

Finding People Who Share Your Interests

Certain situations call for a good conversation. You're looking for an answer to a question that can't easily be found. Or perhaps you're tired of just reading about music and you want to talk to someone about it. You want to share your enthusiasm, your knowledge, and your insights—maybe even be recognized for it. Or perhaps you just want to learn from other enthusiasts—people who have been obsessing over your favorite music for longer than you have. Whatever the motive, seeking out other people online can add a new dimension to your music enjoyment.

Communities of Interest

Online groups, or “communities of interest” as they are sometimes called, use a range of tools to facilitate their exchanges. The most useful are e-mail-based discussion groups and Web-based message boards, which allow you to follow discussions over time and post messages whenever it's convenient. The better online groups have guidelines that dictate what topics are fair game for discussion and what topics aren't. For example, a group devoted to discussion of Baroque music probably doesn't want to hear about the latest Britney Spears release—or see somebody's new recipe for chocolate chip cookies (however tasty). This helps to keep things focused. Also helpful are message archives, which allow you to see if your question has already been answered. Some groups will put together a list of frequently asked questions, or FAQs, with answers for the benefit of new members.

Yahoo Groups

The largest repository of music discussion groups can be found in the Yahoo Groups service (<http://dir.groups.yahoo.com/dir/Music>). This free, ad-supported service lets anyone create a “group” with an e-mail list, message archives, and the ability to share files and photos. With over 200,000 groups dealing with music the problem becomes one of choosing. There are scores, if not hundreds of groups devoted to particular genres. Popular artists can be counted on to have at least five groups devoted to them.

Figure 25.1. Yahoo Groups devoted to Baroque Music

Yahoo! Groups
[Top](#) > [Music](#) > [Genres](#) > [Classical](#) > **Baroque**

Group Listings
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- 1 **[handel-l](#)**
 HANDEL-L is a discussion list initially founded by The American Handel Society, but open to everybody wishing to discuss the music, life and times of George Frideric Handel (1685-1759), ... [more](#)
 Members: 534 | Archives: Members only
- 2 **[baroquemusiclovers](#)**
 Let's trade messages about recordings, concerts, performance practice, etc. regarding classical music from 1600 to 1750.
 Members: 149 | Archives: [Public](#)
- 3 **[Castrati_History](#)**
 Church and operatic castrati from an historian's point of view. This says it all, really; it would be very pleasant for us to continue sharing our sources of information, as we already ... [more](#)
 Members: 145 | Archives: Members only
- 4 **[ItalianBaroque](#)**
 A group dedicated to the discussion of recordings, composers, and history of Italian Baroque music. (picture : Benedetto Marcello)
 Members: 100 | Archives: Members only
- 5 **[Henry_Purcell](#)**
 For lovers of the English Orpheus - Henry Purcell. Discuss his art, his life and recordings and performances of Purcell's music.
 Members: 63 | Archives: Members only
- 6 **[Gluck](#)**
 For the discussion of the life, times, and music of Christoph Willibald Ritter von Gluck (1714-1787), one of the greatest and certainly the most undervalued composer of opera in the ... [more](#)
 Members: 58 | Archives: Members only

There are two ways to find music groups on Yahoo. One is to browse the music group category listings (<http://dir.groups.yahoo.com/dir/Music>). The other is to do a keyword search. The advantage of using the categorized listings is that for each category you get a list of groups sorted by size. The group with the largest number of members is first, followed by the group with the next largest number of members, and so on. This is useful for narrowing down your choices when confronted with a large number of groups (e.g., 200+ groups listed in the Elvis Presley category). The advantage of a keyword search is that it may turn up relevant groups that haven't been filed under the expected category or for which a category doesn't exist.

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If you are faced with lots of choices, use the following criteria to help you choose.

- **How many members are there?**
Groups with more members tend to have more traffic and are more likely to be forums where your questions can be answered.
- **How much traffic is there?**
A group's home page will tell you how many messages have been posted, by month, for the past couple of years. These numbers will tell you how active a group is, or if a group is dormant or abandoned.
- **Does the group have message archives?**
A message archive lets you tap into the information shared in previous discussions and see if your question has already been answered. Sometimes these archives are only available to group members.
- **Of what quality are the message postings?**
Scan the group's message archive, if it exists, and read a few messages. Then see what proportion of these messages contain relevant discussions. Geeks refer to this as the signal-to-noise ratio. Rambling off-topic discussions, contentious "flame wars," and spam all lower the signal-to-noise ratio and make a group less useful.
- **Is the group moderated?**
Are there moderators or "list moms" policing the list and making sure that messages are "on topic." Though not all moderation is benign, it's nice to know that someone cares enough to do it. Moderated groups are also less likely to be plagued by spam.

Music Service Discussion Groups

Message boards provided by Internet music services can be useful. Examples include:

- **LAUNCHcast**
The LAUNCHcast User Group (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/LAUNCHcast>) lets users exchange tips and discuss music. Members also discuss new feature possibilities with the product manager. This group is moderated. Artist pages on LAUNCHcast also have a "communities" link that links to message boards and related Yahoo Groups.
- **eMusic**
Users discuss music on genre specific message boards with an emphasis on the music available from eMusic. A generic message board is also available to discuss other issues and concerns. You don't have to subscribe to be able to access them. (<http://www.emusic.com/messageboard/TopicBrowse.html>)

- **Live365**

Live365 broadcasters and listeners share information about music and radio stations available on Live365. Many Live365 stations have their own mailing lists or discussion groups, which you can find out about on the broadcaster's Web site. Many are Yahoo Groups.

Other Places to Look for Music Discussion Groups

- **MSN Groups** - <http://groups.msn.com/browse.msnw?catid=50>

Similar to Yahoo Groups in function—just not as big. Run by Microsoft as part of its MSN service.

- **Catalist** - <http://www.lsoft.com/lists/listref.html>

A directory of 75,000+ public mailing lists that use Listserv software.

- **Topica** - <http://www.topica.com/dir/?cid=156>

Another service which hosts free e-mail discussion groups. Smaller than the Yahoo and MSN offerings.

- **Fan Web sites**

Here, you can often find mailing lists or message boards for a particular artist. See Chapter 23, *Behind the Music: Questions About Artists*, for more information on fan Web sites.

Tips for Using Online Discussion Groups

- **Get the lay of the land before plunging in**

Read whatever guidelines are posted for a group before posting messages. If an FAQ is available, read that as well. Then “lurk” for a bit—monitoring messages to get a feel for the group. If a message archive exists, search it to see if your question has already been answered.

- **Understand Netiquette**

“Netiquette” refers to etiquette on the Internet—widely accepted norms for how to behave online. Web sites with Netiquette information can be found at: <http://directory.google.com/Top/Computers/Internet/Etiquette>.

- **Manage your e-mail**

E-mail from discussion groups can overwhelm your inbox unless you take measures to control it. Using your mail reader to route discussion group messages to a designated folder is one good step. Another option is to request mailings in “digest” form, in which multiple postings (usually a day's worth) are combined into a single message.

