

## In Pawtucket, mixing Bach and beer

**Wednesday**

Posted Feb 22, 2017 at 9:00 PM

Cellist Stuart Pincombe brings baroque sounds to Foolproof Brewing.

By Keith PowersSpecial to The Journal

PAWTUCKET, R.I. — "I'll have a beer. Do you have G major? How about D minor?"

In Stuart Pincombe's world, this makes perfect sense. The baroque cellist brings his unique blend of Bach and beer to Pawtucket's Foolproof Brewing Company on Thursday, performing three Bach cello suites while patrons choose from a special tasting menu that he helped to curate.

It's part of Pincombe's musical life — Music in Familiar Spaces, he calls it. And it's not a one-off performance in a non-traditional setting; it's what he does all the time.

Trained at Oberlin, with degrees in both modern and baroque cello, Pincombe followed a traditional path after taking his bachelor's and master's degrees. He went to Europe and toured extensively, living the itinerant musician's "if this is Tuesday, it must be Brussels" lifestyle.

It wasn't satisfactory, for many reasons. Pincombe thought, "If I'm an artist, I've got to be a human being," and so he gave it up, came back to the United States and, with his wife, Michelle, bought a 1959 FAN travel trailer.

They hit the road, playing cafés, churches — anywhere — reaching out to audiences in different venues. Along the way, he began mixing craft brewing with the craft of cello playing, and "Bach and Beer" was born.

"You're going to get your Bach, and you're going to get your beer," he says of the performances. "There are some common things between the two: How we value these old traditions, as well as these old recipes."

Talking a brewery into hosting a baroque cellist might seem impossible. Not to Pincombe.

"I don't shy away from the business side of things," he says. "That's one of my frustrations as a musician, that any association with business diminishes your art form. I think it's important for musicians to have a business mindset."

"I always made the pitch that it was an exchange, between the artist and the venue," he says. "You're going to get a new crowd into your venue. It's a nice exchange for your product, and I'm not turning the music into the business, or cheapening it."

The performances themselves can be just as unusual as the venues.

"I feel that our music is so distant from our current culture," he says. "I had to learn it. I want others to learn it. I feel that if performers communicate their joy in what they experience, then there's a sense of community to be shared."

Creating that community in a brewery is certainly not like creating that community from a concert stage, where a performer might offer a few circumspect words about the music, but an active exchange between musician and audience almost never happens.

"There's a lot of dialogue at these events," Pincombe says. "It may make some of the regular concertgoers uncomfortable. But there's a big mix of perspectives with our audience — it's so diverse. Young and old, different cultures — a lot of them expect me to talk."

"And I enjoy that," he says. "From my perspective, it makes the music more effective. It helps bring people to a place of reflection, away from the craziness of their lives."

Pincombe takes his musical and his alcoholic pairings seriously. Each brewery visit has arranged beer offerings, matched to the music through Pincombe's own insights.

"I just kind of go with certain notes in the beer," he says, explaining how he arrived at programming the first (G major), second (D minor) and sixth (D major) of Bach's cello suites for Thursday's event.

"If it's a really powerful beer, then the more virtuosic suites have to be played," he says. "It does seem like most beers make me need to play the sixth."

Taste them for yourself. "There's always a bit of surprise," Pincombe says.

— *Keith Powers covers music and the arts for the GateHouse papers and WBUR's The ARTery. On Twitter at [@PowersKeith](#).*

## **If you go**

**What:** "Music in Familiar Spaces: Bach and Beer"

**When:** 7 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 23

**Where:** Foolproof Brewing Company, **241 Grotto Ave. #1, Pawtucket**  
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**Tickets:** Name-your-own-price at the door; \$15 for three-beer tasting

**Information:** (401) 721-5970; **[foolproofbrewing.com](#)**  
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