

Remembering Helen DeVos (1927-2017)

The orchestra world lost one of its most generous and dedicated supporters this fall. Helen DeVos died on October 18 in Ada Township, Michigan, just outside her hometown of Grand Rapids. She was 90. DeVos, wife of Amway co-founder Rich DeVos,



Philanthropist
Helen DeVos

had a lifelong love of music from the time she began playing piano as a child. She channeled that passion into philanthropy, which in addition to music included programs for children and Christian education. She served on the board of the Grand Rapids Symphony for many years, and was a longtime supporter of the League of American Orchestras. In addition to her husband, DeVos is survived by four children, including son Dick, who is married to Betsy DeVos, the U.S. Secretary of Education.

Helen DeVos joined the Grand Rapids Symphony's board of directors in 1971, and in 1974 she and her husband established the orchestra's DeVos Quartet, allowing the orchestra to hire its first full-time musicians. In 2012 she and her husband launched the orchestra's \$40 million endowment campaign with a \$20 million gift. DeVos Performance Hall is one of many Grand Rapids institutions named after the couple.

DeVos served on the board of the League of American Orchestras from 1982 to 1992, and was an honorary board member at the time of her death. For her service to the orchestra field, she was awarded the League's Gold Baton Award in 2012. "Helen was the rare kind of donor who really understood the importance of a healthy sector," says League President and CEO Jesse Rosen. "She not only was instrumental in the growth and sustenance of the Grand Rapids Symphony, she believed in the League, and wanted us to have substantial, significant annual support for general operations. She had a deep commitment to all orchestras, with a particular interest in smaller-budget orchestras."

Catherine French, who was the League's president and CEO from 1980 to 1996, says, "I remember Helen DeVos fondly as an active member of the League Board and Executive Committee, as chairman of the Nominating Committee, and as a major donor who made possible much of the League's work. Her grace and elegance in inviting new members to join the board were also reflected in the way she thanked those whose board service was coming to an end. I will always be grateful for her extraordinary generosity to the League and to the field."

Factory Made

This October, a former machine shop in Johnstown, Pennsylvania provided an unusual site for a free concert (below) by the Johnstown Symphony Orchestra. Inside the long-closed 40,000-square-foot Cambria Iron Lower Works building, Music Director James Blachly led the concert before a standing-room-only crowd that included former steelworkers and their families as invited guests. The program included Copland's *Fanfare for the Common Man*, Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony*—"representing that Johnstown's greatness is unfinished," Blachly noted—and Barber's *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*.



Selections from Bernstein's *On the Waterfront* were performed as the film was projected on the walls of the steel mill. Also shown during the Bernstein was additional footage, commissioned by Johnstown Area Heritage Association, shot in Johnstown two weeks before the steel mills closed in 1992. Blachly and Executive Director Michael Walther felt the mammoth machine shop offered the exact combination of acoustics, aesthetics, and historical significance they had been hoping to find.



Sacramento Philharmonic and Opera / Facebook photo

Music Stop

This fall, a bus shelter in downtown Sacramento became "The World's Smallest Concert Hall" for an initiative by the Sacramento Philharmonic and Opera. Launched on October 13 with a short concert performed by members of the Sacramento Philharmonic (above) and continuing through the end of November, the music hall/bus stop raised awareness of the regional arts scene. The shelter—directly across from the Sac Phil's performance venue—was wrapped with images and information about upcoming Sacramento Philharmonic and Opera performances. Speakers played music by composers featured in the 2017-18 season, including Brahms, Mozart, Rossini and Tchaikovsky. Matthew Buckman, the Sacramento Philharmonic and Opera's general manager, said, "It's an opportunity for us to display a little bit of what we do in front of our home."

League Names Jessica Schmidt as Diversity Advisor

The League has appointed Jessica Schmidt as diversity advisor. In this newly created position, Schmidt will lead and help the League in advancing its diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) strategy and programming. She will design the League's annual Diversity Forum, manage its DEI task forces, staff the board diversity committee, and help the League develop a long-term plan for its DEI work. From 2012 to 2017, she was director of education and community engagement at the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and was previously senior director of community programs at the Pittsburgh Symphony and education coordinator at the Dallas Symphony. She helped to create the League's Diversity Work Group and facilitated the League's Education and Community Engagement Mentoring Circle.