

# DAILY NEWS

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## Waterfront venue's a cultural icon

Last year, they staged 250 concerts, more than any other classical music venue in the world.

Musicians from across the globe trekked to play here on this renowned stage with the natural picture postcard backdrop. We are not talking here about Carnegie Hall, Boston Symphony Hall, the Vienna Konzerthaus or the Washington Kennedy Center.

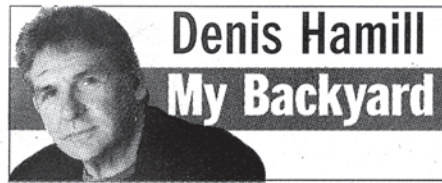
We're talking Brooklyn here.

That's right, you do not have to sit on the blue Danube to hear Strauss at his best, or to enjoy Sunday afternoons of Bach, Beethoven or Brahms. All you gotta do is come to the Brooklyn waterfront, to Bargemusic, that cultural ark that lolls in the webbed shadow of John Augustus Roebling's Brooklyn Bridge on the shores of the East River, a magical watery inlet immortalized by Walt Whitman's "Crossing Fulton Ferry."

This little corner of the city offers a perfect New York night out: Right across from Bargemusic is the upscale River Café and, across the street, the more affordable Pete's. Downtown offers fine Italian fare and, just up the block, tour buses unload herds of hungry visitors at noted Grimaldi's Pizzeria.

But the ruby in the tiara here is Bargemusic, which, after three decades, is now a permanent cultural icon of New York City, screaming for official landmark status, which would help secure badly needed corporate sponsors.

This little barge that could — founded by classical violinist Olga Bloom and now entrusted to the skillful managerial hands of famed violinist Mark Peskanov — has been offering classical music, and now Thursday night jazz, for three decades.



Denis Hamill  
My Backyard

"This year we're celebrating our 30th anniversary," says Bloom, sitting on a polished wooden bench inside the wood-lined interior of the steel barge opposite the magnificent Manhattan skyline.

"There is no other venue like this in the world," says Peskanov, pausing in the middle of a strolling violin rehearsal. "I have played in most of the great concert halls in the world with the greatest musicians and composers, from Isaac Stern to Itzhak Perlman to Yo-Yo Ma, and I will tell you there is no better gig anywhere because I get to play every single day."

"It's like playing inside a finely made violin," says Olga Bloom, running her old, strong hand across the cherry wood walls, all personally hand-scavenged from a boat graveyard on Staten Island and transported in her Volkswagen bug across the Verrazano and installed by her and one helper named Albert Frank.

"Most of the wood in here, including this bench I'm sitting on, where I sometimes nap, is from an old Staten Island ferry called the American Legion," she says. "Back in the 1970s, once a week I would go to the boat graveyard and load up the VW bug until it was an inch off the ground. The truck drivers would yell at me, 'Yo mama!' But the barge was steel and I needed to line it with wood that would vibrate in order to give it the resonance it needed. As a musi-

cian, I could just intuit how thick and which wood would best serve the music."

She said she got the idea for Bargemusic after witnessing what she calls, "the great American tragedy of music."

"The custom to have yearly competitions where the winners, who are claimed to be superior creatures, get to play two or three performances before a symphony orchestra. And then in no time at all the next winners have arrived and last year's winner take shelter in universities. Because of that the nation has lost a glorious voice of individual expression."

Back in the mid-'70s, Bloom was a hardworking musician who played in all the best music halls of New York. But she had an idea to give those lost talents a place to perform on a regular basis. "But I just couldn't find the right place," she says.

Until she located an old steel barge for sale, behind the Statue of Liberty, once used to haul coffee. After she lined it with wood, a tugboat captain in Rockaway told her about the unclaimed slip by the Brooklyn Bridge.

"He towed me here and I dropped anchor," she says, shrugging. "Right in the place made famous by Walt Whitman, which I thought was so cool. No one has ever asked me to move. But we have no official status."

The city has grown richer by the lasting presence of our most cultured squatter, as music lovers flock to the 150-seat barge four days a week — six in summer — paying just \$35 to listen to Peskanov and the established classical musicians from around the world and newcomers previously lost to academia.

"But because we have no established landmark status, corporations shy away from spon-

soring us," Peskanov says. "However, after 30 years, so unique a cultural institution should have some kind of landmark — or watermarked — status. We should be like Carnegie Hall or Lincoln Center. Bargemusic has earned its great reputation. We get a tremendous number of concertgoers from abroad coming here."

Peskanov says when he first came to America from Odessa, Ukraine, in the 1970s, he thought everything was different. "The sun was different, the asphalt was different, the air was different," he says. "My Carnegie Hall debut was with a John Williams concerto. Only in New York would you have something like Bargemusic, which is different from any concert venue in the world."

And now, he says, many of the great musicians with whom he has played around the world come to play at Bargemusic, alongside new musicians. "This is the only place I know in the world where there are classical music concerts 52 weeks a year," Peskanov says. "I love music, so when Olga offered me this job I just could not turn it down. Now, as we celebrate our 30th anniversary, it is my obligation to make sure it survives."

Certainly there must be a cultured politician out there looking to spearhead a campaign to landmark this New York treasure called Bargemusic. [dhamill@nydailynews.com](mailto:dhamill@nydailynews.com)

### MORE INFO

For more information about **Bargemusic**, call (718) 624-2083 or visit [www.bargemusic.org](http://www.bargemusic.org).