

## The Philadelphia Zither Ensemble

Since the zither originated as a folk instrument in the German speaking Alpine regions of Europe, it is to be expected that immigrants to the United States from these regions would have brought this instrument to these shores. In Philadelphia, during the 20s and 30s there was a group known as the "Isarthalers" consisting of two zithers (Tom Mathauser and Peter Haberl) and a contra-guitar (Sepp Gsinn) which played regularly at the Fairmount Liedertafel in Brewerytown during and after Three Act plays performed in the Bavarian dialect.

But it was not until Leonhard Zapf from Bayreuth came to Philadelphia in 1924 that Zither Instruction was imparted on a regular basis to young and old. For ten cents a lesson, school children were taught the fundamentals of zither playing according to the classical school of Richard Gruenwald. It was Leonhard Zapf who was instrumental in organizing the Philadelphia Zither Club which sponsored the zither instruction and held zither concerts on a regular basis.

His son, Sofian, continued the traditions of his father, both as a zither virtuoso and teacher. He was instrumental in organizing a zither concert at the German Society in 1985.

The catalyst for the renaissance of zither music in Philadelphia was the arrival of the Zither Trio München (Robert Popp, Hannes Popp, Lothar Laegel) who were sent here by the Federal Republic of Germany in 1983 to provide musical contributions for the 300th Anniversary of the first German settlement in America, Germantown.

After Sofian's untimely death in 1988, Zither Seminars continued to be held and in 1993 a group of zitherists decided to meet regularly and offer concerts. Musical direction was provided by another member of the Zapf family, Leonard Zapf, Sr., who is a professional instrument repair man, in addition to being a zither virtuoso. He and his son Leonard Jr. have been playing duets for many years.

Members of the Philadelphia Zither Ensemble who are participating in today's concert are:

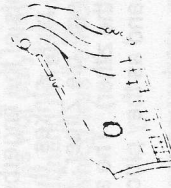
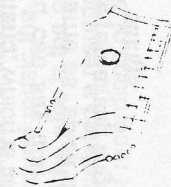
George Beichl	John Beyer	Ellen George
Tom Groeber	Dave Harton	Kurt Maute
Maria Skowronek	William Tundermann	Tony Walter
Leonard Zapf Jr.	Leonard Zapf Sr.	

# the DELAWARE SAENGERBUND PRESENTS A

# ZITHER CONCERT

OF

# the Philadelphia Zither ensemble



SUNDAY APRIL 14, 1996

in the deutsche halle

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## The Concert Zither

The music of a country gives an insight into the character of its people and often can serve as a means of identifying a geographic area. This is especially true when the music is played on an instrument that is rarely heard outside that area. The unique tones of a bagpipe immediately conjure up visions of the highlands of Scotland or the rolling hills of Ireland just as the strings of the balalaika unmistakably identify with the folk music of the Ukraine or Russia. Another instrument that is unique to one geographic area is the zither, which is native to the German-speaking regions of the Alps--Germany proper, Austria, and the German-speaking part of Switzerland.

The zither, or more accurately the concert zither, is a relatively modern instrument having only reached its full development in the latter half of the nineteenth century. There were instruments called zithers that existed in the 18th century, but they bear only a minimal resemblance to the modern zither. Some trace the origin of the zither to the Greek "kithara" which was played 2,000 years ago. But such a relationship is only etymological. The same "kithara" also became "guitarra" in Spanish, that is, our modern guitar.

The concert zither is an instrument which consist of a fingerboard containing five string, a, d, g, c--(the same strings found on a viola)--and thirty-six strings beyond the fingerboard which serve primarily as accompaniment. The melody is produced by the fingers of the left hand pressing down on the strings in the spaces between the frets of the fingerboard while the thumb of the right hand, which is fitted with a metal pick, strikes the string. In fact, in German you can say that a person "schlaegt" die Zither" (strikes the zither), which is the same as "spielt die Zither" (plays the zither). The accompaniment is produced by the remaining fingers of the right hand as they pluck the so-called "accompaniment" strings.

The zither is an instrument that was played when the herdsmen and herdgirls drove the cattle to pasture in the Alps. It was also played when the Alpine men and women sang their yodels, which is a type of singing popular in that region. It then found its way into the larger cities where its unique tone made it an ideal instrument for romantic music.

It was from Vienna that the first virtuoso came, Johann Petzmayer (1803-1888), who set the stage for the modern zither. He played in his father's inn and was so proficient that he was invited to play for the emperor. Before long he was invited to neighboring Bavaria where he again became the idol of the court. Here his playing affected one member of the royal family to such an extent that the man, Duke Maximilian, decided to learn the instrument himself. With Petzmayer as teacher he soon became adept enough to play duets with his teacher. This they did, not only in Bavaria, but on a tour that reached Egypt, Turkey, and Asia Minor. Before long

the zither became popular not only among the peasants but also among the nobility--Queen Marie of Naples, Crown Princess Alexandra of England, and Princess Beatrice of Wales. Even Empress Elisabeth of Austria became adept at playing the zither. But then this is readily understandable since she was the daughter of Duke Maximilian. Once, while playing the zither in the Alps, someone mistook her for a peasant and deposited a coin on the table as a tip. She saved this coin and often remarked later that it was the only money she had ever earned.

As the zither gained in popularity, improvements were made in its construction so that by 1870 the concert zither as we know it today had reached its full development. Many of the early zither virtuosi were accomplished musicians on other instruments and had studied music theory. They also became prolific composers for the zither. For example, Josef Hausteiner (1849-1926), who had studied composition under Anton Bruckner in Vienna, composed three hundred pieces for the zither. Ferdinand Kollmanek (1871-1941) had 700 compositions to his credit.

It seems strange that the zither never retained its popularity. With its 188 tones it is more versatile than the piano with its 88 keys or the guitar with its 138 tones. But it must be admitted that it is a difficult instrument to learn. It requires the synchronization of movements which are of a different nature for each hand. Still, there have been periods in which interest in the zither has been revived. The movie, "The Third Man", which still appears on occasion as the Late Movie on TV, has as its background music the zither played by Anton Karas. Karas not only plays the zither but he also is the composer of all the music. The haunting refrains of this music stimulated a resurgence of interest in the instrument which was reflected in the sale of recordings of zither music.

A new renaissance of the zither is being experienced in Germany where young people in large numbers are finding the zither not only ideal for folk music but also for classical music that was composed for melody instruments--other than the zither. One of the leading zither ensembles is the Zither Trio Muenchen. Their recordings as a trio and in combination with two flutes are outstanding interpretations of classical music that spans four centuries.

The description of an instrument which you have never heard is as unsatisfying as the description of a food you have never tasted. To really appreciate the zither you must hear it. After you have heard this music you will agree with the Bavarian poet Franz von Cobell.

"Die Zither is' a Zauberin.

Sie hat mir g'fangen, Herz und Sinn

"The zither plays a charmer's role.  
She holds me captive heart and soul."



## PROGRAM

Gretl Boarischer ..... Traditional  
Zither Arr. Brigitte Amasreiter

Reserl Walzer ..... Wastl Biswanger

### Zither Ensemble

Auf der Zwiesselalm ..... Hans Dondl

Oberbayerische Tanzweisen ..... Herzog Max in Bayern

Tom Groeber, Toni Walter

Auf ins Chiemgau ..... Georg Lechner

G'scheerte ..... Georg Freundorfer

### Zither Ensemble

Souvenir ..... Ferdinand Kollmanek

Ständchen ..... Simon Schneider

Frühlingsträume ..... Oskar Messner

O. John Beyer, Soloist

## INTERMISSION

## PROGRAM

Auf der Denggn Alm ..... Wegscheider Musikanten

Münchner Walzerklänge ..... Philip Schwarz

### Zither Ensemble

Zwiegesang ..... Simon Schneider

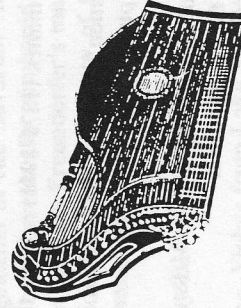
Der Weg zum Herzen ..... Georg Freundorfer

George Beichl, Leonard Zapf, Sr., Leonard Zapf, Jr.

Drunter und Drüber ..... Georg Freundorfer

Die Veilchen vom Kochelsee ..... Georg Freundorfer

### Zither Ensemble



## PROGRAM NOTES

Gretl Boarischer Gretl is the affectionate diminutive for "Margaret," and Boarischer is Bavarian for "in the Bavarian dialect." The Boarischer is an Alpine dance.

Reserl Walzer - Theresa's Waltz.

Auf der Zwieselalm The Alm is the Alpine meadow where the cattle graze during the summer months. Zwiesel is the name of a specific Alm. Hans Dondl of Munich composed many pieces for the zither and was known as the "Landlerkönig."

Oberbayerische Tanzweisen (Upper Bavarian Dance Melodies) by Duke Maximilian who had composed about 60 pieces for the zither. Since the instruments that the Duke and Petzmeyer played were quite primitive (three fingerboard strings and 15 accompaniment strings), these compositions had to be transcribed for our modern instrument (five fingerboard strings and 36 accompaniment strings). This was done by Simon Schneider (1886-1971) of Munich, a zither and guitar virtuoso as well as a composer and author of zither instructional manuals.

Auf ins Chiemgau (Up into the Chiemgau). This is a march and the title refers to the area around the Chiemsee in Bavaria, where King Ludwig II built one of his beautiful castles.

G'scheerte This is the Bavarian word for "Geschorene" (literally the "shorn ones"). In the Middle Ages, only men of the upper class could wear their hair long and have beards. Men of lower social rank had their hair shorn. In modern usage the Bavarian "G'scheerte" is used in jest with friends, implying that they are country bumpkins.

Souvenir by Ferdinand Kollmanek (1871-1941) reflects the Romantic style.

Ständchen (Serenade) by Simon Schneider (1886-1971) illustrates the harmony that can be achieved by the interplay of fingerboard and accompaniment.

Erühlingsträume (Dreams of Spring) by Oskar Messner is a piece that features demanding musical runs on the fingerboard.

O. John Beyer, our zither soloist, originally from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, received a degree in Mechanical Engineering from the Carnegie Institute of Technology and owns a business in Baltimore, Maryland, which designs and constructs industrial tools and instruments. He has studied zither since the age of six and received his most advanced zither training under Professor Ernst Kappler. He studied voice with Lotte Lehmann in New York, where he also sang for two years with the City Center Opera Company. He has performed extensively as Zither soloist, most notably with the symphony orchestras of Baltimore, Washington, DC, and Mexico City.

Auf der Denggn Alm Denggn is the name of a specific Alm. The Wegscheider Musicians, from the Bad Tölz area of Bavaria, are a quartet of three zithers and one guitar, whose recordings are enormously popular.

Münchner Walzerklänge (Munich Waltz Tunes). This is a typical waltz which the Bavarians characterize as "schneidig" (snappy). Philip Schwarz composed many such pieces for the zither.

Zwiesesang (Song for Two). This piece by Simon Schneider illustrates the counterpoint that can be effectively rendered by two zithers.

Der Weg zum Herzen (The Pathway to the Heart). This is one of Georg Freundorfer's most popular pieces. Freundorfer (1881-1940), a native of Munich, learned the beer brewing trade at the Löwenbräu Brewery. He taught himself to play the zither and by the time he became a teenager, he was a zither virtuoso, although he never learned to read a note. He decided to become a professional musician and played at various resorts. On the Island of Sylt, North Germany, he met Bernhard Derksen, a concert pianist. They formed a duo and subsequently an orchestra. Since this music was so well received in North Germany and Berlin was a thriving metropolis, Freundorfer and his wife moved to Berlin in 1912, although he would play summer engagements in the Bavarian Alps. At this time he started composing his own pieces, which eventually numbered over 100. Since he could not read music, Derksen would listen to Freundorfer's music and write down the notes and scores for the entire orchestra. The beauty of this music is reflected in the pieces selected by the Ensemble.

Drunter und Drüber - Topsy Turvy.

Die Veilchen vom Kochelsee - Violets from Lake Kochel.