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Baltimore Symphony Orchestra receives \$1.2 million donation to bring low-income students to concerts



Philanthropist Mark Joseph, above, and his wife, Patricia, announced Tuesday that they are donating \$1.2 million to the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. (Kim Hairston / Baltimore Sun)

By Mary Carole McCauley | The Baltimore Sun | June 28, 2016, 3:00 PM



Who's the most recent beneficiary of Mark and Patricia Joseph's philanthropic spending spree?

The philanthropists Mark and Patricia Joseph said Tuesday that they are donating \$1.2 million to the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra to bring the city's poorest children to classical music concerts.

The gift, which will target city schools with the highest numbers of low-income pupils, will more than triple the number of financially disadvantaged students who attend the orchestra's popular midweek concert series for local schools — from 1,500 to 5,000 annually, Mark Joseph said.

The announcement is also the most recent — and apparently, far from final — installment in the Josephs' philanthropic spending spree. Tuesday's gift brings to \$7.5 million the sum spent in the past eight months alone.

The inspiration behind the couple's donation occurred a few years ago, when they took three of their grandchildren to a youth concert at Joseph Meyerhoff Symphony Hall.

"I looked around at the audience, and it occurred to me that there apparently weren't very many city youth attending these concerts," Mark Joseph said. "I wondered what was going on, so I contacted the symphony."

Officials explained that many children couldn't afford the \$10 ticket price, let alone the often-prohibitive cost of renting a bus.

The Josephs' gift includes \$150,000 to start bringing kids to concerts as soon as school resumes in the fall; \$1 million to create an endowment so the program can continue in perpetuity; and \$50,000 to benefit OrchKids, the symphony program that provides music instruction and instruments for low-income pupils.

Barbara Bozzuto, chairwoman of the symphony's board of directors, said that she was impressed that the couple has structured their donation to have the maximum impact.

"What's incredible about this gift is how well thought out it is," she said over the phone.

"They know they want to make a difference in educating our young people, and they put a lot of thought into how best to move that dial. This is philanthropy at its most visionary."

In May, the Josephs promised \$3.5 million to the CollegeBound Foundation, the largest single donation in that organization's history. In October, the Josephs also pledged \$3 million to the Baltimore Museum of Art to pay some costs of its new center on education and creativity.

The couple have a long history of supporting education.

Mark Joseph is founding chairman of The Shelter Group, which began developing multifamily housing in 1975. That same year, he became president of the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners and served in that post until 1980.

Before she retired, Patricia Joseph was a dean at Stevenson University as well as a special assistant to the provost of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. She also is an immediate past chair of the board of overseers at the Baltimore School for the Arts, which her husband helped found.

"We plan to give more, God willing," Mark Joseph said.

"You can't take it with you, and Pat and I have a number of projects we're looking at. We're trying to help city schoolkids as much as we can and we're very fortunate to be able to do so."

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