

The Salzburg Festival Society

Continuing a Legacy of American Philanthropy with Individual Giving

The Salzburg Festival is a touchstone of many lives. Those of Salzburgers, Austrians, and Europeans. Also those of Americans, Japanese, and many others throughout the world. People want to experience the Festival, and be enriched by it, and support it. In short, to be a part of it. Naturally, friends of the Festival have formed a variety of groups. One such group is the Salzburg Festival Society (SFS), founded in 2005.

Based in New York, SFS serves as the official liaison between the Festival and its American patrons. SFS is not for Americans only. It is open to all, and extends a welcome to all. But most members come from the United States.

Indeed, SFS grew out of AFSF, i.e., the American Friends of the Salzburg Festival. This group was founded in 1995 by Richard Colburn and Joe Troy – pillars of Los Angeles. The late Mr. Colburn's name can be found on a performing-arts school in that city. Mr. Troy was a lawyer, involved in all sorts of worthy causes. He was, for example, a founder of the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra.

Instrumental with merging the AFSF into the SFS, were Lee MacCormick Edwards, then president of the AFSF and John French III, a founding director of the SFS. Lee MacCormick Edwards, an unforgettable figure. She had a great zest for Salzburg, as for life itself. An American from Australia, she engaged in almost any sport you could name, including tennis, golf, swimming, and skiing. She was a professor of art history, and a businesswoman. She devoted her philanthropy to many endeavors, includ-

ing musical ones. She was practically made for Salzburg, and Salzburg for her.

Another figure from the "early days" – both in AFSF and SFS – was Donald Kahn. He was a keen and noble patron of the arts, "an Esterházy for our time," as he was dubbed. A New Yorker, essentially, he was a nephew of Walter Annenberg, the media magnate.

Mr Kahn loved Broadway, and could sing almost any show tune you could request. (His uncle, incidentally, dated Ethel Merman.) He also loved classical music, the theater, etc. – and he put his treasure where his heart was. Eventually, he and his wife, Jeanne, lived in Salzburg.

Mr Kahn was a prime builder of the Haus für Mozart. It might be considered his legacy, in his adopted hometown.

The Salzburg Festival Society was founded by a mighty triumvirate: Gerhard Andlinger, John French III, and Isabelle Harnoncourt Feigen. They were American, two of them Austrian American. Each has an interesting life story. We will touch on "Gerry," as everyone called him.

He was a Horatio Alger type. Born in Austria in 1931, he almost starved to death during the war. He pried coal out of the tracks for fuel. In due course, he learned English from American GIs. By dint of his wit, charm, and drive, he earned a fortune in America.

To the Festival, he gave, among other things, the SalzburgKulisse: a beautiful, large room amid the Festival halls, way up high. From its balcony, you



Marifé Hernández
and Alexa Wesner
© ...



Dorothee Volpini de Maestri,
Jack McDowell and
Peggy Weber-McDowell
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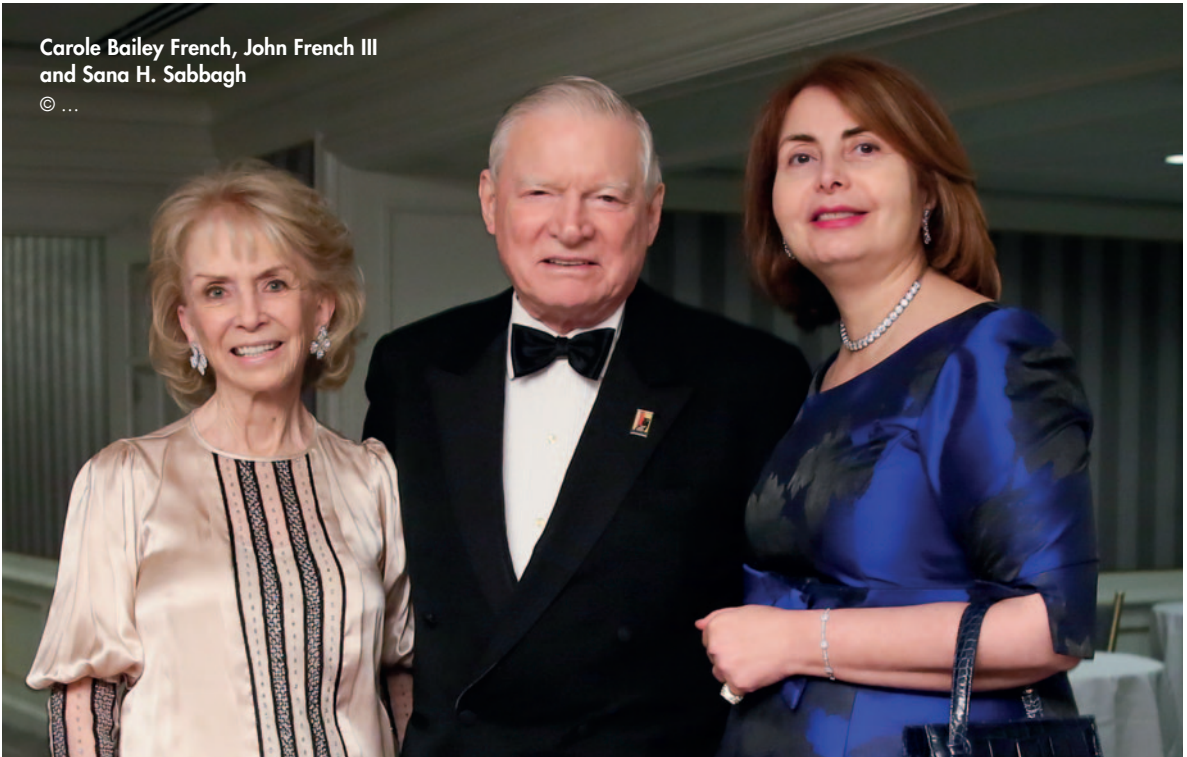
Nabil and Jeanne Chartouni
and Tristan Andlinger

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Carole Bailey French, John French III
and Sana H. Sabbagh

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have a panoramic view of the city, pretty much perfect.

SFS hosts a variety of activities and sponsors a number of projects – projects and individuals. The Society has lent a hand to young artists, as they make their way. Also, the Society has helped bring orchestras to Salzburg, including those of Cleveland, Boston, and Pittsburgh. SFS is committed to opera, too – getting productions off the ground.

There is no more distinctive member of the Salzburg Festival Society than Peggy Weber McDowell. Long an American, she is a native of Salzburg. In fact, she belongs to one of the oldest business families in town. She is an invaluable repository of Salzburg lore. Once, Maestro Wilhelm Furtwängler flirted with her. But she married Jack McDowell, a businessman who grew up in California and Minnesota. They live in Atlanta, and, during summer weeks, Salzburg.

The McDowell's make possible the English translation of Salzburg program booklets. This is a great help, not only to patrons from English-speaking countries, but also to patrons from all over.

Every summer, SFS stages a series of conversations with musicians, directors, and others. They are moderated by Jay Nordlinger, a journalist and music critic from New York. Each conversation lasts about an hour, and ends with audience questions. Anyone may attend. The atmosphere is relaxed and jovial. Interviewees and audiences alike enjoy these sessions. We learn about music, the music business, and life itself.

By this point, almost anyone and everyone has been an SFS guest, or interviewee. Conductors included Franz Welser-Möst and Manfred Honeck, to name two Austrians. Plus Mariss Jansons, Valery Gergiev, Christoph Eschenbach, Trevor Pinnock, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Kent Nagano, Herbert Blomstedt, et al.

Singers from high to low, one might name Diana Damrau, Renée Fleming, Krassimira Stoyanova, Anne Sofie von Otter, Michelle DeYoung, Bejun Mehta, Matthew Polenzani, Piotr Beczala, Thomas Hampson, Ferruccio Furlanetto, John Tomlinson, and René Pape.

Some violinists were Joshua Bell, Lisa Batiashvili, Anne-Sophie Mutter, Benjamin Schmid (a Salzburger), and Werner Hink (a concertmaster of the Vienna Philharmonic).

Two of the most interesting and popular guests SFS has ever had are two leaders of the Festival: Helga Rabl-Stadler, the president, and Markus Hinterhäuser, the artistic director (who doubles as a pianist). They took their listeners behind the scenes, so to speak.

Today, the Salzburg Festival Society is led by Alexa Wesner, its chairman, and Nabil Char-touni, its president. The Honorable Wesner is a former U.S. Ambassador to Austria; Mr Char-touni is a businessman and philanthropist. Both of them bring experience, knowledge, heart, and dynamism.

In the 1970's, there was a movie called "Same Time, Next Year." Thousands of people have this feeling about the Salzburg Festival: same time, next year. Patrons of the Festival become friends with one another. They get to know ushers, shopkeepers, hotel clerks, waiters, and many others. At Festival time – *Festspielzeit* – they would not want to be anywhere else.

You can learn more about the Salzburg Festival Society, its board of directors, becoming a member and annual activities in America and Austria at: www.sfsociety.org. You may also contact Joseph Bartning, Executive Director at office@sfsociety.org.

Joseph Bartning