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Music at risk

THE cash-strapped New York Times Co. may be inching closer to dumping classical music station WQXR (96.3 FM). As we reported last month, ESPN wants an FM signal in New York for its sports network, and now it's just registered three Web domains with ESPN and 96.3 in the name. Asked if there have been talks about a sale or lease, a Times rep told us, "You should ask ESPN about that." ESPN declined to comment.

THE secret is out on a clandestine billionaires' summit held in Manhattan earlier this month, when some of the wealthiest Americans met behind closed doors to plot strategies for weathering the economic downturn and coordinating their global philanthropic efforts.

Bill Gates and **Warren Buffett** organized the hush-hush huddle held in a Rockefeller University conference room on the Upper East Side with **Mayor Bloomberg**, **George Soros**, **Oprah Winfrey**, **Eli Broad**, **Ted Turner**, **David Rockefeller Sr.** and **David Rockefeller Jr.**, among others.

Topic No. 1 during the May 5 conclave was which of the moguls' favorite causes — such as disease control or government reform — needed extra help during the downturn. They also sought ways to encourage the common man to keep making small-change donations, an aide to one participant said. IrishCentral.com, which first reported on the powwow, said Gates and Buffett also solicited views on how the group should respond to the global economic climate.

CNN founder **Turner**, a staunch conservationist and United Nations supporter, was reportedly the most outspoken — he's

known as **Capt. Outrageous** and the Mouth of the South — while talk-show queen **Oprah** was in "listening mode."

In all, the attendees have donated a collective \$70 billion since 1996, according to the Chronicle of Philanthropy.

Bloomberg, worth an estimated \$20 billion, yesterday declined to discuss specifics of the meeting. "I meet periodically with lots of my friends who are philanthropic," he said. "All my friends are philanthropic or they probably wouldn't be my friends ... There are meetings all over this city and there are some very powerful people in this city."



Brad Pitt and leggy **Angelina Jolie** attend the premiere of his World War II flick, "Inglorious Basterds," at the Cannes Film Festival.

Heart for Brett's fan

THERE'S more to the story about the little girl in the hospital who gave Yankee outfielder **Brett Gardner** a Project Sunshine bracelet last Friday and told him, "Hold onto this. You'll hit a home run." A few hours later, Gardner hit an inside-the-park homer against Minnesota. But **Joseph Weilgus** — who founded Project Sunshine when he was a college student and visited hospitalized kids in a clown costume — said at the group's fund-raiser at Cipriani 42nd Street Tuesday night that the girl at New York Presbyterian was waiting for a heart transplant, and Friday night, she had the surgery. "She didn't get to see the home run live," Weilgus told the crowd, which included Giants lineman **David Diehl**, **Miss USA Kristen Dalton** and Sports Illustrated swimsuit beauty **Tori Praver**. "But after she got her heart transplant, she saw the tape, and as Brett Gardner was racing toward home, she said, 'Yeah, he's running for me.'"

Free and thin

ONE of English society's long-lasting couples has called it quits. Designer **Allegra Hicks** and decorator hubby **Ashley Hicks**, the son of David Hicks and descended from Lord Mountbatten, have separated. Friends of the couple are unsurprised, noting that Allegra had been unhappy with the moody Ashley for years, and has shed more than 20 pounds since the split. But weight and a spouse aren't the only things Allegra has lost: Her design business recently shuttered its Madison Avenue and London locations, both recession victims.



Elle Macpherson flashes her irresistible smile as she leaves Le Bilboquet bistro off Madison Avenue yesterday.

Long, long Ago

ALL traces of the disaster that was Ago — the legendary LA restaurant that opened in **Robert De Niro's** Greenwich Hotel — have been dismantled. In its place is a new Italian eatery, **Locanda Verde**, run by **Spotted Pig's Ken Friedman**, **Lure's Josh Pickard** and chef/partner **Andrew Carmellini**, formerly of **Cafe Boulud** and **A Voce**. **Friedman** and **Pickard** went with **Carmellini** after **Friedman** asked **David Chang**, of **Momofuku** fame, to name the best young Italian chef. "He told me without a doubt it is **AC [Andrew Carmellini]**," **Friedman** said.

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