

FRIENDS OF THE SCHOOL OF MUSIC

by DENIS COLWELL, *Head*

It was in early October of 2011 that I first walked through the doors to the main office at the Carnegie Mellon University School of Music as the newly appointed, but slightly naïve, interim head. I wasn't even inside the door when I got clobbered by a steep and nasty-looking learning curve. When I came to, I was being administered smelling salts by a terrific office staff who assured me that while I was struggling to climb that learning curve they would make sure the trains ran on time. Still, the year 2012 was nearly upon us and that meant we faced the prospect of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the School of Music. How to mark the occasion with events worthy of the school's rich, 100-year history?

To my relief, I learned that a planning process for the school's Centennial Celebration was already well under way, complete with a distinguished Host Committee featuring dynamic co-chairs, Cynthia Friedman and the husband-and-wife team of Richard and Ginny Simmons. It became apparent that the best thing for me to do was to stay out of the way or risk getting run over. No fool, I sat back, embraced my role as cheerleader, and enjoyed my up-close view of special people at work.

Organizing something as complex as the School of Music Centennial Celebration is enough to give even the most skilled manager fits. Finding a way to pay for it – well, that's an even taller order. Richard and Ginny Simmons are well known in Pittsburgh as the first couple of philanthropy, especially where classical music and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra are concerned (a future issue of the School of Music magazine will profile these extraordinary people). As for the other half of the Host Committee chairmanship, here is a brief tribute to a very special woman, with sincere thanks from the Carnegie Mellon School of Music.



Cynthia Friedman

Let me tell you a bit about Cynthia Friedman—Carnegie Mellon trustee, organizer extraordinaire, businesswoman, philanthropist, activist, art lover—because to her goes much of the credit for the success of the Centennial Celebration events.

The memorable gala concerts were undoubtedly highlights of the School of Music's Centennial year. Featuring nine School of Music alumni soloists from around the country, the 101-piece Carnegie Mellon Philharmonic, and the 99-strong Carnegie Mellon Concert Choir and Repertory Chorus, the celebratory program was performed first in the Benedum Center in Pittsburgh in late March and then two days later in Carnegie Hall in New York. The concerts themselves were by acclamation artistic triumphs. But the backstage story—the creation of the Host Committee, the planning, the care for thousands of details—these were no less exceptional.

To find out more about how it all came about, I visited Cynthia Friedman in New York City, which serves as her part-time home along with Palm Beach, Pittsburgh and Paris.

A native of Pittsburgh, Cynthia attended

the University of Pittsburgh with majors in Political Science and Fine Arts, connecting a keen social conscience and a gift for activism with what would prove to be a lifelong love for the arts. At Pitt she also indulged her musical side as a member of the alto section of the Heinz Chapel Choir under the direction of the legendary Theodore M. Finney, whom Cynthia claims as an important influence. (Finney was the Head of the Department of Music at Pitt from 1936 to 1968, and founded the Heinz Chapel Choir in 1939. Today the music library at the University of Pittsburgh bears his name.)

After college and given her bent toward public service, Cynthia could have easily found her way to Washington D.C. and immersed herself in politics or public policy. But love intervened when she met a young Carnegie Tech alumnus, Milton Friedman ('47, '49). They married, and the Keystone State became their home and the place where they raised three children.

Milton Friedman was the founder and long-time President and CEO of the Emglo Products Corporation. He died in 1996.

Cynthia recalls that her husband loved to brag about his student experience at Carnegie Tech as an engineering student,

declaring that it was positive in large part because of the good friends he made in the College of Fine Arts, who taught him "about life and the world."

For Cynthia, life at the time was an intricate interweaving of public service and arts advocacy. Her public service side surfaced in 1993 when having made that long-contemplated move to Washington, D.C., she co-founded the Women's Leadership Forum (WLF) of the Democratic National Committee, an organization that encourages women to participate in national Democratic Party affairs. Today the WLF boasts a membership of several hundred thousand women across the country.

Cynthia's efforts with the WLF were noticed by President Bill Clinton, as was her interest and advocacy for the arts, and he appointed her to the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities. She also served on the Collectors Committee at the National Gallery of Art.

In 1998 and in memory of her husband, Cynthia set up an

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innovative internship program, the Friedman Fellows, which enables Carnegie Mellon students to spend summers in Washington, D.C., involved with real policy makers in real projects.

Among the arts groups currently on her radar screen, Cynthia serves on the board of the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra (based in New York), and is a member and supporter of the American Friends of the Louvre, an organization of American and French art lovers.

Smack dab in the middle of this full and busy life CMU President Jared Cohon asked Cynthia to serve as co-chair of the Host Committee for the School of Music Centennial Celebration, and she agreed. Asked why she would consider adding one more thing to her already busy schedule, she said simply, "I love music, I love CMU, and I love making things happen."

Making things happen is hard enough, but paying for things to happen can be harder still. As co-chair of the Host Committee, part of Cynthia's task was to convince others of the importance and value

of the Centennial Celebration project. The result was a Host Committee comprised of many remarkable and dedicated people. How does she convince busy people to get involved in yet one more project? "Well, I start by calling people up and introducing myself," she said wryly. "I don't see it as asking people for money, or help, or charity. I am firmly convinced I am doing them a favor. Getting involved in worthwhile organizations and projects is good for them—they get something very valuable for their time and money. And it's good for the community."

Serving as a member of the Carnegie Mellon Board of Trustees for the past 10 years, Cynthia has had a birds-eye view of the progress of the place, particularly with regard to the quality of the students. "I have witnessed the CMU student body become, in general, more diverse, more talented, and much more sophisticated," she said. "I am amazed by the current crop of students' intelligence, ingenuity, and energy."

About the CMU School of Music

Centennial Celebration, Cynthia expressed satisfaction and maybe a hint of pride, too. "I was very impressed and pleased with the student musicians' performances in Pittsburgh and New York. The artistic level was very high and I think we can be very proud to have a School of Music of this caliber. I lost count of the number of people who expressed to me their astonishment at the proficiency of these young musicians."

Cynthia has agreed to stay involved with the School of Music beyond its Centennial year, lending her energy, abilities, perspective, and experience.

That's music to our ears.