

Classical Music ^[1]

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by Margaret Foote and Wiley J. Williams, 2006

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See also: [Brevard Music Center](#) ^[2]; [Eastern Music Festival](#) ^[3]; [North Carolina Symphony](#) ^[4]; [Opera Houses](#) ^[5].



The North Carolina Symphony performing at the Crown Center Theatre in Fayetteville, North Carolina, March 21, 2012. Image from Flickr user Gerry Dincher.

^[6]Classical Music, which includes a wide variety of traditional and contemporary orchestral and choral pieces, symphonies, and operas, enjoys great popularity in North Carolina, especially in larger metropolitan areas such as [Charlotte](#) ^[7], [Winston-Salem](#) ^[8], [Asheville](#) ^[9], [Greensboro](#) ^[10], and [Raleigh](#) ^[11]. The state's [colleges and universities](#) ^[12], as well as many public and private high schools, have ongoing "serious" musical programs, men's and women's glee clubs, orchestras, and a variety of instrumental and vocal groups. In addition to enjoying classical music by attending performances of orchestras, bands, instrumentalists, or vocalists, North Carolina enthusiasts also turn to radio, television, or sound recordings for entertainment. In the early 2000s numerous [FM stations](#) ^[13], many of them public radio affiliates, served as classical music outlets for their regions and beyond, including [WCQS](#) ^[14] in Asheville, [WTEB](#) ^[15] in New Bern, [WCPE](#) ^[16] in Raleigh, and [WFDD](#) ^[17] in Winston-Salem.

During North Carolina's [colonial](#) ^[18] and [antebellum](#) ^[19] periods, [plantation owners](#) ^[20], religious leaders, and professionals in various fields were the primary purveyors of classical music, with the piano being an essential living room furnishing and singing and vocal groups providing musical entertainment at tea and dinner parties. Among the first North Carolinians to place significance on [instrumental music](#) ^[21] were the [Moravians](#) ^[22], who settled the Piedmont in the mid-eighteenth century. The Moravians of [Salem](#) ^[23] received their first trombones in 1772, and thereafter wind music played a critical role in town life. The Salem Band, which featured flute, clarinet, trumpet, bugle, French horn, bassoon, bass trombone, and bass drum, formally organized in 1831. Brass players from Salem formed the core of the 26th Regimental Band, North Carolina Troops, Confederate States of America. The group performed throughout the [Civil War](#) ^[24] and was present at the Battle of Gettysburg.

Other North Carolina communities encouraged the development of wind bands during the mid-nineteenth century. A special venue for band performances was the [North Carolina State Fair](#) ^[25]. The [Agricultural Society](#) ^[26] hired bands to attract crowds to the inaugural State Fair in 1853. The bands pleased the crowds and became a part of fair tradition for the remainder of the century. The Salisbury Band was a particular favorite in the state fair's early years. Bands from Carthage, Concord, Winston, Raleigh, and Salem performed at later state fairs.

In the postbellum years until the 1890s, North Carolina could be described as culturally unfocused, struggling with the aftereffects of the Civil War, although the construction of "[opera houses](#) ^[5]" in several towns indicated some interest by the middle and lower classes in the shows of traveling actors, bands, and minstrels. Beginning in the 1890s, women began forming groups to promote classical music in their communities. The earliest may have been Greensboro's Coney Club (later the Euterpe Club), organized in 1889. The Reineke Club in Wilmington was organized in 1892, and the Saturday Club in Asheville probably began in 1898. Other such clubs followed, including music clubs in Chapel Hill, Hickory, and Gastonia. Winston-Salem's choral society (renamed the [Thursday Morning Music Club](#) ^[27]) was formed in 1914, as was Raleigh's St. Cecelia Choral Society.

A second and continuing period of the flowering of serious music in North Carolina began in the 1920s. Once again, women's groups, particularly the North Carolina Federation of Music Clubs-which supported classical music by staging performances, training future musicians, and financing research projects-were at the forefront of such efforts. In 1927 the federation's president, Estelle Walker Harper, raised the possibility of a [North Carolina orchestra](#) ^[4]. Returning to the state in 1929, [Lamar Stringfield](#) ^[28]-a North Carolina-born composer, conductor, and flutist who won a Pulitzer Prize in 1928 for his suite, *From the Southern Mountains*-was instrumental in the founding of the [Institute of Folk Music](#) ^[29] at the [University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#) ^[30] to link music, drama, and social science research. Soon he was actively advocating a state orchestra, which became the North Carolina Symphony in 1932-believed to be the first state-supported symphony in the country.

North Carolina's appreciation of classical music continued to grow throughout the twentieth century, a fact reflected by the proliferation of musical organizations, bands, orchestras, and companies throughout the state. The Grass Roots Opera Company (later the National Opera Company) was organized in 1948 in Raleigh by Alfred Johnson Fletcher and his wife Elizabeth Utley Fletcher. Since then, the company has taken both light and grand opera in English translation to countless North Carolina towns, with little costuming and without benefit of scenery. The [North Carolina Opera Company](#) ^[31], founded in 1978, is the educational and touring arm of the Charlotte Opera. Normally limited to in-state tours, its 1980-81 tour of *Porgy and Bess* in four states played to sellout audiences and has been cited as an example of remarkable success in the classical music field, as was its management for "Pavarotti in Concert" on 16 Nov. 2002 at the RBC Center in Raleigh.

North Carolina's largest cities and metropolitan areas are rich in opportunities to enjoy classical music forms. Groups in the Asheville, Winston-Salem, and Greensboro areas are typical of those elsewhere across the state. In addition to the [Asheville Symphony Orchestra](#) ^[32], music organizations in the Asheville area include the Asheville Chamber Music series, Asheville Choral Society, [Brevard Music Center](#) ^[2], Land of the Sky Chorus, and the music department of the [University of North Carolina at Asheville](#) ^[33]. Winston-Salem boasts the [North Carolina School of the Arts](#) ^[34], a unit of the [University of North Carolina System](#) ^[35]. This public institution offers professional training in the performing arts, including music, dance, design and production, drama, filmmaking, visual arts, and general studies. Its Stevens Center, completed in 1983, is used by several organizations, including the Little Symphony of the Winston-Salem Symphony. The city has a chapter of the American Guild of Organists. [Forsyth County](#) ^[36] has two orchestras (Little Symphony and Salem Community Orchestra), the Piedmont Chamber Singers, the Piedmont Opera Theatre, the Winston-Salem Community Band, and the Winston-Salem Piedmont Triad Symphony.

Greensboro's principal classical music organizations include the [Bel Canto Company](#) ^[37], an adult professional ensemble; the [Eastern Music Festival](#) ^[3], which presents more than 60 concerts in summer by professionals and talented students from around the world at the [Guilford College](#) ^[38] Campus and other locations; and the [Greensboro Opera Company](#) ^[39], which offers opera in the original language with English subtitles performed by local and professional artists. Other Greensboro groups include the [Greensboro Oratorio Society](#) ^[40], the [Greensboro Symphony Orchestra](#) ^[41], the Greensboro Concert Band, the [Choral Society of Greensboro](#) ^[42], the [Philharmonia of Greensboro](#), the Greensboro Big Band, and We Are One Youth Choir.

A number of symphony orchestras exist in other cities and regions throughout North Carolina, such as the [Salisbury Symphony Orchestra](#) ^[43], the [Charlotte Repertory Orchestra](#) ^[44], the Charlotte Philharmonic Orchestra, and the [Wilmington Symphony Orchestra](#) ^[45]. Instruction in the playing of stringed instruments beginning in grade schools is common in North Carolina. Several youth orchestras, such as the [Charlotte Symphony Youth Orchestra](#) ^[46] and Junior Youth Orchestra, the [Greensboro Symphony Youth Orchestra](#) ^[47], the Triangle Youth Orchestra, the [Winston-Salem Youth Symphony](#), and the [Wilmington Symphony Youth Orchestra](#) ^[48], offer young instrumentalists the opportunity to perform classical music. Since 1992, the three ensembles of the [Piedmont Youth Orchestra](#) ^[49] have been a resident company at Chapel Hill Arts and Music in Progress, which has since 1991 included the Durham String Ensemble.

Community bands have flourished throughout the state, including the Gaston Community Concert Band, the [Durham Community Concert Band](#) ^[50], the [Tar River Community Band](#) ^[51], and the Raleigh Concert Band. Founded in the 1970s, the Raleigh Concert Band comprises approximately 60 brass, woodwind, and percussion players, all volunteers with various musical backgrounds. The [Raleigh Concert Band](#) ^[52] gives a number of concerts each year and participates in civic events such as Memorial Day and Independence Day celebrations. The [Cary Town Band](#) ^[53] performs a turn-of-the-century repertory of music by John Philip Sousa and his contemporaries. The [Triangle Brass Band](#) ^[54], its members drawn from the [Research Triangle Park](#) ^[55] area, consists entirely of brass and percussion players. All of these bands strengthen community ties through the joy of performing spirited music for wind ensembles.

Several divisions of the North Carolina government support classical music in various ways. Included in these is the [North Carolina Museum of History](#) ^[56], whose [Music of the Carolinas series](#) ^[57] offers regular free concerts. [North Carolina Arts Council](#) ^[58] programs in literary, visual, and performing arts provide financial support, information resources, and organizational development assistance to symphonies, opera companies, and summer music festivals. Grants from the [National Endowment for the Arts](#) ^[59], in-state foundations and businesses such as [Belk](#) ^[60], [Duke Energy](#) ^[61], and the [Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation](#) ^[62], and fund-raising events all help support the state's abundant classical music offerings.

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