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Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection

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Saturday, December 2nd, 2006, 5:00-6:00 p.m.

- [Louis Gesensway](#) (1906-1976). *Four Squares of Philadelphia* (1951). Philadelphia Orchestra, Eugene Ormandy, Oscar Treadwell, narrator. Troy 276. 27:03.
- [Jules Massenet](#) (1842-1912). Suite No. 5, "Scènes napolitaines." (1876). Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra, Ondrej Lenard. Naxos 8.550087. 12:22

This month we listen to two travelogues for orchestra. Jules Massenet takes us to Italy, with his sparkling *Neapolitan Scenes*, and Louis Gesensway guides us on a walking tour closer to home with *Four Squares of Philadelphia*. It's a snapshot of life in and around the Washington, Rittenhouse, Logan, and Franklin Squares, and this is a delightful recording with Ormandy and the Philadelphians, with whom Gesensway was a violinist for many years.

Born in Latvia, Gesensway came with his family to Canada, and he caught the attention of musicians early on. Stokowski invited him to join the Philadelphia Orchestra when Gesensway was only 19, and then allowed him, a few years later, to take a leave of absence to study composition in Budapest with Zoltán Kodály. He returned to resume his seat in the orchestra, but was also composing, and by the late 1940s started work on *Four Squares*. William Penn's mixture of faith and reason inspired Gesensway, who quotes Penn's "Prayer for Philadelphia" early in the piece. And Penn's remarkable design of Philadelphia along north-south and east-west gridlines, with large islands of green set aside for the squares, informs the structure of the music.

After a Prologue depicting the Philadelphia of Penn's time, including his narrated prayer, the southeastern square, Washington, is heard on an early colonial morning. Street criers hawk their goods amid echoes of American and English tunes. We then travel west and forward in time to Rittenhouse to glimpse a busy afternoon filled with people young and old around the fountain and along the pathways. It's one of the loveliest places in the city today as in 1951 when Gesensway finished composing this. North to Logan Square at dusk, he pays homage to the examples of public art here: the Calder sculptures personifying the Wissahickon Creek, and Schuylkill and Delaware Rivers, and the grand architecture of the surrounding buildings (which include, of course, our own [Free Library](#).) Chant reverberates through the open doors of the Cathedral of SS. Peter and Paul. Finally, east to Franklin Square at night—traffic rushing across the Ben Franklin Bridge, snatches of folk music drifting in from neighboring Chinatown, and turn-of-the-'50s jazz emanating from clubs. An Epilogue quietly evokes the spirit of William Penn as the night deepens.

One of the symphonic works by the opera composer Massenet, the *Scènes napolitaines* revisits the Italy where he lived after winning the Prix de Rome, joining a number of composers over the years who have done the same. Massenet wrote it well after his time there, but it must have been an enjoyable recollection of his visit to Naples, for the music is brimming with brilliance and warmth. The movements are The Dance, The Procession, and The Festival. So, two examples of musical paintings of physical places: one by a Philadelphian for his adopted hometown, and one by a French composer for the Italy of his youth.

Hosted by [Kile Smith](#), Curator of the Fleisher Collection, and [Jack Moore](#), Program Director of WRTI. In *Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection* we uncover the unknown, rediscover the little-known, and take a fresh look at some of the remarkable treasures housed in the Fleisher Collection of Orchestral Music in the [Free Library of Philadelphia](#). The Fleisher Collection is the largest lending library of orchestral performance material in the world. For recording details, please go to our [web page](#). For a detailed list of all our shows, please visit our [archives](#).