WASHINGTON
PERFORMING ARTS

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Washington Performing Arts announces the Douglas H. Wheeler Fund for Classical Music

The public phase of a $30 million endowment campaign to support the present and future of classical programming at Washington Performing Arts

WASHINGTON, D.C. (October 28, 2026) Washington Performing Arts today launches the public phase of a transformational endowment campaign to gain additional, sustaining support for premier classical music programming, the **Douglas H. Wheeler Fund for Classical Music** (The Wheeler Fund). Named in honor of Washington Performing Arts President Emeritus, The Wheeler Fund sustains the organization's ability to bring exceptional classical music artists and performances to the region and opens the power of this art form to more people, now and for generations to come. Longtime Board Member Dr. Robert Feinberg and his wife Betsy Feinberg provided the cornerstone commitment of $10 million for The Wheeler Fund.

The Wheeler Fund follows Washington Performing Arts's 2024 announcement of the Dallas Morse Coors Legacy Endowment gift ($8.6 million) to support classical music, dance, and operations. The combined goal for the Dallas Morse Coors Legacy Endowment and The Wheeler Fund is $30 million by fall 2027. To date, $22 million has been received or pledged.

The Wheeler Fund gives Washington Performing Arts a lasting financial foundation to sustain and expand exceptional classical music programming in our nation's capital, strengthens capacity to bring world-class artists and ensembles to Washington, D.C., and reinforces the city's standing as a destination for the performing arts. With this foundation, The Wheeler Fund

invites opportunities to deepen artist relationships, plan beyond a single season, and pursue bold artistic initiatives that enrich Washington's cultural life.

Washington Performing Arts invests each endowment gift for the long term, creating an annual, dependable source of support, and ensuring exceptional classical music stays a vibrant part of the region's cultural life for generations to come. Each year, a board-approved draw from endowment earnings will be allocated to support classical programming initiatives. With the cost of presenting these concerts supported by the endowment, Washington Performing Arts can offer more accessible ticket prices. A portion of ticket revenue can then support arts education, gospel music, and community programs.

The Fund honors Douglas H. Wheeler, President Emeritus at Washington Performing Arts, who forged trusted relationships with artists, championed artistic excellence, and committed Washington Performing Arts to the community it serves during a career spanning more than five decades.

> *"Doug Wheeler is a hero and an inspiration to me as an artist. He nurtured creativity in me and encouraged me to be daring, think outside the box, and pursue my visions without fear. He embodies the belief that art has no endpoint or inherent boundaries, only the possibility of continually reaching toward something greater. I appreciate and love that he trusted artists to follow that path without imposing limits on where it might lead. His generosity brought artists and young audiences closer to the performing arts, opening doors to discovery, possibility, and a lifelong connection with the transformative power of art," said* ***violinist Midori***

"Classical music was part of my life from the time I was three or four years old; we attended everything we could because the tickets were affordable for my parents: excellence and access were intertwined. Now, as President & CEO of Washington Performing Arts, I am thrilled that we can envision a similar path forward for current audience members and generations to come: a sense of welcome, discovery, excellence, and access… not with just one performance but with many, year after year. The Douglas H Wheeler Fund for Classical Music will make this possible. We are so grateful to Bob and Betsy Feinberg for honoring our dear friend and visionary President Emeritus Doug Wheeler, whose legacy inspires us every day," said ***Jenny Bilfield, President & CEO****.*

"We want to make sure that many others, both young and old, can share the pleasures and excitement of great classical music performed here in Washington," said ***Dr. Robert Feinberg,***

***Cornerstone Supporter of the Wheeler Fund**.*

*"As a board, our commitment is to ensure a secure and vibrant future for Washington Performing Arts. The Wheeler Fund anchors our foundation, making exceptional classical music accessible to more people and strengthening everything we do. It carries the name of our treasured friend and leader, who showed us what long-term vision looks like," said **Trista Colbert, Board Chair, Washington Performing Arts**.*

The Wheeler Fund focuses on three priorities:

- Advancing artistic excellence. Washington Performing Arts presents extraordinary orchestras, chamber ensembles, soloists, and vocalists on D.C.-area stages. The December 10, 2026, performance of Daniil Trifonov at the Music Center at Strathmore serves as the inaugural Wheeler Fund Performance.

- Deepening artist partnerships. Washington Performing Arts nurtures lasting relationships that shape ambitious programming, creating greater opportunity for commissions, special recitals, international collaborations, and projects developed alongside artists.

- Expanding access and discovery. Washington Performing Arts opens more doors for students, newcomers, and longtime patrons to experience exceptional classical music in person.

A Legacy of "Everybody In, Nobody Out"

Washington Performing Arts grounds its work on a simple belief by founder Patrick Hayes: "Everybody in, nobody out." For 60 years, that belief has guided the organization as it brings premier artists to the region, builds enduring relationships with artists and audiences, and shapes the cultural life of the city. At its founding, Washington Performing Arts prioritized international collaborations, bringing cultural exchange from abroad to D.C.-area stages, and multi-decade partnerships with soloists and ensembles took root in the 1980s. Gospel music became a staple in the 1990s, when resident choirs established a program that thrives more than 30 years later.

To learn more, visit https://www.washingtonperformingarts.org/wheeler-fund

About Douglas H. Wheeler, President Emeritus

Douglas H. Wheeler led Washington Performing Arts as President from 1982 to 2002. He became President Emeritus upon retiring in September 2002, and in 2022 received the organization's Ambassador of the Arts Award for his extraordinary achievement, service, and advocacy.

During his tenure, Wheeler presented the Washington recital debuts of many of the world's leading artists, including Luciano Pavarotti, Kathleen Battle, Cecilia Bartoli, Denyce Graves, James Galway, Evgeny Kissin, Midori, and Lang Lang. He is credited with increasing support for local artists, establishing the Washington Performing Arts gospel choirs, introducing audiences to experimental art forms, expanding arts education and family programs, and growing the organization's budget and membership. He also helped develop collaborative arts education approaches in D.C.-area schools and the formation of a Cultural Development Corporation for the District.

Wheeler is a Past President of the ISPA Foundation, a past board member of the Cultural Alliance of Greater Washington, and a 2023 recipient of ISPA's Angel Award. He has served on and chaired National Endowment for the Arts panels.

Active in regional affairs, he is a Past Chairman of the D.C. Chamber of Commerce, a trustee emeritus of the Federal City Council, and has served on numerous boards, including Leadership Washington, the Friday Morning Music Club, and Southeastern University. In 2004, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg invited him to chair the Friends of Music at the Supreme Court. He currently serves on the board of Partners in Performance, founded by Midori.

About Washington Performing Arts

One of the most established and honored performing arts institutions in America, Washington Performing Arts has engaged for 60 years with artists, audiences, students, and civic life. The city is truly our stage: for decades, in venues ranging from concert halls and clubs to public parks, we have presented a tremendous range of artists and art forms, from the most distinguished symphony orchestras to both renowned and emerging artists in classical music, jazz, gospel, dance, culturally specific genres, and more.

Washington Performing Arts deeply values its partnerships with local organizations and other arts institutions. Through events in myriad performance venues and neighborhoods, we engage international visiting artists in community programs and introduce local artists to wider audiences. We place a premium on establishing artists as a continuing presence in the lives of both young people and adults through residencies, gospel music ensembles, and education programs.

Our achievements have been recognized with a National Medal of Arts and with four Mayor's Arts Awards from the DC Government. We have now embarked upon our second half-century, ever inspired by the motto of our founder, Patrick Hayes: "Everybody in, nobody out."

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