Heather McDougall, Maine Public Classical Host



I Tell us a little about your background, where you are from, and what journeys have led you to Maine.

I grew up in Pennsylvania, near Philadelphia. After studying music at the Eastman School in upstate New York, I took up an offer to go straight into arts administration, working at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. I couldn't have asked for a better first foothold into the world of professional music. I later found my way to Ireland, where I have some family – working in classical radio there and for the radio orchestras of the Irish national broadcaster, RTÉ. Over the years, I've spent about half my career to date in Ireland and the other half in Chicago and Philadelphia – most of that time in public media. Last year, this opportunity to join Maine Public Classical came along and I couldn't let it pass me by. Very soon, I was Maine-bound!

I When did you develop an interest in music?

I was one of the lucky kids who grew up in a time and place where music education was very much part of the school experience. In the 3rd grade, there was a lottery system due to the demand for playing instruments. I put my name in a hat, to be in with a chance to play cello. Sure enough, the teacher pulled out my name and my friend's, and called us up to the front of the class to pick up our cellos. I'll never forget her reaction – she exclaimed, "It's like being on 'The Price is Right'!" We were giddy and knew something great was ahead of us.

Was there a particular moment you believed that a musical career was the path for you?

It was more of an unfolding over time rather than a particular moment. One step leading to the next, one door opening after another. I got a music performance degree, but early on knew I wanted something different. I also studied linguistics and had a hunch that some sort of hybrid experience would be in store, rather than playing full time. For a while, I figured my path would be one in arts management, but an opening came up in public media while in Ireland and so my radio path started to take shape then.

I You are a performer in your own right, yes?

A cellist, yes. Over the years, playing has been in fits and starts – in quartets, orchestras, gigs here and there, when there's enough space around the rest of my working life. That's been true for teaching, too. Some years it's been easier than others!

Who are some of your favorite performers?

Happily, the world is bursting with musicians with outstanding artistry and exciting projects these days. You find yourself bouncing from one exceptional album or performance to the next and you then realize what might have started as a shortlist of favorites quickly becomes very long! Standouts in the last few years would be the Ragazze Quartet of Holland and tenor Nicholas Phan – they have absolutely floored me with the care, attention and intention in the sound they create. Every corner of every note is impeccably shaped. Cannot say enough good things about the Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective – Elena Urioste heads it up and they keep pumping out knockit-out-of-the-park albums. Stephen Isserlis is always beloved for his choice recordings of the French repertoire as much as for his wry humor on social media! For a live show, who can beat Bobby McFerrin? He's a national treasure.





Maine Public Classical Team

Back row, left to right: Sarah Tuttle, Gale Parmelee, Heather McDougall;
Front: Joe Boucher.

I What have you seen so far in the musical landscape across Maine?

It's been great starting to get out there, meeting people and seeing and hearing who's doing what. I had the opportunity to catch Palaver Strings' collaboration with little house dance, Noisefloor. As beautiful in its conception as it was in live performance. It was also a treat to catch the Portland Piano Trio, St. Mary Schola and Classical Uprising end-of-year performances. There's a way to go, given the scale of Maine's music scene — much, much more to see and hear out there, but so far, those ensembles have been a great introduction to the artistry and imagination right on our doorstep. Really looking forward to experiencing the multitude of festivals, orchestras and other ensembles of Maine across 2024!

I Give us some insights into the Maine Public Classical team that you are leading.

We're a team of four – myself as well as morning host Gale Parmelee, midday host Joe Boucher and

afternoon host, Sarah Tuttle. We each bring to the table our own unique perspectives – Gale, with an incredible array of experience in voice-overs, production and consulting, Joe, with deep roots in the world of stage management, touring and having a band of his own, and Sarah, with operatic experience, from Tanglewood to Oldenberg, Germany. I like to think that together we're a very handy, multifaceted toolbox for making radio! There's a wonderful strength in that sort of mix, as well as a fresh, vibrant energy.

I What three words would you use to describe the classical music experience?

Always be curious!

