

CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

NEWS

RETIRES

FIELD FOUNDATION GRANT PROVIDES FUNDS FOR TOURING BASSES

The Field Foundation of Chicago has given the Chicago Symphony Orchestra a grant of \$100,000 to purchase nine new double basses and cases to be used especially for touring. The instruments and their cases have been completed in time for the forthcoming trip to Australia.

The basses project was undertaken as the result of an accident last February involving the truck which was carrying the Orchestra's instruments and equipment on a tour of the Southwest. A number of items were damaged when the truck overturned, but the most seriously affected were the Orchestra's double basses. Because of their size and fragility, basses are the most vulnerable. The accident occurred enroute to a performance in Austin, Texas, which was delayed for nearly two hours while the instruments were moved from the disabled vehicle to a new truck. Because four of the damaged basses were unplayable, instruments were borrowed from the University of Texas Music Department for the concert.

The experience was a devastating one, not only to the bass players, but to the entire Orchestra as well. At the conclusion of the tour it was decided that it was imperative that the basses have proper protection for touring, and that the rare and valuable old Italian basses no longer be subjected to the rigors of touring. The Orchestra's bass section, and Manager Vanessa Moss began investigating instrument makers and case builders.

The gift was made by the Field Foundation in honor of Paul R. Judy who served as a director of the Foundation for ten years. Mr. Judy also was President of The Orchestral Association from 1977 to 1980 and currently is a Life Trustee.

"The touring basses project seemed an especially attractive one to the Foundation," commented Dr. E. Leland Webber, President of the Field

Sir Georg Solti
Music Director
Kenneth Jean
Associate Conductor
Michael Morgan
Affiliate Artist
Assistant Conductor
The Orchestral Association
Orchestra Hall
220 South Michigan Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60604
312/435-8122
Henry Fogel
Executive Vice President
and Executive Director
Joyce Idema
Director of Marketing and
Public Relations

Foundation. "The awarding of the grant fulfills an important and immediate need for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and it allows the Field Foundation to honor Paul Judy who has been so important to both our organizations," he concluded.

The basses were built by Peter Elias of Toronto. Mr. Elias began his career as a self-taught musician, before taking up the double bass and formal music studies. At the same time he became interested in repairing and building basses, to which he now devotes his time exclusively. His first double bass was modeled after the Domenico Montagnana bass for the principal of the Toronto Symphony. All his subsequent basses have been modeled, with some variations on this instrument. (Montagnana was a celebrated maker of string instruments in 17th century Italy. The Orchestra owns a Montagnana viola which is played by principal Charles Pikler.)

Members of the bass section had an opportunity to play all the new instruments that were available to them. The Montagnana model was chosen because the instruments have the sound and quality of the old Italian basses and offer great possibilities for the future as they age. The instrument is particularly beautiful with the shape the modern bass player needs. The tops are made of spruce and the sides and backs are either maple or mahogany.

The cases were made by Tim Fickholt of Minneapolis who has been building touring trunks and experimenting with their design for more than 30 years. As a stage hand for the Minnesota Orchestra he has been intimately involved with the protection and shipment of instruments. The new hand-crafted cases for Chicago are made of 7-ply marine plywood with reinforced corners. They offer great security, are lightweight, and easy for stagehands to handle.

CONTACT: Joyce Idema, (312) 435-8171
Kevin Martin, (312) 435-8771

11 February 1988
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