



# The German Society of Pennsylvania

presents

## **ESTrella Piano Duo**



**Sunday, January 28, 2018 at 3:00pm**

The German Society of Pennsylvania  
[www.germansociety.org](http://www.germansociety.org)

611 Spring Garden Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19123

# Calendar of Events

## January 2018

Tue. Jan. 30 KA EXTRA: Right-wing Populism and the Crisis of Democracy, 7:00pm

## February 2018

Sat. Feb. 3 Women's Auxiliary Monthly Meeting, 10:00am

Wed. Feb. 13 Konversationsabend: Feuerzangenbowle, 6:00pm

Fri. Feb. 16 Friday Film Fest: *Kundschafter des Friedens*, 6:30pm

Sat. Feb. 17 Buchclub, 1:30pm

Sat. Feb. 24 7th Annual Bierfest, 2:00pm

## March 2018

Sat. Mar. 3 Women's Auxiliary Monthly Meeting, 10:00am

Sat. Mar. 10 Buchclub, 1:30pm

Wed. Mar. 14 Konversationsabend: Reconstruction of the Imperial Castle, 6:00pm

Fri. Mar. 16 Friday Film Fest: *Willkommen bei den Hartmanns*, 6:30pm

## ...Save the date for our next “Wister and More!” concerts:

Sun. Feb. 18 Soprano Leslie Johnson with Chuck Holdeman and Michael Djupstrom  
With original compositions, plus works by J.S. Bach and Edvard Grieg

Sun. Mar. 18 The Casimir Trio  
Program will include works by Mozart, Dvořák, Farago, and Beethoven

Sun. Apr. 22 The Delius Society presents Choral Arts Philadelphia  
Delius's *Songs of Sunset* with an orchestral score by Lloyd Smith presented by  
the Wister Quartet under the direction of Matthew Glandorf

Sun. May 20 Academy of Vocal Arts  
Current AVA students will present Broadway musicals and German operettas  
from their vast repertoire of songs.

All of our events are open to the public.

We welcome members and non-members alike.

Most events require tickets. Please call or email the office to inquire about purchasing:

215.627.2332 info@germansociety.org

# **EStrella Piano Duo**

## **PROGRAM**

Four Polonaises D. 599, Op. 75  
No. 1 in D minor  
No. 2 in B-flat major  
No. 3 in E major  
No. 4 in F major

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

From Petite Suite  
Cortège  
Ballet

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Pavane pour une infante défunte

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)  
(arr. Joseph Jemain)

La Valse

Maurice Ravel (arr. Lucien Garban)

### **- Intermission -**

Slavonic Dances  
Allegretto grazioso, Op. 72, No. 10  
Allegretto scherzando, Op. 46, No. 2  
Presto, Op. 46, No. 8

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

Danse macabre

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921)  
(arr. Ernest Guiraud)

Sabre Dance from Gayane

Aram Khachaturian (1903-1978)  
(arr. Greg Anderson)

Hungarian Dances WoO 1  
No. 1 Allegro molto  
No. 13 Andante grazioso. Vivace  
No. 7 Allegretto  
No. 16 Con moto. Presto  
No. 17 Andantino. Vivace  
No. 5 Allegro

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

There will be one 15-minute intermission. We offer refreshments from our bar during that time.  
Your ticket to our concert also invites you to a complimentary reception with the artists in the

## Program Notes

Every human culture, from Paleolithic caves to European palaces and to the clubs of today, has made Dance the center of ritual, pleasure and entertainment. Our need to move when we hear music is a part of the shared human experience. Music written for dancing varies widely in style and character, but always leaves us wanting to tap our toes!

Vienna of Schubert's time boasted more than 200 piano manufacturers, kept busy by endless demand. Every middle-class home aspiring to respectability needed to have one. The daughters of the gentry could not hope to marry without showing proficiency on it. No family gathering was complete without a mini-concert, with dancing, also required of a well-brought up young person. Music for this market was churned out by the ream, of the quality one might imagine. But in the hands of great artists, the genre gave birth to masterpieces. Schubert's Polonaises D. 599 are a lovely example. Like many period dance pieces, they were written for piano 4-hands, to be played by a teacher and student, or sisters, or eligible young people engaged in societally approved courting. Each piece is in ternary form, with a trio in the middle.

Claude Debussy's *Petite Suite* continues the tradition of piano duet music written for home use. But it is now generations later, and Schubert's classical purity and sweetness are replaced with the decadent harmonies and ironic wistfulness of Debussy's early style. This is Debussy's version of a French Baroque dance suite, seen through the mists of time. The scene is a Versailles-like palace in the reign of the Sun King. *Cortège* depicts a marching procession of a lady's entourage. *Ballet* is a brilliant court entertainment, choreographed, perhaps, by Louis XIV himself.

Maurice Ravel described his *Pavane pour une infante défunte* (originally for piano solo) as "an evocation of a pavane (a slow court dance of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries) that a little princess [infanta] might, in former times, have danced at the Spanish court". There is nothing "defunct" about the piece's princess. When asked about the title, Ravel replied, "that title has nothing to do with the composition. I simply liked the sound of those words and I put them there, *c'est tout*".

Ravel wrote *La Valse* on commission from Sergei Diaghilev, whose *Ballets Russes* company is famous for inspiring *The Afternoon of a Faun* and the *Rite of Spring*, among many more revolutionary works. *La Valse*, however, was rejected (but is now universally acknowledged as a great masterpiece). Ravel describes the piece in his preface: "Through whirling clouds, waltzing couples may be faintly distinguished. The clouds gradually scatter: one sees an immense hall peopled with a whirling crowd. The scene is gradually illuminated. The light of the chandeliers bursts forth. Set in an imperial court, about 1855." To the many listeners who hear a darkness at the heart of *La Valse*, Ravel replied: "While some discover an attempt at parody, indeed caricature, others categorically see a tragic allusion in it – the end of the Second Empire, the situation in Vienna after the war, etc... This dance may seem tragic, like any other emotion... pushed to the extreme. But one should only see in it what the music expresses: an ascending progression of

sonority, to which the stage comes along to add light and movement.” And yet.... We leave it to each listener to decide.

Antonín Dvořák was an unknown starving composer until the publication of his hugely popular *Slavonic Dances*. As in Schubert’s time, dance music written for piano duet was all the rage, but now there was an added demand for exotic Eastern European flavor. Dvořák uses the characteristic rhythms of Slavic folk music, but the memorable melodies are all his own.

Camille Saint-Saëns based his tone-poem *Danse macabre* on an old French legend in which Death himself appears at midnight on Halloween and calls the dead from their graves to dance for him until the rooster crows at dawn. The title evokes images of gruesome Medieval art of the Grim Reaper collecting his horrifying harvest at the times of the Great Plague – but the music is more in the vein of a horror movie satire. The piece opens with the clock ringing the hour of twelve, and the melody comes in playing a *tritone*, a musical interval traditionally known as the *diabolus in musica*. At the climax, we hear a parody of the *Dies irae*, the ancient Gregorian chant sung as part of the Mass for the Dead – but in a major key! The coda represents a cockerel’s crow, and the skeletons return safely to their graves.

The perennially popular *Saber Dance* is not only Aram Khachaturian’s best known composition, but also the most beloved piece of music to have come out of the Soviet Union in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It has been used to accompany every genre of dance, countless medal-winning figure skating routines, as background for a dozen movies, and as an audience-pleaser by every pops orchestra in the world. Our arrangement for piano 4-hands is by the irrepressible Greg Anderson, and presents as much of a physical danger to the pianists as the original dance did to ballet dancers armed with swords.

Johannes Brahms got his introduction to the world of exotic and captivating Roma (Gypsy) music during his teenage year, while earning money playing in rough inns in his native Hamburg. While not specifically Hungarian, this tradition is strongly identified with that nation. Europe in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was fascinated by its diverse blend of minority cultures and could not get enough of music inspired by these new influences. At the same time, the market for 4-hand dance music still thrived, so Brahms was able to capitalize on both trends at the same time. The *Hungarian Dances* are mercurial in mood, with constant shifts of tempo between the energetic and the languid, their melodies are unforgettable, and the rhythms are guaranteed to have all audiences wishing to get up and dance!

## About the Artists



EStrella Piano Duo burst onto the musical scene in 2011 with a series of concerts celebrating the great Russian masterpieces for piano duet. Their first performance evoked raves of “technical brilliance” and “infectious joy in music making”. The second drew a standing-room-only crowd. Since then, they have performed widely to enthusiastic audiences and critical acclaim. The 2015-16 concert season alone took the Duo to 6 states plus the District of Columbia in the US and to several

cities in China. 2017 featured both a Canadian and an orchestral debut. EStrellas's upcoming year will again take the Duo all over the United States, with numerous repeat engagements. Recent concerts of this season include performances in Florida and Virginia with upcoming concerts in Philadelphia, Milwaukee and Chicago. A new CD, featuring fantastic stories and fairy-tales by Russian composers, is due out in late spring. The Duo's repertoire includes, besides the usual favorites, many rarely-heard, fascinating works that most duos fear to touch. Their programs are always musically profound, but also virtuosic, often acrobatic, and occasionally humorous, always with introductions which draw the listeners into the music.

Elena Doubovitskaya and Svetlana Belsky are accomplished pianists in their own right. Between the two, they have been heard throughout Europe, Asia and the United States. Their concert credits include Carnegie (Weill) Hall, Kiev Philharmonic Hall, Chicago Symphony Center, St. Petersburg Rimsky-Korsakoff Museum, Baptist University of Hong Kong, Ravinia and Tanglewood Music Festivals, among many others. Critics praise them for “marvelous and extraordinary playing” and “confidence and élan”. Elena and Svetlana are also accomplished teachers, who enjoy sharing their love for music with new generations of pianists at the University of Chicago and Merit School of Music.

**Svetlana Belsky** — Critically acclaimed as “a passionate pianist and scholar”, Dr. Svet-



Iana Belsky is an in-demand recitalist and chamber pianist, noted for her remarkable rapport with audiences and stylistic versatility. She has appeared in Ukraine, Russian, Poland, China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, and throughout the United States. Her performance credits include Carnegie Recital Hall, Kiev Philharmonic Hall, Dame Myra Hess Series, Music in the Loft, countless university concert series, live recitals on Chicago's WFMT and New York's WQXR, and guest appearances with the University of Chicago Symphony, Southern Illinois Symphony, Chicago Chamber Orchestra, and the Tutti Orchestra. In addition to her multiple

solo and chamber musical appearances, Dr. Belsky is a member of two Chicago-based groups: EStrella Piano Duo and Pianissimo!, a multi-piano group of four pianists. As a coordinator of Piano Studies at the University of Chicago, Dr. Belsky teaches students from four continents, among other academic responsibilities.

**Elena Doubovitskaya** — A native of Russia, Elena Doubovitskaya performed her debut piano recital in Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall in New York City, as a part of the Artists International series, followed by numerous engagements in the United States, Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, and Russia. Her accomplishments include awards from Artists International Presentations, the Seattle International Piano Competition, the IBLA Grand Prize Competition in Italy, and appearances in Chicago Symphony Center and Seiji Ozawa Hall in Massachusetts. She is the recipient of scholarships at various institutions, including the Tanglewood Music Festival, Northwestern University's Bienen School of Music, and the Manhattan School of Music. Dr. Doubovitskaya is a member of three Chicago-based chamber groups: EStrella Piano Duo, the contemporary music ensemble Lakeshore Rush, and a multi-piano group Pianissimo!, comprised of four pianists. In addition, Dr. Doubovitskaya serves as the Chair of the Piano Department at the Merit School of Music in Chicago.



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We also wish to acknowledge with thanks the generous support received from  
The Philadelphia Cultural Fund for this season of our music program.

