BENEFACTORS OF THE 2005-2006 CLASSICAL CONCERT SERIES

Hella and Heinz Berndt
Sonia and Morgan Churchman
Dr. Edmund D. Cohen
Daniel Cosper
Marjorie and James E. DelBello
Renate and Frank Genieser
Susan J. Gerrity and Edward Taffel
Dr. Harold E. Glass
Dr. Janice and Arthur Goldmann

Gisela Hill and Joseph Perry
Marjorie and Dr. F. Peter Kohler
Anita and William LaCoff
Margarete Larmann
Lachlan Pitcairn
Dr. Victor K. Schutz
Sonja and Hanno Spranger
In Memoriam Gunda Hack

PATRONS OF THE 2005-2006 CLASSICAL CONCERT SERIES

Eva and Noel Jackson
Sunny Lawrence
Gabriele W. Lee
Doris H. E. Simon

Ann and Karl H. Spaeth, Esq.
Rosamund Wendt
M.J. and Roger Whiteman

The Wister Quartet presents

Sunday
November 6, 2005 at 3:00 p.m.

Albert and Hete Barthelmes Auditorium
611 Spring Garden Street, Philadelphia, PA
The Wister Quartet

Since its formation in 1987, the Wister Quartet has earned high praise from critics and audiences alike for its superb musicianship and memorable performances, including those with guest artists Emanuel Ax, Yefim Bronfman, Alicia de Larrocha, Wolfgang Sawallisch and Yo-Yo Ma. Its name honors Frances Wister, founder of The Philadelphia Orchestra’s Volunteer Committees and a major cultural force in Philadelphia for over a half century.

In 1993 the Wister Quartet established its own five-concert Chamber Series at The German Society of Pennsylvania. These concerts feature some of the greatest quartet literature ever written, as well as rarely played works. The Philadelphia Inquirer wrote of one performance, “The Mozart was especially pleasurable, filling the [German Society’s] hall with glowing refinement.”

The Quartet has recorded with DTR Recording Company, earning a Grammy nomination and critical praise for their “big vibrant sound, dramatic contrasts and brilliant effects.” It has featured works on its many CD’s from the Classical Concert Series at the German Society.

Calendar of Events at The German Society of Pennsylvania

November 11 St. Martin’s Day Parade
November 14 Konversationsabend, 7:00 p.m.
November 18 Friday Film Fest, 6:30 p.m.: “Luther”
December 3 Christmas Bazaar, Noon
December 14 Konversationsabend, 7:00 p.m.
December 16 Friday Film Fest, 6:30 p.m.: “Black Box Germany”

2006:

January 15 Classical Chamber Music Series – The Wister Quartet
Works by Haydn, Shostakovich, and Mendelssohn

History of the German Society of Pennsylvania

In 1683 thirteen families from Krefeld under the leadership of Frankfurt lawyer, Franz Daniel Pastorius, founded the first German colony in America: Germantown — today part of Philadelphia. Many of these immigrants formed clubs that enabled them to preserve their cultural heritage. They also formed clubs that emphasized a specific geographic area, such as the Swabians, Bavarians, Saxons, Danube Swabians, Plattdeutsche, Tyroleans, and many others.

The German Society of Pennsylvania, founded in 1764, is the oldest German organization in the United States. It was founded to protect German immigrants from unscrupulous shipping agents and to ensure just treatment on their arrival here.

Since that time, the German Society has dedicated its efforts to preserving German heritage. This it does, for instance, by offering a full-fledged German language program as well as scholarships and prizes to students of German. In addition, the Society is a source of cultural programs, lectures, film series, and seminars. These events build bridges and strengthen national and international relations among individuals, organizations, businesses and governments.

The fine arts program also includes presentations that feature European music and literature as well as access to the Joseph P. Horner Memorial Library for education and research. The newly restored Library, holding over 70,000 volumes, is the largest private German library outside the Federal Republic of Germany.

In serving its members and the community, and in all its undertakings, the Society strives to benefit anyone in need of its resources.

Since the time of Pastorius, more than 8,000,000 Germans reached these shores. Today, 29% of the total population in the United States claims German ancestry.
The Argentine-born Astor Piazzolla was first attracted by the sultry tones of traditional dance hall tangos while in New York City, where he lived from the age of three through his mid-teens. He was taking piano lessons when his father gave him a bandoneón, the traditional instrument of the tango. It quickly superseded the ivories in Piazzolla’s evolving musical life. He grew so enamored of it and of the tango that by age sixteen he had thoroughly mastered both and was regularly playing in New York’s leading dance bands. He received, and turned down, an offer to play in Hollywood in favor of a return to Argentina, his native, tango-crazy land.

Piazzolla’s distinctive, brainy yet passionate Tango Nuevo style is evident in these two works. The moody and dark Oblivión contrasts with Adios Nonino. The latter is a mixture of sadness and passion in a heartfelt tribute to his father, who had just passed away.

Luigi Boccherini (1743-1805)

Quintet in G Major, G. 448 (“Fandango”)

Boccherini was born in Lucca and died in Madrid, his home for thirty-seven years. Here he enjoyed the friendship of the painter, Goya. “The Italian musical conquest of Spain,” wrote Paul Henry Lang, “abetted by the ruling classes, became as real and as devastating as a military invasion.”

Boccherini was a cello virtuoso and an extraordinarily prolific composer. Among his massive output (symphonies, concertos, secular pieces, etc.) are no less than one hundred quintets. His style so resembled Haydn’s (1732-1809) that amused colleagues dubbed him “Haydn’s wife.” (There is no record of the two composers having met, but they did exchange greetings through their publishers.)

“The great vogue of Boccherini’s and Haydn’s chamber music,” continued Lang, “are indicative of the general dissemination and high level of instrumental ensemble playing.”

Like many composers of his time, Boccherini was attracted to the guitar. In response to a request from the Marquis de Benavente, patron and amateur musician, he composed a group of six quintets for guitar and strings — new arrangements of some of his chamber pieces.

G. 448, subitled “Fandango,” is named for the last movement of this quintet — a treasure of the rococo era. The first movement opens with a jaunty declaration and proceeds briskly but sweetly. The slow movement is quite sensuous, almost smoky — rare for this early Classical era. The last movement is a delightfully unfettered Fandango. Boccherini shows off his own instrument, the cello, with outlandish effects and even gives the cellist the castanets to play in a splendid, almost hilariously exhibitionistic Finale.

The audience is invited to a reception in the Ratskeller.
Sebastián Yradier (1809-1865)  

La Paloma

Sebastián Yradier is perhaps best known for a habanera he didn’t write. The songs he wrote of his native Spain were so popular and so universally performed that Bizet adapted one of them for the habanera in the first act of Carmen, thinking it to be a folk song. When he discovered his error, he wrote a note in the score acknowledging the composer. La Paloma is a song which predates the tango but is written with the characteristic rhythm in the tradition of the milonga, a more lyrical style of tango.

Gerardo Matos Rodríguez (b. 1900)  

La Cumparsita

A 17-year-old architecture student and amateur pianist when he wrote La Cumparsita, Rodríguez had only written down the first two parts of his piece, and the first part lacks both harmony and a clear beat. Thus it was understandable that this work, later to become an enormous hit, first found its way into the world of tango anonymously. Rodríguez was shocked to hear it, seven years later, as a major hit. Decades of litigation finally restored Rodríguez’ rights to his part of the tango.

A Cumparsita is a word meaning a group of people attending carnivals, generally masked and costumed. Coming from Lunfardo, it is the peculiar slang developed by the Argentinean underworld, and it is strongly related to the roots of the tango, which began amongst the lower classes and the shadier elements of Argentinean society.

The idea of the original lyrics was dark depression as contrasted with the colorful Cumparsa. The second set of lyrics turned the tango into a tale of a man jilted by his lover, a favorite theme of tangos of every era.

Zequinha de Abreu (1890-1935)  

Tico-Tico

Abreu was a prominent Brazilian composer of the choro, a Brazilian musical form popular over the past hundred years. At one time he studied at an Episcopal seminary which, coincidentally, included harmony lessons. Deciding then to become a musician, he escaped from the seminary, went home, and formed his own band. By 1915 he had written nearly one hundred compositions of mostly Brazilian character.

The tango had swept the world by 1917, and Abreu had already demonstrated a universal approach to dance music: choros, marchinhas, waltzes and tangoes. That year he wrote something new for a dance for which his band had been hired to play. He hadn’t named it, but while rehearsing it, commented that the excited dancers were just like tico-ticos (a kind of small bird) that had just found cornmeal. When he asked for suggestions for naming it, his bassist replied that Abreu himself had already named it.

Brazilian tango orchestras performed a wider range of dances than their Argentinean counterparts, and technically Tico-Tico is a samba. It is one of the most endearing dances ever written.

Pablo de Sarasate (1844-1908)

Zapateado, Romanza Andaluza, Navarra

One of the first concert violinists to be heard in gramophone recordings, Pablo Martín Melitón de Sarasate y Navascuéz, represented a new breed of virtuoso. His playing was technically flawless, his vibrato lush (more so than was usual in the late 19th century), his tone sweet, and his bow technique was described as “frictionless.” Gone were the brash showiness and bizarre tonal effects of Paganini (who often imitated barnyard animals), and in its place was a tendency towards cleanliness and perfection.

The son of a military bandmaster in Pamplona, Sarasate began playing violin at the age of 5 and gave his first public performance three years later. He made such a strong impression that he was given a scholarship to study in Madrid and later, with the help of Queen Isabella, was sent to Paris to study at the Conservatoire.

Composers sought him out and dedicated many significant works to him; namely the great German violinist, Joachim, dedicated his Variations for violin and orchestra to him.

Sarasate loved chamber music and often played string quartets (particularly Brahms) both privately and in public performances. He performed Beethoven’s violin concerto but was often compared unfavorably to Joachim, and he refused to ever perform Brahms’ violin concerto.

He is best remembered today as the composer of such virtuoso violin works as Zigeunerweisen and his great fantasy on Carmen. His gifts as a composer were uneven, and many of his compositions came across as superficial – but enough of them, including the three presented today, are gems to be enjoyed for their sumptuous, sensuous melodies and their sparkling (and demanding) virtuosity.

Kelly Ray and Elizabeth Seylor  

Latin Dancers

Kelly Ray, of DancePhiladelphia, is a dancer and teacher who promotes Argentine Tango. He has studied extensively in the salons of Buenos Aires and has recently traveled to Germany to dance in the flourishing tango communities in Berlin and Cologne. He is also a member of the German Society. Elizabeth Seyler has been dancing, choreographing, and performing for 15 years, and is a doctoral candidate at the Department of Dance at Temple University.