

Sandy Weill announces Carnegie Hall partnerships with SSU, Santa Rosa Symphony

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Financier and philanthropist Sandy Weill and his wife, Joan, on Wednesday announced a new educational partnership between Sonoma State University and New York's Carnegie Hall, scheduled to begin in June 2013.

In conjunction with the SSU program, Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute also announced a partnership with the Santa Rosa Symphony to help support a new, five-year education program for underprivileged youth starting in the 2013-2014 season.

“We're going to launch a program called ‘Simply Strings,’” said Alan Silow, executive director of the Santa Rosa Symphony, who was in New York for the announcement. “We'll be choosing an elementary school in Sonoma County that serves underprivileged kids.”

The education program is inspired by El Sistema, a free music program for mostly impoverished youth founded in 1975 in Venezuela. Similar programs have since sprung up in the U.S. with the help of Venezuelan conductor Gustavo Dudamel, music director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra.

“It will be looking at music as a vehicle for social change,” Silow said. “This will serve an under-served part of this community. It's a big vision.”

The symphony will also work with Carnegie Hall's Link Up program, which will provide the repertoire and teaching materials for students in third through fifth grade to learn a piece of music on the recorder.

Silow estimated that the symphony would have to raise about \$100,000 to support the first year of both programs.

The Simply Strings program will culminate with two free concerts for youth at SSU's Green Music Center, featuring the violin and recorder students as well as the Santa Rosa Symphony.

“It's going beyond the passive appreciation of music and actively involving the students,” Silow said.

Also representing the Santa Rosa Symphony at Wednesday's announcement were President-Elect Charles Schlangen and Music Director Bruno Ferrandis, who flew in from Paris.

Representatives of SSU included President Ruben Arminana and his wife, Marne Olson; Vice-President for Administration and Finance Larry Schlereth; and Green Music Center Artistic Director Jeff Langley, according to Silow.

As part of the SSU partnership, the symphony's Simply Strings program will be taught by three professional musicians from Carnegie Hall's The Academy, who will spend a year-long residency at the SSU campus in Rohnert Park, he added.

The Academy, a two-year fellowship program designed to prepare musicians for careers in music teaching and leadership, was created by Carnegie Hall, The Juilliard School and the Weill Music Institute in collaboration with the New York City Department of Education.

The program marks the first time that alumni of The Academy will engage in such an extensive residency, working within a university setting.

Sandy and Joan Weill, who have a home in the Sonoma Valley, donated \$12 million to SSU's Green Music Center in March 2011. The center's main concert hall is named in their honor.

Sandy Weill, a former chief executive of Citigroup and nationally recognized philanthropist, serves as chairman of the Green Music Center Board of Advisers. He has served as chairman of the Carnegie Hall Board of Trustees for 30 years.

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