Set the night to music

Musicopia, formerly Strings for Schools, is hosting their Carnival of Music Annual Gala this Saturday, Feb. 24 at 5 p.m. at the Philadelphia Country Club, 1601 Spring Mill Road in Gladwyne.

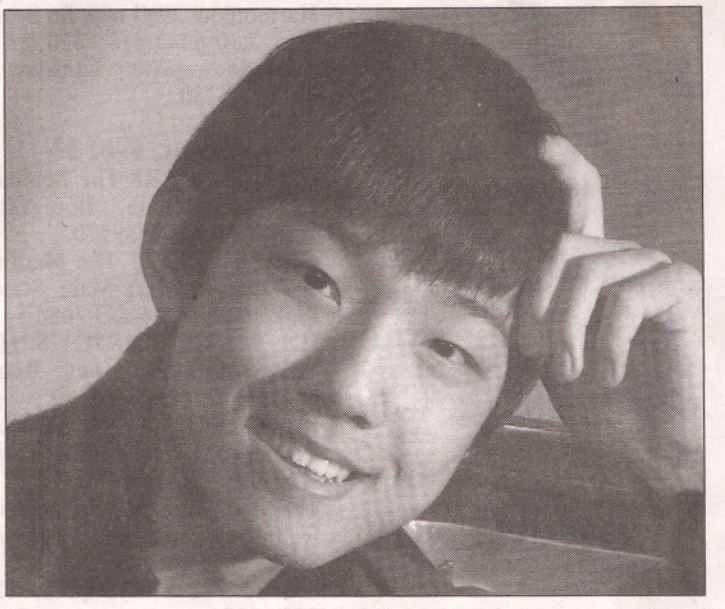
The evening will feature performances by some of the area's top student musicians, a silent auction, cocktails, dinner and dancing to the Spice Route Ensemble raises funds for Musicopia, a non-profit organization that brings educational music programs to schools and communities throughout the Delaware Valley.

Musicopia presents over 700 programs per year, with a total yearly outreach to over 200,000 students and parents.

"We work with 200 different schools in Delaware Valley. Fourty percent of them are in Delaware County, another 40 percent in Philadelphia, and the rest in the surrounding area," said Dierdre Woody, managing director of Musicopia and a 1996 gradutate of Penncrest High School.

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 percent of Musicopia's audiences are classified as low-income.

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 safeguard music education in public schools.



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, 15, attends Masterman High School in Philadelphia. He has been a finalist in the Philadelphia Orchestra Competition and won the Lansdowne Symphony Competition.*

"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."

Single tickets for the event are $150. Please visit **www.musicopia.net** for more information.