



## **MUSICOPIA, FORMERLY STRINGS FOR SCHOOLS, HOSTS ANNUAL FUNDRAISING GALA ON FEBRUARY 24 AT PHILADELPHIA COUNTRY CLUB**

### **Event honors Welthie and Walter Fitzgerald of Wayne, PA for their tireless efforts to preserve music education in public schools**

**PHILADELPHIA, PA (February 6, 2007)**—Musicopia, formerly Strings for Schools, hosts a Carnival of Music Annual Gala on Saturday, February 24, 2007 beginning at 5:00 p.m. at the Philadelphia Country Club at 1601 Spring Mill Road in Gladwyne, Pennsylvania. This evening of performances by some of the area's top student musicians, a silent auction, cocktails, dinner and dancing to the Spice Route Ensemble raises funds for Musicopia, a non-profit organization that brings educational music programs to schools and communities throughout the Delaware Valley. Welthie Fitzgerald, one of the organization's co-founders, and her husband Walter, who played a central role in development and marketing, will be honored at the gala for their tireless efforts to safeguarding music education in public schools.

"Welthie Fitzgerald is a missionary for music education," says Dr. Dennis Creedon, Administrator for the Office of Creative and Performing Arts in the School District of Philadelphia. "In this era of high stakes tests, she has championed the powerful influence of music education on developing the character of the child."

Denise Kinney, Musicopia's Executive Director, notes that Walter Fitzgerald's behind-the-scenes efforts perfectly complement Welthie's public perseverance: "Walter is a visionary who saw Musicopia's ongoing potential. Utilizing his background as a marketing vice president in a corporate setting, he worked diligently to uphold the backbone of our non-profit organization, focusing on promotional pieces, strategic plans and grants. Walter and Welthie are a true team."

Founded in 1974 by Welthie Fitzgerald and three of her musician friends, Musicopia (then called Strings for Schools) began as a single string quartet that sought to fill a void in music education and inspire young people to appreciate classical music. Today, its professional musicians from leading Philadelphia ensembles also present a full range of jazz, multicultural and crossover popular programs that feature all forms of instrumentation, including brass, woodwinds, strings and percussion.

According to the Music Performance Fund (a division of the American Federation of Musicians), Musicopia has grown into "the largest provider of outside music education resources for schools on the East Coast." Musicopia presents over 700 programs per year, with a total yearly outreach to over 200,000 students and parents in approximately 200 different schools and communities. Currently, 18 professional ensembles present more than 40 different music education programs with almost 100 of the regions' professional musicians, many of whom are recognized nationwide and even internationally for their musical and educational achievements. Musicopia focuses its outreach to geographical areas that lack adequate music programs or are cut off from the region's rich cultural life. On average, 60% of Musicopia's audiences are classified as low-income.

"Welthie believes that every student should have the opportunity to experience the richness of music and the arts," explains John Blake, a professional jazz violinist and educator from Philadelphia who has been



on Musicopia's roster for over 15 years and has developed programs focusing on the history of both jazz and African Americans to Musicopia's offerings. "She's done a tremendous amount of work to further music education, from assemblies to residencies, and concerts featuring the best Philadelphia-based musicians as well as international artists. She's been a real warrior in preserving music in the schools."

Among the highlights of the gala are performances by a sampling of the Greater Philadelphia region's finest young musicians:

- Yang Bao, a child prodigy pianist in his native China, was awarded a full scholarship to study in the Juilliard School's preparatory program. Currently training with world-renowned concert pianist Susan Starr, Yang is 15 years old and attends Masterman High School in Philadelphia. He has been a finalist in the Philadelphia Orchestra Competition and won the Lansdowne Symphony Competition.
- Seraphina is a string quartet featuring two sets of sisters: Caeli Smith (age 14, violin) and Madeline Smith (age 17, viola) of Chestnut Hill and 15 year-old twins Sabrina Tabby (violin) and Genevieve Tabby (cello) of Merion Station. The quartet has performed live several times on WRTI-Radio in Philadelphia, and will appear on *From The Top's* new 13-part television series, filmed in Carnegie Hall in 2006, to be broadcast nationally on PBS stations beginning in April 2007.
- The Radnor High School Honors Jazz Band, comprised of the strongest musicians at Radnor High School, represents the school at various community events. Directed by Dan Drew, the group has won numerous awards and has performed in Boston, Toronto, Virginia and Florida.
- Established in 1998, Dischord is a co-ed a cappella group from the University of Pennsylvania. Dischord performs songs from a variety of musical styles and genres—all with high energy and an infectious enthusiasm. Their repertoire includes such favorites as *Big Yellow Taxi* by folk icon Joni Mitchell, *3x5* by Grammy winner John Mayer, classic rock from the Doobie Brothers, timeless R&B from Stevie Wonder, modern rock from Ben Folds, Weezer and more. Dischord's second CD entitled *Loving Every Minute* was released in 2006.

Guests will also enjoy dancing to the exotic sounds of The Spice Route Ensemble, one of Musicopia's roster artists. Featuring distinguished professional musicians Bruce Kaminsky, Adeeb Rafela, Michelle Tayoun and Bill Koustorous, the ensemble performs music of the Middle East.

The Carnival of Music Annual Gala is expected to draw over 250 guests. KYW-3's news anchor Ukee Washington is set to serve as emcee. Single tickets for the event are \$150. Please visit [www.musicopia.net](http://www.musicopia.net) for more information about Musicopia and to purchase tickets online.

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