

**Karyl Charna Lynn**

# **The Opera Critic**

## **November 20, 2015**

This is the beginning of a new series where I will share with my readers worthwhile local Washington DC cultural programs, events, and galas so you can vicariously experience them, in case you might have missed one or more due to other commitments.

### **The Embassy Series – Japanese Ambassador’s Residence**

For those of us not lucky enough to be on Washington’s A list, or even B or C for that matter for invitations to private functions at the plethora of Embassies and Ambassador’s residence dotting the Washington DC area, and have no time or patience to wait for hours to visit them during the annual Embassy open house every May, Embassy series is your ticket, especially if you enjoy a range of musical genres.

Founded by Jerome Barry in 1994, the Embassy Series organizes musical events, ranging from classical violin and piano recitals to klezmer and jazz. The musical evening concludes with a reception or buffet style dinner reflecting the food and drink of the host country. But this “after party” is more than just eating and drinking, it’s about cultural exchange, breaking down barriers and preconceived notions, to promote and



**Foyer  
Ambassador's  
residence**



**Jerome Barry mingling  
with guests**



**Open Bar**



**Tea House**



**Jerome welcoming  
remarks**

celebrate diversity. Attendees have the opportunity to mingle with the artists and diplomats of the host country, thereby uniting people of different backgrounds and beliefs. Barry believes in “musical diplomacy” as music is a universal language that can facilitate peace. Barry is also an accomplished baritone, having been born into a musical family in Dorchester MA. After studying at Northeastern and Tufts University, and Boston Conservatory, he moved to Europe, performing in Italy, Germany, and Israel. When he returned to the USA, he formed the Washington Musical Ensemble in 1981, performing contemporary music around the DC area. More than a decade later, he began the Embassy Series, often delighting his guests with his singing in those early years. Now in its 21<sup>st</sup> season, Barry has collaborated with more than 200 ambassadors hosting around 600 concerts in more than six dozen embassies.

Recently I attended an Embassy Series event at the Japanese Ambassador’s residence featuring the accomplished Japanese pianist Mariko Furukawa in an impressive full-concert length program which included works by Czerny, Beethoven, Ginastera, Chopin, Takemitsu, and Rachmaninoff. But I’m jumping ahead since before I could even enter through the gates where the concert was taking place, there was (understandably) comprehensive security screening. When I entered this magnificent residence, I was essentially in Japan without



View reception thru garden



Masato Otaka introducing pianist



Mariko Furukawa discussing program



Japanese Garden



Mariko Furukawa

jetlag, as through the glass wall where the cocktail reception took place one could gaze on the traditional Japanese garden with a tea house in the distance that was open for viewing.



"After Party"

After the cocktail reception, everyone moved to the recital hall, which was set up more as a private musical soiree on a grand scale, with bistro tables, chairs, and program books with comprehensive notes on the composers and pieces. Masato Otaka, minister for Public Affairs welcomed the guests and introduced the pianist. The attendees continued enjoying their cocktail (very quietly) while listening to virtuoso piano playing (all from memory) by Mariko Furukawa. Dressed in a shimmering silver strapless gown, she introduced each piece and explained how she interpreted the work. She demonstrated remarkable dexterity and profound understanding of each piece she played. After this amazing concert, everyone lined up, some patiently, some attempting to jump the line, for a buffet of Japanese delicacies which satisfied the most discerning palate.



View tea house from reception

For the complete upcoming program information, visit [www.theembassyseries.org](http://www.theembassyseries.org)