

Singer honored for his musical diplomacy

By Debra Siro

Jerome Barry has performed with the Baltimore and National Symphonies, with the Boston Pops and at Carnegie Hall. The baritone has lived in Germany, Italy and Israel, where he spent four years with Israel's National Opera. He speaks 10 languages and can sing in 27.

So when he moved back to the States, Barry felt it was natural to gravitate toward the international community. In 1994, he founded an annual series of concerts held at many of Washington's embassies.

Now in its 17th year, the Embassy Series serves as a kind of musical diplomacy to help promote understanding among people of many different cultures, he said. After each performance there is a reception, and guests have an opportunity to enjoy the food of the featured country as well as to meet embassy officials.

Barry, who lives in Northwest Washington, stressed that in his dealings with the embassies and artists, "There's no politics even with Cuba, not a word."

The current season will offer about 25 concerts, down from a high of 42 in the past. "I felt I didn't have much of a life because it's a lot of work," Barry said. By eliminating duplicate performances, the series has consistently sold out.

The Embassy Series will hold its first concert of the season on Oct. 1 at the Iraqi Cultural Center. Performing will be Salsafir, an ensemble of three Iraqi musicians on traditional instruments.

On Oct. 17, the second concert of the season will feature pianist Jill Fellner at



the Austria Embassy playing Beethoven sonatas.

Other concerts will take place at the ambassadors' residences or embassies, including those for Australia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Armenia, Belgium and Poland.

Staying vocally nimble

In addition to his work for the Embassy Series, Barry, a native of Boston who started formal instruction at the age of 12, still sings professionally and maintains a rigorous practice schedule. Barry, who said he's in his late 60s, believes that "if you don't use it, you lose it."

He even uses a peak flow meter (a small handheld device used to measure a person's ability to breathe out air) to monitor the strength of his breath, and is proud that his rate is twice the normal range.

Asked what his secret is for staying fit, Barry said, "I think the real secret is keeping occupied with something that really uses your mind but also your body."

The idea of retraining is a foreign concept to Barry, who thrives on learning. He laughed as he described walking around conjugating verbs in 10 languages and memorizing music as regular mental exercises.

"I really think it's important to concentrate on quality," Barry said adding, "This is what America needs right now, thinking at a high level to achieve excellence, not just to get by, and it takes work."

Arts award

In recognition for his work, on Oct. 8 Barry will receive the third annual Lolo Sarroff Award for Outstanding Vision and Creativity. The award is named after the founder of the nonprofit Arts for the Aging, which provides outreach programs to older adults for health improvement and life enhancement through the arts.

"It represents all the elements in life that I hold dear," said Barry about the honor. One of the reasons this award means so much to him is because of his admiration and respect for Sarroff.

"She's 96 years old, and she's absolutely amazing, and she's constantly busy with creative things," Barry said. The way that



The D.C. Youth Orchestra performs at the Austria Embassy in a program presented by the Embassy Series.

make the world a better place to live in and here I can proceed with a little bit more trying to bring more understanding" is confidence and passion for what I do."

To learn more, or to purchase tickets for very similar to his own mission. Barry said it's gratifying to be recognized by the Embassy Series, visit www.embassyseries.org or call (202) 625-2261. For more information about the Arts for the Aging past you're making, but when somebody gives you an award like this, it's sort of a milestone in your life, a point of departure [for thinking], "Oh, we've got this, and from or call (202) 718-4990.