



Friday, April 2, 2004

Professor to research French composer's work

By **Jeff Samoray**, *OU Web Writer*

Professor of Music Flavio Varani got his career as a concert pianist off to an early start. At age 7, he was a featured soloist on radio and TV in his native Brazil. By age 13, he was studying with Magda Tagliaferro, a prominent teacher in Paris. He continued his education in the United States at Julliard and the Manhattan School of Music before joining OU's **Department of Music, Theatre and Dance** in 1972. Since then, he's appeared regularly at major music centers throughout North and South America, Europe and Asia. Among the many awards he's received is the Steinway Gold Medal, the highest honor given by the Steinway Society.

But for all his accolades and accomplishments, Varani is now approaching one of the most satisfying projects of his career – one that takes him back to where he began. Varani will go on sabbatical this fall to research and record 40 solo piano pieces representing the entire output of Paul Paray (1886-1979), a French composer who also conducted the Detroit Symphony Orchestra from 1951-63. The project is of great significance to Varani in part because his first teacher, Tagliaferro, had performed under Paray's direction.

"This is an incredible circle of events for me because of my teacher's relationship to Paray," Varani said. "I actually met Paray in Paris in the backstage of the Champs Elysées Theater, when Tagliaferro introduced me to him after a performance. I was a teenager at the time and in awe of him."

Varani's interest in recording Paray's work began last year when he was contacted by Eduard Perrone, pastor of Assumption Grotto church in Detroit.

"Father Perrone is an accomplished pianist and very respected in the community and by Detroit Symphony Orchestra musicians," Varani said. "He said he was interested in having me work with some DSO musicians to record a piece by Paray. The name sounded familiar to me. I thought about this and remembered that my teacher had played under his baton. Immediately, I told Father Perrone that I wanted to play this music, and I managed to learn the piece during the academic year."

Varani and the DSO musicians recorded a fantasia (a free form composition) Paray completed for piano and orchestra in 1903. Varani was so inspired by recording the piece he decided to further collaborate with Father Perrone to record the piano solos.

"My sabbatical begins in the fall, and I'm under contract to record two to three CDs of music for the Grotto label," Varani said. "This comes at a perfect time in my life with my strong interest in French composers. Paray was a colleague of Debussy, Ravel and others. What's beautiful about Paray's music is that it has rhythm and imagination. It's complete and well balanced with lots of fingering work and fast passages. It's extremely personal, but at the same time, there's nothing bombastic or pretentious about it."

To begin his research, Varani will visit the offices of a Parisian music publisher to examine Paray's scores, which have been out of print since the 1920s and are otherwise unavailable. Each of the scores must be checked for publishing errors, and Varani has been in touch with Paray's family to verify the composer's musical intentions.

"This music has never been heard. I have no barometer by which to gauge it," Varani said. "This is why I have to go to France because it's the only place where you can even see Paray's scores. Music publishers make mistakes, and while I'm checking the scores for mistakes, I must also learn each piece."

Varani typically performs through the spring and summer months around the world. This year, he'll be making appearances in Brazil and in Japan as a soloist with the Shin Nippon Symphony Orchestra.

"I love trips," Varani said. "They are opportunities to learn about other cultures, which is why I left my home in Brazil at

age 13 to study in France. I do it as a learning experience. But as a performer and professor, I couldn't find a better project than to record Paray's work. It's a perfect blend for me."

Varani will host a benefit concert Saturday, April 10, at 8 p.m. at Varner Recital Hall to help the **Department of Music, Theatre and Dance** raise funds for the purchase of a concert piano. In addition to performing solo works by French composers, he will be joined by violinist Velda Kelly and cellist Nadine Deleury for Schumann Trio op. 63. Tickets are \$50 for VIPs, \$25 for general admission and \$10 for students. To reserve tickets, call the Varner Box Office at (248) 370-3013 Tuesday through Friday from noon to 3 p.m. Tickets also are available one hour before the performance.

SUMMARY

For all the accolades and accomplishments Professor of Music Flavio Varani has received throughout his career, he's now approaching one of his most satisfying projects – one that takes him back to where his musical studies began. Varani will go on sabbatical this fall to research and record 40 solo piano pieces representing the entire output of Paul Paray (1886-1979), a French composer who also conducted the Detroit Symphony Orchestra from 1951-63.

Created by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Friday, April 2, 2004

Modified by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Friday, April 2, 2004

Article Start Date: Friday, April 2, 2004