MUSIC GUILD: 40 YEARS AT THE CENTER

By DANIEL CARIAGA

Musical Los Angeles. It has often been remarked, has no real center.

If a stranger to this city wants to see our musical community, it is difficult to know where to send that visitor.

It is true that a sense of our musical community sometimes does surface. It can be seen on certain winter-season Thursday nights when the Los Angeles Philharmonic is playing at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. Or at the Pierre Boulez concerts that reopened Royce Hall last May. But only on special occasions.

Along with the Philharmonic, Music Guild, our longtime purveyor of first-rate chamber music ensembles, may be the closest this community gets to having a musical core. Attending a Music Guild event at the Wiltshire Heights, its home for most of the past 30 years, one often feels in the center of things. Interesting music is made there; important musicians perform there. And the loyal and dedicated Music Guild audience recognizes the distinction.

Celebrating its 60th anniversary this week (its 1984-85 season opens Wednesday night with a performance by the Prague Quartet), Music Guild seems as vital, as vigorous, as ever.

"Well, damn," the Guild's longtime manager, Dorothy Huttenbach, replies to that statement, "it's not so easy. Our costs are going up. Artists' fees keep rising. And we have to do it all ourselves."

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Huttenbach, who has run the chamber-music operation since 1962, is talking about the organization's complete independence from government grants, foundation mules, large donors and deficit spending. And about what has been, in these four decades, essentially a one-person operation.

The first operator was Alfred Leonard, record-shop owner and radio personality, who founded, with a number of others, Music Guild in 1944. Huttenbach succeeded Leonard eight years later.

Over the years, the now-87-year-old impresario has chosen the ensembles, selected the programs, entreated the artists, handled the publicity, re-sold the subscriptions, and, apparently, solved all problems.

Recently, she has had a willing helper—Dorothy Huttenbach has managed Music Guild's fortunes and future since 1952.

Our list is getting smaller. We must bring it up again by finding more and more young people.

One critic has called Music Guild the best-kept secret in musical Los Angeles.

"We have to turn that around," says Golden.

"If we can sell every seat (there are 1,200) in Wiltshire Heights, we can then afford even the highest-price quartets."

He reveals that the two most celebrated chamber ensembles, the Juilliard and Guarneri Quartets, are no longer within the budget limitations of Music Guild—this year reaching $35,000—an irony that has not escaped Huttenbach's clear vision, at one time, b-annual visits by those ensembles were a Guild tradition.

"It's a crazy business," Huttenbach explains, expressing an opinion formed over a period of 53 years in that business.

Born in San Francisco on Oct. 30, 1930, Dorothy Alice Marcus was a prodigious child, a pianist from the age of 5, and a young musician with a clear future. Her mother took her to Berlin in 1907 to study, first with Xavier Schwarzecker, later with Casimir Hohmann (father of Josef). Only her youth disabled her from entry into the Hochschule fuer Musik, a jury on which sat both Ernst von Dohnanyi and Engelbert Humperdinck decided, as Huttenbach says today, "that they couldn't have a 13-year-old person wandering around there."

But the head of the school, Heinrich Berl (one of the teachers of Artur Rubinstein), took the young Dorothy as his private pupil. After further study with Conrad Anker, the budding pianist returned to the United States during World War I and attended UC Berkeley (where she assisted Edgar Sullivan Kelley in his piano classes). In 1929, she returned to Germany for further study and concertizing. "The height of my ambition," Huttenbach recalls today, "was a successful concert at the Beethoven Hall in Berlin. I got nine good reviews, I thought I had achieved everything I wanted to achieve."

Her marriage to Otto Huttenbach of Princeton in 1932 proved to be a turning point.

"When I had my children," Huttenbach remembers, "I was so devoted to my work that I had no interest in sitting for hours playing the piano. The last time I played in public was in 1938. Then I married. And I never looked in the coffin again. I just didn't have the interest to practice as much as you need to practice to keep in concert pitch. When you've been there, and you know what it is, you can't settle for less.

"But then, as I had all of these musical connections, having wired and wired musicians internationally, I began to use them for other people, to build up their careers."

Through her uncle, San Francisco arts patron J.B. Leavitt, Huttenbach had already been instrumental in placing an unknown Russian conductor, Isay Dobrowen, at the helm of the San Francisco Symphony. Now, she began to use her taste and connections in earnest, helping other musicians. "I saw that I had a certain talent for getting people together," Huttenbach recalls. "And knowing music from being a musician, I could recommend the right people. It wasn't just a question of wanting to do something; I actually got putting people together that I knew it together.

With the rise of Hitler, the Huttenbachs moved to London in 1933, and Mrs. Huttenbach became connected with a number of established theatrical managers—Sir Oswald Stoll, Wilfrid Van Wyck and others. Among the musical artists with whom she worked at that time were soprano Maria Farel and conductors George Szell and Erich Kleiber. In 1939, seeing the approach of war, the Huttenbachs set off for California.

In Los Angeles, long-term and successful collaborations with impresario L.B. Bushyager and conductor Franz Waxman, among many others, prepared Huttenbach for the rigors of chamber-music management. And, beginning in the 1950s, her encouragement of young artists like Marilyn Horne and Mary Coin gave extra satisfaction to a life always devoted to others.

"People talk about having it all," Huttenbach muses, today, "I'm here to tell you, dearie, no one has it all.

"I've proven that you can be in business and have a very happy family life. But you have to think very little of yourself. You can't think about your personal life and your family. You can think of business and your family. You can have it all. More than that, it's not always possible."

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