

As the World Turns.... In Retrospect

By Jerome Barry, Director/Founder, the Embassy Series

The Embassy Series is now entering its 25th season, originally conceived by myself and my wife, Lisette, to be a force in championing unity among all peoples. Our long experience living in Europe convinced us that something had to be done to highlight the cultural values of the people of the many countries represented in the National's capital.

We started with Eurocentric countries and gradually through the years added country after country, inviting host countries' artists, playing music of their culture and imbibing in their special cuisine. Seemingly imperceptibly, this idea morphed into 88 countries, including many Latin American countries, 26 countries of the European Union, many of the old Eastern Bloc countries and the Far East.

The challenges presented were beset with obstacles, seeing that in the history of the United States, such a project had never been done, due to the fact that all embassies are located in Washington, DC. It has been a very rewarding venture, but fraught with problems which seemed at times impossible to overcome, yet we persevered and kept our idealistic non-profit going, thanks to the generosity and caring of so many thousands of people.

We now come to our 25th year, searching to be creative in our approach and adjust to the times, which are daunting. We need to involve young people, as all Arts groups must do, but we have to bring more comity in our dealings. If we understand each other and appreciate our varied cultures, hatred becomes abated and brings in the human element that all of us cherish: peace and serenity, a decent life for ourselves and our children and freedom from fear.

Here are some of the highlights of the past 24 years:

- After the rise of the Russian Federation and demise of the Soviet Union, the Embassy Series featured, most for the first time, countries of the eastern bloc: Russia, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, and many more.
- ...and we didn't neglect The Peoples' Republic of China, Vietnam, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and many Asian countries.

- The Central Asian Republics and nearby countries, such as Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India were also featured.
- As I mentioned, the European Union fared well and so did all the Scandinavian countries too. Added to that, the Old Yugoslavia yielded Slovenia, Croatia and Latin America added Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, Mexico, Peru, Ecuador, Argentina and a few others.
- The Middle East, the hotbed of the world, included Israel, Syria, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, Iraq, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Egypt.
- Africa still could use more musical diplomacy, but we were hosted by South Africa and Senegal with more to come.

So, after all these years, we hope to cement our legacy and engrave on more minds how important it is to understand those people who you might consider your adversaries unless you made an effort to connect with them.

That is what our ideal and mission really is and hopefully, this kind of bonding will be enhanced in the future.

Our mission says it all: *To foster a greater sense of common humanity through the international language of music by showcasing the very best of each culture in each nation's symbolic home in Washington.*

And to that, let us all say: "Amen!"