NOMINATION FOR THE 1997 NATIONAL MEDAL OF ARTS
CATEGORY: ARTS PATRON

Walter Scheuer

Walter Scheuer has been one of New York's leading forces in keeping great art forms alive. In his own private way, he follows in the traditions of such previous National Medal of Arts honorees Alice Tully and Vera List.

Mr. Scheuer grew up in a highly-successful real estate family, but carved out his own success as an investor--first with Oppenheimer and Co., and later as a private investor. He is now Chairman of the Board of the investment firm Sterling Capital Corporation. Using his wealth as a true member of the community, Mr. Scheuer shares not only his fortune, but also his wisdom, his time and his energy with a legion of charitable organizations and projects. He bubbles over with intellectual force, public spirit and literally boundless generosity and enthusiasm.

Mr. Scheuer lends his time and skills to a host of philanthropic activities, but focuses mostly on the arts--most notably the Paul Taylor Dance Company, the Mannes College of Music, Symphony Space, the Harlem School for the Arts, and Carnegie Hall. He has given many millions to these and other organizations which form the lifeblood of New York's cultural world.

At Carnegie Hall, he has been the largest single private benefactor in Carnegie Hall's history since Andrew Carnegie himself. A trustee since 1977, Mr. Scheuer is a man whose unstinting generosity has helped the Hall reach goals in its Capital, Centennial and Endowment Campaigns over the past twenty years. With his particular interest in education, Mr. Scheuer's gifts have resulted in programs such as the Solti Conducting Workshop and the most recent Tribute to Isaac Stern benefit gala, which--thanks in large part to his organizational skills and his own donations--helped raise a staggering $15 million for toward Carnegie Hall's Endowment Fund.

Twenty years ago, he almost single-handedly rescued the Paul Taylor Dance Company from extinction, pouring his own funds into its coffers and offering his leadership to guide it to a new era of success. He continues as Executive Vice President, and is currently using his talents as a film producer and fundraiser to develop a biography of Paul Taylor himself. This past summer, he sent the Company on its first tour to the People's Republic of China. Last year, by funding the PBS's production of "Dance in America" for home video market, Mr. Scheuer made it possible for people across the nation to experience the artistry of these dancers.

With a keen interest in bringing the arts to the broadest possible audience, Mr. Scheuer founded and funded the Four Oaks Foundation, through which he produces several documentary films, each with music or musicians as the subject. These projects build a bridge between the sometimes rarefied world of classical music and the world at large, making culture come alive for millions who might not otherwise have the opportunity to see the artists represented in his films. "From Mao to Mozart: Isaac Stern in China" chronicles the brilliant violinist's 1979 tour to the People's Republic of China; proceeds from the film, which received the 1980 Academy Award for Best Achievement

in a Documentary Feature, benefit Carnegie Hall. "Fiddlefest," which was also released as "Small Wonders" by Miramax, was nominated for the 1995 Academy Award in the same category. This feature documents the 1993 benefit concert at Carnegie Hall for Opus 118, the East Harlem violin instruction project. These and his other films show the power of music education worldwide, a cause for which Mr. Scheuer has been a loyal and generous advocate. Mr. Scheuer's film work also focuses on producing promotional films for nonprofits across the country.

He brings his unique commitment and receptivity towards not just the 'classical' art forms, but also to using new media technologies to educate young people. He was one of the earliest advocates of using CD-ROM technology for arts educational purposes, and has funded several programs and research projects regarding how best to educate non-musician public schoolchildren about the arts in interactive and exciting ways. One of his recent projects, an educational workshop at the Computer Museum in Boston, MA, enables children to use the latest computer technology in conjunction with others across the country to build virtual cities.

Mr. Scheuer recently wrote about Isaac Stern: "[He has] an infinite capacity for the most affectionate and intimate friendship...the old-fashioned, unconditional, all-weather, 'no small print' kind." These words describe Mr. Scheuer as well; his loyalty, strength and generosity--all of which benefit so many in his role as a champion of the arts--is that of a supportive, lifelong friend. Without pretension, without publicity, Walter Scheuer has helped New York maintain its reputation as one of the richest artistic communities in the world. For this, Carnegie Hall believes he exemplifies the spirit and the pursuit of excellence that the National Medal of the Arts was created to honor.