

MARY BARRANGER, PIANO/CELESTE



Mary Weil Barranger grew up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where she was a winner of the Pittsburgh Concert Society Youth Auditions. She graduated *magna cum laude* from the University of Michigan School of Music and in her senior year was one of 15 women to be selected to be in the Mortar Board Society. Her Master's Degree was in Piano Performance from San Diego State University. Her musical mentors have been George Trovillo, Marion Owen, and Karen Follingstad.

Mary has been the pianist for the San Diego Symphony since 1975 and principal pianist for the San Diego Chamber Orchestra (now Orchestra Nova) since 1988. She has appeared as soloist with the San Diego Symphony, the San Diego Pops Orchestra, and the Grossmont Symphony Orchestra. She is a founding member of Camarada Chamber Music Ensemble. She performs regularly with duo-pianist Diane Snodgrass and has collaborated frequently in concerts and recordings with Zina Schiff, violinist. Schiff's and Barranger's Naxos recording of the music of Cecil Burleigh was voted Critic's Choice Best of 2002 in *American Record Guide*. In a review of that CD, *The Strad* magazine characterized Barranger's playing as "endlessly sympathetic."

Recently, Mary has presented solo harpsichord recitals at the Athenaeum, the Lyceum, and the San Diego Museum of Art. In addition to her Flemish double harpsichord she is the proud owner of a rare early keyboard instrument called a clavicytherium.

Mary is proud to have been paired with Sheila Potiker in the San Diego Symphony's Partner with the Player Program since 2002.

Getting to know Mary Barranger...

Q: How did you choose your instrument?

A: My parents both played the piano: My mother's crowd pleaser was *Kitten on the Keys* and my Dad played by ear. While my older brother Ed was taking piano lessons from Mrs. Folmer the church choir director, I taught myself to read music by doing his assignments in John Thompson's *Teaching Little Fingers to Play*. For my eighth birthday my parents asked me what I wanted and I promptly stated, "I want piano lessons!" My brother quit the piano soon after, but he and I would often entertain our parents and friends with his singing and my playing. The wonderful part of this story was that my brother stuttered when he spoke, but he had the smoothest singing voice you'd ever want to hear.

Q: What good book have you read most recently?

A: I belong to a two book clubs: one with my colleagues in the symphony and another with a younger set of women who are in a completely different stage of life than I. Some of my favorites have been *The Elegance of the Hedgehog* by Muriel Barberry, *Zahir* by Pablo Coelho, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* by Milan Kundera, and *Peace Like a River* by Leif Enger. So many books, so little time.

Q: Where might you find me on a Saturday night if I'm not performing with the Symphony...?

A: When I'm not working my sweetheart Jerry and I love to have a "date night," be it at the movies or a playhouse. In fact, even after a symphony concert, we've been known to make a mad dash to a 10:30 film. We enjoy seeing films or plays together and then we find ourselves discussing our reactions to the characters or the plot. By doing so, we enhance the experience. We both lead busy lives and this is a real treat for us.

Q: What is your favorite San Diego Symphony memory?

A: I remember a concert about 15 years ago when the actor/student conductor David Ogden Stiers conducted a tricky piece with some stage business of actors walking around in the front of the stage pushing around noisy vacuum cleaners (or were they leaf blowers?). I was playing organ on this piece (I'm not an organist, but I managed to fake it.) During the vacuum cleaner section it was obvious that we were all lost: vacuum cleaners were droning on, the rest of the orchestra was noodling around, the conductor was flailing his arms with a petrified look on his face. I had the loudest instrument on stage and I had an important cue coming up which I knew everyone would be able to hear. So through the miasma of sound I cut through with my organ "lick" and everybody jumped on board. People told me later that I saved the performance!

Q: What do you love most about San Diego (besides the weather)?

A: I love the fact that San Diego, despite its large geographical area, feels like a small town to me. I revel in our close knit musical community where by and large we support and respect one another. In the non-musical community the famous "six degrees of separation" is like two or three degrees in this town: I can't tell you how many times I've met a stranger and before long we know someone in common. I used to have a fantasy that I would like to live and work in the Bay Area. That fantasy is over: the Bay Area is just too frenetic. I'll take San Diego's more laid-back lifestyle. It suits me just fine.

Q: The San Diego Symphony is essential to San Diego because...?

A: A San Diego Symphony concert awakens the audience to the unspoken world of sounds – so much of our lives are filled with chatter, political harangues, advertisements, commercial stimulation to buy and consume. Yet audience members who come to our concerts can jump off that merry-go-round and watch a diverse group of people team up to create one voice that speaks of the ineffable. Symphonic musical concerts are unique – a sporting event is all about competition, winners and losers; a film or a play is filled with words and dramatic conflict. But music carries us along on a wave of sound in an immense variety of timbres and musical languages. It is society's link to the past and our bridge to the future. It MUST continue! (I will get off my soap box now.)