



The German Society of Pennsylvania

proudly presents

Estrella Piano Duo



Sunday, January 31, 2021 at 3:00pm

The German Society of Pennsylvania
www.germansociety.org

611 Spring Garden Street
Philadelphia, PA 19123

Calendar of Events

February 2021

Sun. Feb. 7	GSP Wellness: Gentle Yoga, 11:00am
Wed. Feb. 10	Konversationsabend: Zoom Carnival, 7:00pm
Sat. Feb. 13	Buchclub: <i>Austerlitz</i> by W.G. Sebald, 1:30pm
Fri. Feb. 19	Friday Film Fest: <i>Atlas</i> , 6:30pm
Sat. Feb. 20	GSP Wellness: Wandern at the Willows, 11:00pm
Sat. Feb. 27	10th Annual Philly Bierfest, 2:00pm

March 2021

Sun. Mar. 7	GSP Wellness: Gentle Yoga, 11:00am
Wed. Mar. 10	Konversationsabend: City Planning, 7:00pm
Sat. Mar. 13	Buchclub: <i>Landnahme</i> by Christoph Hein, 1:30pm
Fri. Mar. 19	Friday Film Fest: <i>Die Getriebenen</i> , 6:30pm
Sat. Mar. 20	GSP Wellness: Wandern at the Willows, 11:00am

April 2021

Sun. Apr. 4	GSP Wellness: Gentle Yoga, 11:00am
Sat. Apr. 10	Buchclub, 1:30 pm
Wed. Apr. 14	Konversationsabend Wellness for All, 6:00pm
Fri. Apr. 16	Friday Film Fest: <i>Das perfekte Geheimnis</i> , 6:30 pm
Sat. Apr 17	GSP Wellness: Wandern at the Willows, 11:00 am
Sun. Apr. 18	Bösendorfer Youth Music Festival Final Recital, 3:00 pm

Save the date for our next "Wister and More!" concerts:

Sun. Mar. 21	Duo Parisienne Nancy Bean (violin) and Anne Sullivan (harp) will present selections by Piazzolla, Corelli, Debussy, and Massenet.
Sat. Apr. 10	Xiaopei Xu Concert Pianist Xiaopei Xu will present selections including Bach's Prelude and Fugue in A Major, Chopin's 24 Preludes, Op 28. and Musto's Improvisation and Fugue

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	Franz Schubert (1797-1828)
Papageno!	Wolfgang A. Mozart (1756-1791) arr. Greg Anderson
Der Erlkönig	Franz Schubert arr. Greg Anderson
Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun	Claude Debussy (1862-1918) arr. by composer
Suite for Two Pianos No. 2, Op. 17 <i>II. Waltz</i> <i>III. Romance</i> <i>IV. Tarantella</i>	Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)
Concerto for Two Pianos in E-flat Major, K.365 <i>II. Rondo</i>	Wolfgang A. Mozart
From Pictures at an Exhibition <i>Baba-Yaga</i> <i>The Great Gate of Kiev</i>	Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881) arr. Catherine McMichael



Program Notes

Franz Schubert – Four Polonaises, D. 599

Making music with another person, made largely impossible by the pandemic, is one of a musician's greatest joy, be they professional or amateur. Sharing a keyboard in a piano duet allows artists to be enlightened and inspired, the student to feel more confident, and a courting couple to enjoy far more intimacy than a watchful mamma of Franz Schubert's day would otherwise allow. Schubert wrote many sets of dances for just such reasons, to be performed at humble gatherings for the pleasure of the audience, the dancers, and the performers themselves. The music is everything we love about Schubert – the simple textures conceal layers of emotions; the stately elegance of the dance allows for endless flexibility and surprise; and the listener is transported to another time and place.

Wolfgang A. Mozart / arr. Greg Anderson – Papageno!

Greg Anderson's riotous take on Mozart's great opera calls for a quite different interaction between the performers. The terms "stately" or "elegant" do not apply; there is plenty of touching, or rather bumping, as you shall see, but it tends to be of the accidental and none-too-gentle variety; and, really, nobody with a shred of sanity should try this at home. Mozart's masterpiece concerns itself with the great existential truths of the universe – but it is also filled with a goofy sort of magic, from the eponymous magic flute, to an easily-vanquished dragon, to the comic character of Papageno, half-man half-bird, who gets to sing some of the most wonderful melodies of the opera, which form the basis of this fantasy. Be ready to laugh and see if you recognize anything definitely not by Mozart...

Franz Schubert / arr. Greg Anderson - Der Erlkönig

From the ridiculous, to the sublime. We have already heard a lovely example of Schubert's dances, so now let us play for you Greg Anderson's setting of one of his most famous songs, based on the great poem by W. Goethe. Anderson's prodigious talent is, alas, entirely unrestrained by any appreciation for the limitations of human anatomy; as you will see, he has us play in positions that would make our childhood piano teachers faint – but the effect is nothing short of remarkable! Please follow the text of the song on the screen, to see how all of Goethe's characters – the frightened child riding through the stormy night in his father's arms, the father who tries to calm his son, the cajoling and threatening Elf King, the narrator of the story, and even the horse – come to life in the music.

Claude Debussy / arr. by composer – Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun

And here is another story of a magical creature, also based on a celebrated poem, by Stéphane Mallarmé, which became the libretto of Debussy's ballet premiered by the Ballets Russes in 1912. In the story, the half-man half-beast figure of Greek Myth is awakened from his afternoon nap by a group of dancing nymphs, he watches them and picks up a scarf one dropped, for own dance. The Faun was danced by the legendary Nijinsky, sets and costumes were designed by Leon Bakst, the music was ravishing, and yet it was a huge scandal. *Le Figaro* refused to publish a favorable review by its usual theater critic, and instead called the work "filthy" and "indecent". Which it most certainly, and deliciously, must have been! The music is the embodiment of the Impressionist style, both in its original orchestral version and in the composer's own version for two pianos. Listen for the lush har-

monies, the complex rhythms, the intricate textures – but above all, just allow the music to wash over you and to draw you into its dream world.

Sergei Rachmaninoff - Suite for Two Pianos No. 2, Op. 17

II. Waltz

III. Romance

IV. Tarantella

Of all the works for two pianos, none is as admired, or as feared, as Rachmaninoff's Second Suite, written in 1901 to perform with his cousin, the famed pianist Alexander Siloti. Like many of Rachmaninoff's mature works, this masterpiece requires a complete mastery of the piano, an extreme sort of virtuosity combined with the ability to draw endless colors from the instrument. In addition, the piece calls for a perfect coordination between the two pianists, an almost extra-sensory communication. Most duos wait for years before attempting it. EStrella chose to start our career as a piano duo with it instead! It was by about our second rehearsal that we knew that this partnership was truly meant to be. The videos you are about to see were our very first recordings, and we continue to be very proud (and a little shocked) by how well they turned out. We hope you might feel the same. The music is vintage Rachmaninoff, harmonically rich, stunningly beautiful, inventive and exciting. The Waltz showcases the many faces of that dance, from rapid to expansive to dazzling. The Romance is at times reflective and passionate, and the brilliant Tarantella is an homage to Italy, where the suite was composed. But above all, the music is quintessentially Russian.

Wolfgang A. Mozart - Concerto for Two Pianos in E - flat major, K.365

III. Rondo

Mozart was blessed with an equally talented sister Nannerl, so playing piano duets was a part of his childhood. No wonder that his compositions for the medium are such perfect masterpieces. The concerto for two pianos and orchestra is no exception. It is exceptionally fun to play – the interaction between the parts is friendly, teasing at times, humorous and supportive. The Finale of the concerto rises to a raucous conclusion. The performance you are hearing features the Full Score Chamber Orchestra, Ron Arden conducting.

Modest Mussorgsky / arr. Catherine McMichael – From Pictures at an Exhibition

Baba-Yaga

The Great Gate of Kiev

Let us conclude with one more selection from our earliest set of recordings, and another Russian masterpiece, Rimsky's *Pictures*. The story of the work is quite interesting. Mussorgsky was moved to compose it after his experience of attending an exhibition of the works of by his friend, the artist Victor Hartmann, mounted after his tragic and untimely death. You will hear the two final movements of the suite, *The Hut on Hen's Legs*, which portrays the child-eating witch Baba-Yaga, who flies in her stoop and concocts some witch's brew in the middle section. *The Great Gate of Kiev* depicts a fictional monument to Russia's greatness, with its magnificent climaxes and pealing bells.

About the Artists

"Svetlana Belsky and Elena Doubovitskaya are superb pianists on their own; together as the EStrella Piano Duo, they are doubly superb," raves John Puccio of *Classical Candor*.



The 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 throughout the US, Canada and China.

In 2018 the Duo was awarded a Global Music Award Silver medal for their new CD, *Tales from the East*, featuring stories of adventure, magic and romance by Russian composers. Critics describe the album as "passionate, nuanced, rhythmically flexible, technically precise and replete with thunderous oration, delicate filigree, and dreamy sensuality;" "The achievement of conveying such busy textures in such an exciting way and yet remaining clarity throughout is astonishing." (*Fanfare Magazine*); "Anyone who thinks classical music is boring needs to check out *Tales From the East*" (*MainlyPiano*).

EStrella'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. EStrella's upcoming year will again take the Duo all over the United States, with numerous repeat engagements.

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.



Svetlana Belsky — Critically acclaimed as “a passionate pianist and scholar”, Dr. Svetlana Belsky is an in-demand recitalist and chamber pianist, noted for her remarkable rapport with audiences and stylistic versatility. She has appeared in Ukraine, Russia, 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.