



A Celebration of Traditions in Philadelphia

BY FRANK J. OTERI

A SUBSTANTIAL PERCENTAGE OF THE ACTIVITIES funded by the Philadelphia Music Project has always involved the commissioning and premiering of new work, music which hopefully will one day enter the repertoire and become part of our tradition. But there have also always been projects nurtured by PMP that keep important pre-existing musical traditions alive and in the ears of the people of Philadelphia. Notable among the many fascinating endeavors funded in 2006 are several projects involving major contributions to our shared musical heritage that have been heretofore largely unknown and in some cases unheard.

Take, for example, the music of the early 19th century African-American composer, keyed-bugle virtuoso, and bandleader Francis Johnson (1792-1844). Johnson's pioneering social feat of assembling America's first racially integrated ensemble, despite great obstacles and occasionally life-threatening conditions during one of the bleakest periods of inequality in our history, should alone make him a national hero. Plus his concert programs, which seamlessly blended classical and folk music, serve as a harbinger of today's polystylistic eclecticism. Yet, while this Philadelphia native was an international celebrity in his day (he even traveled to England to perform for Queen Victoria), today his music is almost never performed.

But all of that may change as a result of an upcoming revival of his music presented by the West Philadelphia Cultural Alliance. In keeping with the spirit of Francis Johnson's pluralism, the Cultural Alliance's concert on Sunday, June 3, 2007, at the University of Pennsylvania's Irvine Auditorium, will bring together musicians from different genres including jazz legend Branford Marsalis, the classically-trained bluegrass-infused trio Time for Three, and Philadelphia Big Brass fronted by Rodney Mack who has been the driving force behind this concert

and who is something of a modern-day Francis Johnson.

A trumpet prodigy who made his solo debut with the New Orleans Symphony at the age of fifteen, today Mack performs an extremely wide range of repertoire from Baroque classics to world premieres to collaborations involving jazz, klezmer, and latin music. But there's a more unsettling parallel as well. In 1843, Johnson was the victim of a race-based attack by a mob hurling stones and rotten eggs. In 2002, Mack was brutally beaten by a group of undercover policemen allegedly looking for a "black car thief." Discovering the music of Francis Johnson and learning about his life and legacy has been an inspiration to Mack, who hears in this early 19th century music an important message for our own time.

"Despite adversity and sometimes violent opposition, Francis Johnson dreamed of musicians from all walks of life performing many different styles of music together nearly two hundred years ago," according to Mack. "It is a wonderful treat to be a part of the realization of that dream here in Philadelphia.

"Musicians and artists have always known that the universal nature of music and the arts tends to break through limiting boundaries and lines of race, religion, and political affiliation. We are becoming more and more polarized in the beginning of the 21st century. Perhaps hope can be found by looking back in time to brave pioneers like Francis Johnson for whom music was a place where we can all realize that the only 'race' that matters is the human race and that we are all brothers and sisters

whose fate will forever be bound together as we journey through life."

While Francis Johnson's contributions have been unjustly ignored up to now, at least his name has survived which affords him the possibility of eventually being recognized as an important musical and socio-cultural icon. But as the Philadelphia Baroque orchestra Tempesta di Mare is setting out to prove with their upcoming concert "Hoshanna! Hebrew Music of the High Baroque," there is also music which transcends the importance of the person who wrote it; in fact, in some cases, the identity of the person who wrote it is completely lost to history.

"Hoshanna!" offers a rare opportunity to hear three 18th century European Jewish-themed cantatas, all of which are sung in Hebrew. The first of these, *Elyon, melits u-mastin* ("God, Defender and Accuser"), is an anonymous work that has never before been heard in the United States. It was composed in the 1730s for Ashkenazic Jews in Casale Monferrato, a small Italian town boasting one of the world's most beautiful synagogues.

The other two compositions—*Bo'i beshalom* and *Kol ha-neshama* ("Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!"), a cantata based on the text of Psalm 150 which will also be receiving its American premiere—were both composed in the 1770s by Giovanni Cristiano Lidarti. These two works, commissioned for Amsterdam's flourishing Sephardic Jewish community from a now little-known Austrian-born Italian composer of primarily instrumental works trained in a Jesuit seminary, serve as a reminder of the religious tolerance of the Enlightenment period in Europe, a tragically short-lived era that was followed by an era of mounting persecution culminating in the Holocaust. And, this music is unlike any other Jewish-themed music known to present-day listeners.

"I think it's an amazing discovery," exclaimed Tempesta di Mare's Artistic Co-director Richard Stone. "When you think of Hebrew or Jewish music, what comes to mind? Synagogal chant? Israeli folk songs? Sephardic songs? Klezmer? Yiddish operetta? The repertoire that we're performing in "Hoshanna!"—music in the style of Vivaldi and Haydn—completely turns that equation on its head. It's so unexpected. On a personal level, because I'm Jewish and all the Jewish music I've heard to date comes from those other genres, including hearing recordings of Billy Crystal's dad singing cowboy songs in Yiddish, it's a total joy. I'd always been envious of the Catholics and Protestants who had such wonderful composers as Monteverdi and Bach writing music for their rituals. Now there's at least a smidgen of that kind of music for Jewish affairs too."

The scores for all of these pieces had been tucked away in European libraries for centuries until Israel Adler, founder of the Jewish Music Research Center at Jerusalem's Hebrew University, unearthed them. The process of bringing this music back to life in performance will involve more than 50 people—a 30-voice chorus and a 20-piece orchestra performing on period instruments—plus five vocal soloists. Tempesta di Mare will present the program twice, first at the University of Pennsylvania's Irvine Auditorium on Saturday, March 31, 2007, and then on the following day, Sunday, April 1, at Haverford College's Roberts Hall in Haverford, Pennsylvania. At the concerts, Professor Adler will speak about his 40-year efforts to revive forgotten musical artifacts from the past.

A program being assembled by Piffaro, The Renaissance Band, digs even further back into history for a program that will recreate a concert by the Habsburg Hofkapelle who performed large ensemble music long before it is popularly assumed that such music existed. For the 1568 wedding of Renata of Lorraine and Wilhelm V, son of the Bavarian duke Albrecht V, this large ensemble of strings, winds, brass and voices was led by the illustrious composer Orlande de Lassus who even composed some special music for the ensemble's performance on that occasion. While musical notation at that time did not specify ensemble size, accounts from travelers as well as iconographic evidence from these festivities survives, offering a musical Rosetta stone for modern-day interpreters.

"One of our aims is to correct the popular notion, fostered inadvertently by modern performers of Renaissance music, that all Renaissance music-making was small-scale, one-on-a-part and intimate," explains Piffaro's Artistic Co-director Bob Wiemken. "There was certainly plenty of that, but there is also sufficient evidence from the 15th century on that special occasions regularly brought together ensembles of almost orchestral proportions and variety. With the exception of a few attempts by European ensembles, we as performers of Renaissance music never manage to present this side of Renaissance musical life, resulting in the common mistaken notion. The main reason for this is, I think, economical. It costs a lot to garner ensembles of sufficient magnitude to approach the proportions of these various historical occasions."

Over the past three years, Piffaro has managed to convince funders and audiences of the



Page 2: Nineteenth Century band leader Francis Johnson will be honored this season by the West Philadelphia Cultural Alliance.

Page 3, top: Portrait of Giovanni Cristiano Lidarti, a Baroque composer whose work will be presented this season by Tempesta di Mare.

Page 3, bottom: Trumpet soloist Rodney Mack of the West Philadelphia Cultural Alliance. Photo: Anna Tas

Page 4, left: A sixteenth century painting of the the Münchner Hofkapelle from the Mielen Codex

Page 4, right: South African percussionist Mogauwane Mahloele of the Philadelphia Folklore Project

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IN PHILADELPHIA**

worthiness of this large-scale early music repertoire through collaborations with choirs and other instrumental ensembles. Piffaro's directors have also researched and commissioned reproductions of a wide variety of instruments necessary to perform this music. For their recreation of the Habsburg Hofkapelle on Saturday, March 24, 2007, at the Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill, several of these instruments will be making their concert debuts and Piffaro will be joined by guest vocalists and instrumentalists including the viol consort Parthenia.

When Renata and Wilhelm were married, Liberia, which began as a beacon of hope for liberated African slaves returning to their home continent from the Americas, was still centuries away. But since the founding of the Liberian Republic in 1847, the people of this small West African country have developed their own distinctive vocal and instrumental traditions. And over the course of the last two decades, Philadelphia has become home to a substantial Liberian émigré population who have fled from this now tragically war-torn nation. The Philadelphia Folklore Project has been working with Liberian artists for the past 15 years in its Musicians in Residence Program, but the upcoming residencies of Zaye Tete and Fatu Gayflor are PFP's first to focus on Liberia's rich vocal music heritage.

Traditionally, the performing arts have been intimately woven into the personal lives of Liberians. All of the important stages of a person's life are expressed through performance and most people are expected to sing, dance and/or play a musical instrument. But the abilities of both Zaye Tete, a member of the Dan ethnic group originally from Toweh Town in the northeast county of Nimba, and Fatu Gayflor, of the Lorma ethnic group in the northwest village of Kakata, are unique among their compatriots. In the 1970s, both had been selected to perform in the pan-ethnic Liberian National Cultural Troupe in Keneja, Liberia's national art village, becoming repositories of the musical traditions of all of Liberia's numerous ethnic groups. While prior to the current civil war both had become nationally renowned icons, today both struggle to sustain these musical traditions here in the United States, performing for Liberian communities around this country while maintaining demanding day jobs and trying to bring family members out of refugee camps.

As part of their PFP residencies, both will be presented in two concert programs in the spring of 2007. Ms. Tete will sing praise songs and laments, accompanied by percussionists and back-up vocalists, while Ms. Gayflor will perform graduation, wedding and other ritual songs. In addition, both will pass on Liberia's rich musical heritage to younger generations for whom this vital cultural lifeline serves as a positive alternative role model to the gangs that have spawned among these recent immigrants. Zaya Tete will teach a 10-session residency in Liberian song in West Philadelphia, at PFP's new home, where her students will come from the Liberian communities of West and Southwest Philadelphia. Fatu Gayflor will teach an intensive residency in Liberian

song at the Folk Arts and Cultural Treasures Charter School (FACTS), a new school started in 2005 by Asian Americans United and PFP. Finally, PFP will produce a short documentary videotape on Liberian songs and their cultural context here in Philadelphia which will be broadcast on local public television and hopefully reach an even broader audience.

"Music can foster connections and continuity as it both responds to and helps shape the drastic transformations that people and communities experience," says Dr. Toni Shapiro-Phim, associate director of the Philadelphia Folklore Project. "Liberia's devastating civil strife in the late 20th century had an enormous impact on the cultural life of the country. In both refugee camps in neighboring West African countries, where so many sought sanctuary from war, and here in the United States, Liberians have purposefully created opportunities to engage in time-honored cultural practices, including music. When Liberian émigrés in Philadelphia and beyond ask Fatu or Zaye to perform at wedding, graduation, and other celebrations, they are doing what they perhaps couldn't imagine NOT doing—continuing artistic traditions that are still meaningful to them, even if the meanings evolve in these new surroundings."



Of course, as émigré communities adapt to the environs of their new homelands, new musical possibilities frequently emerge. A third artist in residence this year with the Philadelphia Folklore

Project, Mogauwane Mahloele, who was exiled from South Africa for decades because of his anti-apartheid activities and now lives in Philadelphia, creates music which forges new traditions from his immersions into several cultures. A born drummer from the BaPedi people adept at both the playing and crafting of a wide range of traditional instruments from the entire continent including the West African kora and the Southern African kalimba, Mahloele currently explores music merging these older traditions with more contemporary American jazz idioms in his ensemble, Tharo, which includes American musicians such as saxophonist Bobby Zankel and bassist Tyrone Brown. In 2005, this group performed in South Africa during his first trip back home since emigrating. For his residency, Mahloele will create new songs for this group in at least three different South African languages, which will then be presented in a local concert.

Every time musical traditions converge the seeds of new music are sown. The many vibrant musical traditions, whose reintroduction into contemporary American life has been nurtured in part by the Philadelphia Music Project, offer further possibilities for musical renewal. Concerts such as the West Philadelphia Cultural Alliance's program devoted to the music of Francis Johnson, Tempesta di Mare's "Hoshanna!," or Piffaro's reimagining of the Habsburg Hofkapelle, while each rooted in the past, also offer new directions for the music of the present; meanwhile, the Philadelphia Folklore Project's residencies with artists immersed in living traditions from Liberia and South Africa that are little known in the United States directly initiate a process of cultural renewal.

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PMP ANNOUNCES 2006 GRANTS

Prepare yourself: the Philadelphia Music Project's 2006 project grant awards promise to deliver some of the area's most ambitious and artistically significant programming to date! Twenty-three local music organizations received awards ranging from \$4,700 to \$80,000, for a grand total of \$875,860. Area music lovers can look forward to 89 public concerts, encompassing traditional and contemporary forms of classical, jazz, and world/folk music.

**23 Projects
A Musical Feast!**



This season, Philadelphia's audiences will be treated to world premieres of 35 new works, 23 of which were commissioned with support from PMP. These inspired projects feature distinguished composers, both local and international, and will be performed by some of the region's most prominent music organizations.

The **Curtis Institute of Music** received \$33,000 to fund the commissioning and world premiere of a new work by Eric Sessler—an organ concerto for Alan Morrison and the Curtis Symphony Orchestra. The performance will feature the new Dobson pipe organ in Verizon Hall at the Kimmel Center, to be led by Mark Russell Smith, music director and conductor of the Richmond Symphony Orchestra.

The **Kimmel Center Presents** received \$60,000 in support of its **Fresh Ink** series, featuring new music virtuosos in the Kimmel Center's Perelman Theater. Violinist Jennifer Koh will premiere a Jennifer Higdon piece co-commissioned by the Kimmel Center. eighth blackbird will present an intriguing program including recent works by Joseph Schwantner, Derek Bermel, David M. Gordon, and Steven Mackey. And the Kronos Quartet will make its Kimmel Center debut with a multimedia production of Terry Riley's *Sun Rings*. Each concert will conclude with an Artist Chat, and all of the performances will be recorded and broadcast on WRTI-FM.



Left Latin Fiesta

Top, right: Organist Alan Morrison of the Curtis Institute of Music will premiere a piece for the Kimmel Center's new Dobson pipe organ.

Bottom, right: The Kronos Quartet will make its Kimmel Center debut this season.



The **Philadelphia Chamber Music Society** received \$60,000 to make possible **Chamber Music Today**, a special series of performances that will offer the first Philadelphia performances of ten new works—including two world-premieres of compositions by Richard Wernick and Robert Capanna—at concerts in the Kimmel Center, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania Convention Center, and Curtis Institute of Music. **Chamber Music Today** will feature appearances in the city next season by such exceptional artists as the Orion and Miami String Quartets, Imani Winds, Meridian Arts Ensemble, pianists Peter Serkin and Ursula Oppens, the Beaux Arts Trio, Guarneri String Quartet, and the Philadelphia Orchestra ensemble with flutist David Kramer. The project will also include educational outreach programs for Philadelphia students.

Latin Fiesta received \$30,000 to present the second annual Hispanic music festival, **Hispanos... Many Roots... Many Faces**, at the Arts Bank on the Avenue of the Arts during the spring of 2007. The highlight of the festival will be the world premiere of the Hispanic suite *Tabla Raza*, commissioned from acclaimed composers Tania León and Arturo O'Farrill. Two concerts and a workshop will explore the richness of Hispanic musical heritage and include performances by Latin Fiesta; Badal Roy, tabla master artist; La Cumbiamba eNeYé, a leading Colombian music ensemble from New York; and Cristian Puig, flamenco guitarist and singer.

The **Network for New Music** received \$60,000 for a