

PhilharmoniaBaroque Orchestra&Chorale

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PHILHARMONIA BAROQUE ORCHESTRA & CHORALE OPENS NEW ERA WITH *HANDEL'S TOLOMEO*

Olivier Award winner Peter Whelan launches his inaugural season as Music Director of one of the Bay Area's premier music ensembles with a semi-staged production of Handel's powerful opera of exile, loyalty, and survival under pressure

*** July 23–26, 2026 ***

SAN FRANCISCO (June 11, 2026)—Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra & Chorale (PBOC) launches a bold new chapter in its artistic history with a semi-staged production of *Handel's Tolomeo*. The performances mark the opening of Music Director Peter Whelan's inaugural season at the helm of the organization and showcase Philharmonia's continued commitment to historically informed performances brought vividly to life through theatrical storytelling.

Tolomeo is presented **Thursday, July 23 at 7:30 PM at San Francisco's Herbst Theatre** and **Friday, July 24 at 7:30 PM at Berkeley's First Congregational Church**. The production will then head east to the **Caramoor Center in New York on Sunday, July 26**. Tickets for Bay Area performances range in price from \$40-\$170 and are on-sale now at philharmonia.org/tolomeo or by calling Patron Services at (415) 295 1900 (Mon-Fri, 10 AM to 4 PM). \$20 tickets for Bay Area performances are available for patrons under 30.

"As I begin my first season as Music Director of Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra & Chorale, I am filled with gratitude, optimism, and anticipation for what lies ahead," said Whelan. "Philharmonia has long been one of the world's leading period-instrument ensembles, and it is a privilege to build upon that extraordinary foundation. Opening the season with Handel's *Tolomeo* feels especially fitting as it is a work filled with passion, resilience, and transformation. I look forward to sharing many unforgettable musical experiences this season and in the seasons to come."

Directed by acclaimed stage director **James Darrah Black** and conducted by **Peter Whelan**, *Tolomeo* features an internationally celebrated cast led by countertenor **Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen** in the title role. He is joined by soprano **Lauren Snouffer** as Seleuce, soprano **Nicole Heaston** as Elisa, countertenor **Kangmin Justin Kim** as Alessandro, and bass-baritone **Dashon Burton** as Araspe.

Tolomeo explores themes of power, identity, loyalty, and enduring love through one of Handel's most emotionally charged scores. Stripped of power and living in exile under an assumed identity, Tolomeo must navigate betrayal and shifting loyalties as the political order collapses around him. Sung in Italian with English supertitles, the semi-staged production incorporates period instruments with theatrical

direction and movement, offering an immersive operatic experience that transports audiences back to the Baroque sound world that its first audiences would have heard.

Composed in 1728, *Tolomeo* is widely regarded as one of Handel's most beautiful and rarely heard operas, combining virtuosic vocal writing with profound emotional storytelling. The work has garnered acclaim for its dramatic depth, psychological complexity, and richly expressive score.

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About Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra & Chorale

Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra & Chorale is based in the San Francisco Bay Area and is one of America's premier ensembles dedicated to historically rooted performance of Baroque, Classical, and early Romantic music.

Founded in 1981 by harpsichordist and educator Laurette Goldberg, Philharmonia has earned widespread acclaim for its vibrant, period-authentic interpretations using historical instruments and techniques. It was led by Nicholas McGegan for 35 years, and Richard Egarr from 2020. Effective July 1, 2026, Peter Whelan becomes the fourth Music Director in the company's 45-year history.

Among the most recorded orchestras in the world, Philharmonia boasts a discography of nearly 50 recordings, including a coveted archival performance of mezzo-soprano Lorraine Hunt Lieberson in Berlioz's *Les Nuits D'été*, and a GRAMMY®-nominated recording of Haydn symphonies. In 2020, Philharmonia released three groundbreaking recordings: a full collection of commissioned works by Pulitzer Prize winner Caroline Shaw, a selection of arias sung by rising star contralto Avery Amereau, and Handel's *Saul* with countertenor Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen. The ensemble's reach extends across the globe through acclaimed tours, and collaborations with some of the world's leading artists.

Philharmonia is committed to bringing the music of the past to life with energy and relevance for today's audiences. Through its Bay Area subscription series, groundbreaking programs like SESSIONS and Jews & Music, and robust education and community engagement efforts, Philharmonia offers both depth and innovation. Anchored by a world-class chorale and a roster of musicians who teach and perform internationally, Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra & Chorale continues to set the standard for historically informed performance in the 21st century.