artists perform and teach, remaining in residence for about a week.

Performances are open to the public, but what makes the festival special are the workshops. Attendees can take up to five classes a day, and the variety of topics is impressive, from "Polish Music from the Time of Copernicus" and "Marvelous Monteverdi" to "Not Holst: The Planets," "Beginning Harp" and "How Equal Temperament Ruined Harmony (and why you should care)."

This year's festival, titled "Telescopic Vistas: MEMF X and Music of the Spheres," celebrates the International Year of Astronomy. The [Venere Lute Quartet](#), which will visit Madison for the first time, has created a new program of music written by members of Galileo's family.

"The lute was just a hugely popular instrument during the Renaissance," said Phil Rukavina, a St. Paul, Minn.-based musician who plays the bass lute in the quartet (other members are based in Chicago, Boston and New York). "It turns out that Galileo's father, Vincenzo Galilei, was a music theorist and a lutenist," or lute player.

According to the program notes, the concert will include Venere's arrangements of "harmonically adventurous" madrigal vocal music, dances and "a fanciful peek into Vincenzo's 'iPod'... music that Vincenzo absorbed during his formative years."

"Galileo is always thought of in terms of his work in astronomy and getting in trouble with the church," Rukavina said. "But if you can imagine, in that time ... the idea of a string vibrating had some magical powers, with tones and pitches connected to the movement of the planets that they knew about. Music was very representative of astronomical things."

Chris Morrongiello, another member of the quartet, will teach workshops for beginners and more advanced players, Rukavina said. When playing lute, the left hand work is similar to playing modern classical guitar, but the right hand is quite a bit different. It's closer to a folk style.

"It's one of the more complicated instruments to learn," he added. "You can walk down the street and hear recorder players, someone who toots along and it sounds nice. You don't hear many lute players just noodling, because it takes a little more. Chris will teach the simpler pieces in the repertory with the right technique."

As a special treat, students can play alongside their teachers at the end of the week at the All-Festival Concert on Saturday, July 18.

## IF YOU GO

The Madison Early Music Festival celebrates its 10th anniversary with "Telescopic Vistas: MEMF X and Music of the Spheres" from July 11-18. The festival series includes seven concerts, starting on July 11 with [Piffaro](#), The Renaissance Band. All concerts are in Mills Hall in the Mosse Humanities Building, 455 N. Park St. and begin at 7:30 p.m. with a pre-performance lecture at 6:30 p.m. (the only exception is the free MEMF participant concert at 1 p.m. July 17).

Notable performances include the MEMF Faculty Concert, "Celestial Seasonings," on Thursday, July 16, a performance by the Venere Lute Quartet called "The Galilei Project: The Lute Music of Vincenzo Galilei" on July 17 and the All-Festival Concert, "La Pellegrina," on July 18.

Tickets for individual concerts cost \$16, or \$13 for students and seniors. A week-long pass offers a 30 percent savings (\$65/\$55). Buy tickets at the door, online at [arts.wisc.edu](http://arts.wisc.edu) or by calling 265-ARTS (2787).

"Every year it's a complete new combination of instruments and faculty members," said festival marketing director Sarah Marty.

As it enters its 10th year, the Madison Early Music Festival continues to have a wide appeal. It's intergenerational workshops attract a range of people from college students to retired people. Some attend one or two classes, going in to work early or late for the week.

"We've not targeted any particular age group -- we want everybody there. We've been astounded over the years how many people come out," said Chelcy Bowles, a festival co-founder. "The 10th anniversary has meant to me that Madison has really embraced this festival. It's been absolutely critical to our survival."

For more about the festival, visit [madisonearlymusic.org](http://madisonearlymusic.org). For general questions, call 263-6670.