A Tribute to Wayne J. Shilkret

"His gentleness, humor, generous heart and vision are remembered by the many lives he touched."

When a great performing artist passes from this world, there are many pens poised to pay tribute. The gifts of the musician, singer, dancer or conductor are very much on public display – we all know their names, what they did in life and how they will be remembered.

It is different when a great impresario leaves us, however. Not everyone knows the names of these behind-the-scene people who work so diligently to forge the reputations of performing arts centers, scheduling, marketing, educating and enticing artists and audiences to come to the theater. But when the great ones go, they leave a void that is difficult to fill. They are the vital link between the artists, the theater and the community – they leave an indelible stamp upon the theater community and the hearts of their audiences.

Wayne Shilkret was such an impresario (although, modest as he was, he would have disliked that grandiose term). He started his career with famed impresario, Sol Hurok, and, from then on, was continuously offered opportunities in the performing arts over a span of 40-plus years. Under his wise and innovative management for many of the performing arts organizations he led, performances increased and broaden in appeal, and audiences became more diverse and wider. His passion, though, was classical music, and he believed that introducing new audiences to the art form was crucially important. After introducing the Cerritos Center's audiences to the " Pied Piper of Classical Music" – Rob Kapilow, in three short years attendance dramatically increased for these outreach programs. In addition, he wanted to make classical music more accessible to those already converted. Hence, the founding of the Gold Medal Series sponsored by the acclaimed Jose′ Iturbi Foundation and the Cerritos Center's Friends organization which provides aspiring artists a major venue in which to perform and performances at prices that make the concerts accessible to anyone.

Those of us who have had been inspired, moved, educated, and uplifted by the artists this quiet, professional, enthusiastic, and passionate man brought to us, have much for which to thank Wayne Shilkret.

The Wayne J. Shilkret Living Tribute Fund has been established to continue his work in presenting special classical music programs. Each newly minted music fan who goes out into the world appreciating classical music a little more, will, in a way, be a living tribute to Wayne Shilkret.

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