

Trenton Journal

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Bravo!



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Capital Philharmonic of New Jersey Celebrates 10 Years with Maestro Daniel Spalding

By John Gummere

The arts have played a vital part in Trenton's ongoing revival of recent years, and the Capital Philharmonic of New Jersey (CPNJ) has had a leading role. At the center of that role is Maestro Daniel Spalding, CPNJ's Music Director.

Originally from Wichita, Kansas, Mr. Spalding entered Northwestern University as a music major in 1970, "full of creative energy and incredibly excited to be at a university. I had ambitions to be a composer and had already written a few works in high school." His instrumental background was in percussion; now in 2023 he has released a CD of his early compositions for percussion and other instruments. He completed his Bachelor's and Master's degrees at Northwestern, and arrived in our area to conduct the orchestra at Trenton State College (now The College of New Jersey) in the 1980s. While at Trenton State, he also organized the Philadelphia Virtuosi in 1991, a chamber orchestra that has drawn international acclaim. Under Spalding's baton, Phil-

adelphia Virtuosi recordings have received accolades and been named among the top 10 classical CDs of the year by the *Chicago Tribune* and the *London Observer*. He has taken the ensemble to prestigious venues throughout the Americas and Europe. He has worked with a number of European orchestras including the London Symphony and National Russian Philharmonic among others, and is former Music Director of the American Youth Philharmonic. Dan lives in Mill Hill with his wife, Gabriela Imreh Spalding, a concert pianist who has performed with leading international orchestras. Their condo (of course!) happens to be the former stage area of a rehabbed theater on Mercer Street.

The previous Trenton Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1921, but was derailed by mismanagement in 2013. Orchestra members sought out Dan Spalding to help revive classical music in downtown Trenton. Dan worked with bassist Steve Kyle, oboist Melissa Bohl, and others to organize a new orchestra.

Gloria and Joe Teti and local architect John Hatch joined with them to form a board for what became the Capital Philharmonic of New Jersey. "Back in the beginning I did everything!" says Dan. "I handled the marketing, the business, hired the musicians, and got a big spread in the *Trenton Times*. We solicited donations to rent the War Memorial for the New Year's Eve concert in 2013. It was well-received and we had about 900 people attending. So we followed that with a May concert and it just took off from there." The annual New Year's Eve concert continues to be one of Trenton's great events of the year; its program often draws inspiration from the Vienna Philharmonic's concerts that feature waltzes and the always spirited *Radetzky March*, along with works by Gershwin and others. New Year's Eve often features a pre-concert with the recently-restored vintage theater organ salvaged from Trenton's old Lincoln Theater. This past New Year's Eve, Maestro Spalding departed from the norm and planned much of the

concert around his love for jazz as a tribute to Ella Fitzgerald, channeled by soprano Paula Johns of Philadelphia.

While Dan acknowledges that classical music has been dominated by white men, he makes a point of expanding the repertoire. In addition to the Ella Fitzgerald concert, CPNJ has recently highlighted the work of Florence Price and other twentieth century African-American composers, and devoted its April 2023 concert to the works of Latin-American composers. The concert planned for March 2024 will open with African-American composer Valerie Coleman's *Seven-O'clock Shout*, a fun, brand new piece commissioned and premiered by the Philadelphia Orchestra. CPNJ concerts generally display a lively mix of favorites from the classical canon, and almost always some interesting works by less familiar composers. For a jazzy piece a few years ago, Dan showed off his percussionist side with a surprise appearance on the drums. (He was brilliant!)

Asked who his favorite composers are, Dan smiles and hesitates. "I don't like answering that question. I like everybody, but some of my favorites would have to include Rachmaninoff and Stravinsky. Rachmaninoff is incredibly interesting harmonically. Sometimes I work with pieces that are so-so, but I try to make the most of them. Ideally though, I try to pick programs of music that I really LOVE. I have to feel it in my heart!" Like most conductors,



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— Daniel Spalding

Photo © William M. Brown

he makes adaptations where he feels the need. For an upcoming performance of Stravinsky's *Petrushka*, he is using most of the composer's original 1911 edition, but substituting the revised ending that Stravinsky put in his 1945 edition.

CPNJ is now entering its tenth season, and has expanded to include competitions for young performers and a chamber music series at smaller venues. Most major concerts for 2023-24 will be at the War Memorial but some will take place elsewhere in town. The orchestra will present its April concert at the old Roebling Machine Shop in South Trenton. Appropriately enough, it will feature *Ballet Mekanique* by Trenton's own George Antheil, a noted composer of the twentieth century. To liven things up even more, the Philharmonic has arranged for the Trenton Circus Squad, a tenant at the Roebling building, to participate in the performance. CPNJ's new Mary G. Roebling Concerto Competition winner (to be selected) will be featured in Prokofiev's *Peter*

and the Wolf in its May 2024 concert on a Sunday at Trenton High School.

Dan enjoys life in Trenton, while he recognizes the city's challenges and struggles: "It just takes so long for things to happen, but I like the sense of community and the vitality of the arts scene here. The reputation for crime is worse than the reality — I'm not too worried about crime."

It has not been easy for Dan or anyone else to bring the orchestra to its tenth season. Recalling the early years he says, "In the beginning it was shaky, and sometimes I didn't know when I was going to get paid. But we now have an endowment, and some major funding from the state and the Mary G. Roebling Foundation. We've hired Jill Aguayo as Executive Director to oversee the business aspects, and now the orchestra seems to be in a strong position for the foreseeable future." The Capital Philharmonic looks forward to growing as Trenton further solidifies its place in the arts.

