

## THE ARTS AND THINGS TO DO

# He's hitting the right notes

*A classical guitarist is gaining exposure as a composer of an original score.*

By Gloria A. Hoffner  
INQUIRER SUBURBAN STAFF

Visitors to Thomas Smith's house know this is a man who appreciates the classics.

He lives in the 1900s-era former home of his grandparents in Ridley Township, which he lovingly restored inch by inch, including removing layers of aqua kitchen paint. In the dining room, a fretless banjo and dulcimer both handmade by Smith hang above his original classical guitar sheet music.

"Classical guitar music is a very advanced sound. It's a very expressive and profound type of music," Smith said of the style he came to favor after years of playing in rock and roll and folk bands.

"I love the range of creativity in classical guitar. Only six strings and you can make it sound like a small orchestra if you do it well."

*Three Temperings*, an original score he wrote, was recently performed by 23 members of the Philadelphia Classical Guitar Society at the Society's annual festival, held at Settlement Music School in Philadelphia. Conducted by Bill Newman, of Cherry Hill, a director of the guitar society, the piece is written with four guitar parts and designed for beginners through advanced-level musicians.

"I wrote the piece over two to three months, and I didn't have a name for it," Smith said. "I looked up *modulation* in the dictionary and kept coming back to *temper*."

The piece has three musical modulations. Incorporating one key change and two time-signature changes into the score, it thus became *Three Temperings*.

Newman said it was difficult to compose music for several levels of musicians but Smith accomplished the task.

"It is a wonderful piece," Newman said. "It challenged the players and allowed them to play the piece well."



**Smith, of Ridley Township**, started with rock and folk music but moved on to classical guitar. Said Smith: "Only six strings and you can make it sound like a small orchestra if you do it well."

## Snapshot

### Thomas Smith

**Favorite musicians:** Andrés Segovia, Manuel Barrueco, David Russell and John Williams.

**Quote:** "John Williams' techniques and abilities are just so advanced that you don't see the techniques. He makes it seem effortless."

**Performance guitar:** 1991 Robert Ruck

**Hobbies:** Wine tasting and gardening. "There is something very relaxing about putting your hands in the soil."

**Organizations:** Member and former treasurer of the Philadelphia Classical Guitar Society.

**Upcoming concert:** The Philadelphia Classical Guitar Trio will perform at 5 p.m., June 4 at Moravian College's Bethlehem Guitar Festival. For ticket information, call 610-861-1650.

**Contact information:**

On the Web: [www.phillyguitartrio.com](http://www.phillyguitartrio.com)

Michael Simmons, president of the Philadelphia Classical Guitar Society and a member of a professional musical group with Smith, agreed.

"The piece is harmonically interesting, but not technically difficult. It is written in three movements and is continuous between the movements," Simmons said.

Smith, 47, started playing rock and folk songs on a steel

string guitar at 15. He graduated from Ridley High School in 1975, and at 21 enrolled in Temple University to study under classical guitar master Peter Segal.

Smith, who earned a bachelor of music degree from Temple in 1982, played guitar at local rock-and-roll and folk clubs at night and worked as a picture framer by day. His framing work continues, but after a

few years he decided to stop playing clubs.

"The hours and the bar scene got to be for younger people. Somewhere in my 30s, it became clear to me that I was not having much fun," Smith said. "I returned to classical guitar."

He played solo and with several musicians over the years. In 1995 Smith teamed with Marisol Rampolla of Philadelphia and Simmons of King of Prussia to form the Philadelphia Classical Guitar Trio.

Together the trio recorded two CDs and made the roster of the Pennsylvania Performing Arts on Tour. They perform regularly Labor Day through Memorial Day in Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, West Virginia, Delaware and Puerto Rico and Panama.

Smith is an early-morning composer who enjoys gardening and wine tasting when not playing the guitar or sitting under his backyard grape arbor with his wife, Susan Zickler, and dog, Lizzie.

"I have the most clarity in the morning after a couple of cups of coffee," Smith said, standing near his backyard perennial gardens filled with a variety of plantings, including lavender and hydrangea. Each summer his vegetable garden includes the seeds from his grandmother's heritage tomatoes.

Smith hopes to independently publish classical guitar music and CDs through the Internet. Mostly, he wants to continue to practice, play and enjoy the music of the wooden six string instrument he loves.

Sitting with his guitar and capo next to his grandmother's antique sideboard, Smith summed up his musical goal. He said, "I want to be still going strong in my 60s."

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