



# 2024-25 Annual Report



# Introduction

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This Annual Report is provided as a comprehensive presentation of the work and goals of the Richard Wagner Society of New York for the 2024-25 season.

The ambition of the Wagner Society of New York is fundamentally a powerful desire to develop memorable experiences for our membership and friends. To achieve this specific outcome of success we are guided by the motto of the Society: “To teach, to learn, to share.”

### TEACHING

occurs through lectures, symposia and similar events scheduled throughout the season, focusing on the works of Richard Wagner and opera in general.

### LEARNING

always results from attending performances, films and lectures sponsored by the Society that bring to life the genius of Wagner and other composers.

### SHARING

includes assisting developing artists deemed promising in the Wagner repertoire with financial and other forms of support. In addition, the Society has been active in further growing the Bayreuth Stipendium Program for young professionals.

Beyond these goals, the Society provides a forum where individuals who are interested in opera or music in general and the musical works of Richard Wagner in particular can share their knowledge. Reception, events and other social interactions offer opportunities to share our passion for Wagner’s music, the world of opera and make new friends.

We thank our members and supporters and welcome enthusiasts to join us.



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**John Ryan**  
Chairman of the  
Board of Directors

**F. Peter Phillips**  
President

# Activities

## Programming

The Wagner Society offers topical educational programs to its members and the public throughout the year. In the 2024-25 Season, the Society offered the following events:

<p><b>September 2024</b></p> <p>A six-part course by retired Juilliard professor John Muller IV on composers who influenced Wagner, and those whom Wagner influenced in turn</p>	<p><b>September 2024</b></p> <p>A program featuring reports from the 2024 Bayreuth Festival, featuring photos and discussion of the new production of <i>Tristan und Isolde</i></p>	<p><b>October 2024</b></p> <p>Craig Rutenburg and Tyson Deaton led a scintillating exchange on how prompters at the Met Opera do their work</p>	<p><b>November 2024</b></p> <p>Members attended a private screening of a film adaptation of <i>Parsifal</i> Act II, a work-in-progress by cinematographic artist and Society member Griffin Kaiser</p>
<p><b>December 2024</b></p> <p>Our 43d Annual Seminar focused on Richard Strauss' <i>Die Frau ohne Schatten</i>, and featured scholars, performers and critics of the Met production</p>	<p><b>January 2025</b></p> <p>Howard Shore's magnificent score to the film trilogy <i>Lord of the Rings</i> was dissected and explained by scholar and composer Doug Adams</p>	<p><b>February 2025</b></p> <p>Organist Christopher Houlihan performed transcriptions of Wagner and Lizst on the newly reinstalled organ at the Cathedral of St John the Divine</p>	<p><b>March 2025</b></p> <p>Conductor Jakob Lehmann offered an explication of the nuanced relationship between Wagner and Anton Bruckner, also addressing development of conducting styles of Bruckner's symphonies</p>
<p><b>April 2025</b></p> <p>Tenor Shawn Roth, winner of the Society's 2024 Lauch Award, offered a recital at Borge Hall on Park Avenue</p>	<p><b>May 2025</b></p> <p>Simone Young, conductor of the current Bayreuth <i>Ring</i>, was guest of honor at a private reception at the home of member Claudia Deutschmann, to which Society patrons were invited</p>	<p><b>June 2025</b></p> <p>Michael Downes offered an introduction to his new and much-acclaimed book, <i>Wagner and the Creation of the Ring</i>, and graciously autographed copies</p>	

Most of these events were livestreamed for members located remotely or otherwise unable to attend in person. Many of them were also recorded for possible future posting on the Society's YouTube Channel.

The Society also hosted informal "meet-ups" before or during concerts of the New York Philharmonic and performances at the Metropolitan Opera, Houston Grand Opera, and Atlanta Opera. It also arranged group ticket sales for certain related concerts and theatrical performances, encouraging social interactions among our members.

In addition to these programs, the Society arranged a variety of events during the 2025 Bayreuth Festival. These included a series of "Artist Talks" at the Arvena Kongress hotel, featuring informal conversations with performers Ekaterina Gubanova, Jordan Shanahan, Michael Spyres, Michael Nagy and Matthew Newlin. A talk was also offered by Thomas Launius, who addressed the mythic origins of the *Parsifal* narrative. The Society also offered a group dinner after the performance of *Die Walküre* as well as a farewell lunch.



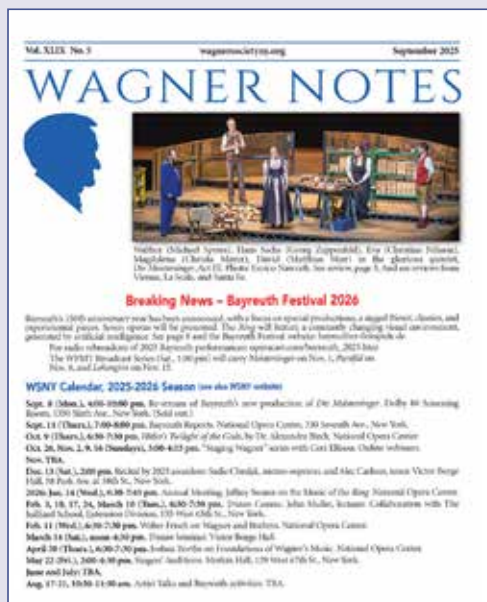
# Activities

## Publications

The Society publishes its members-only bimonthly flagship newsletter, *Wagner Notes*, under the capable leadership of Nathalie D. Wagner. *Wagner Notes* is a benefit of membership that is highly valued and each issue is eagerly anticipated by those familiar with it. It includes reviews, articles, notices, photos, announcements of upcoming Society events, schedules of future Wagner productions, and other valuable information. This publication is distributed in either hard-copy or electronic form, at the election of each member.

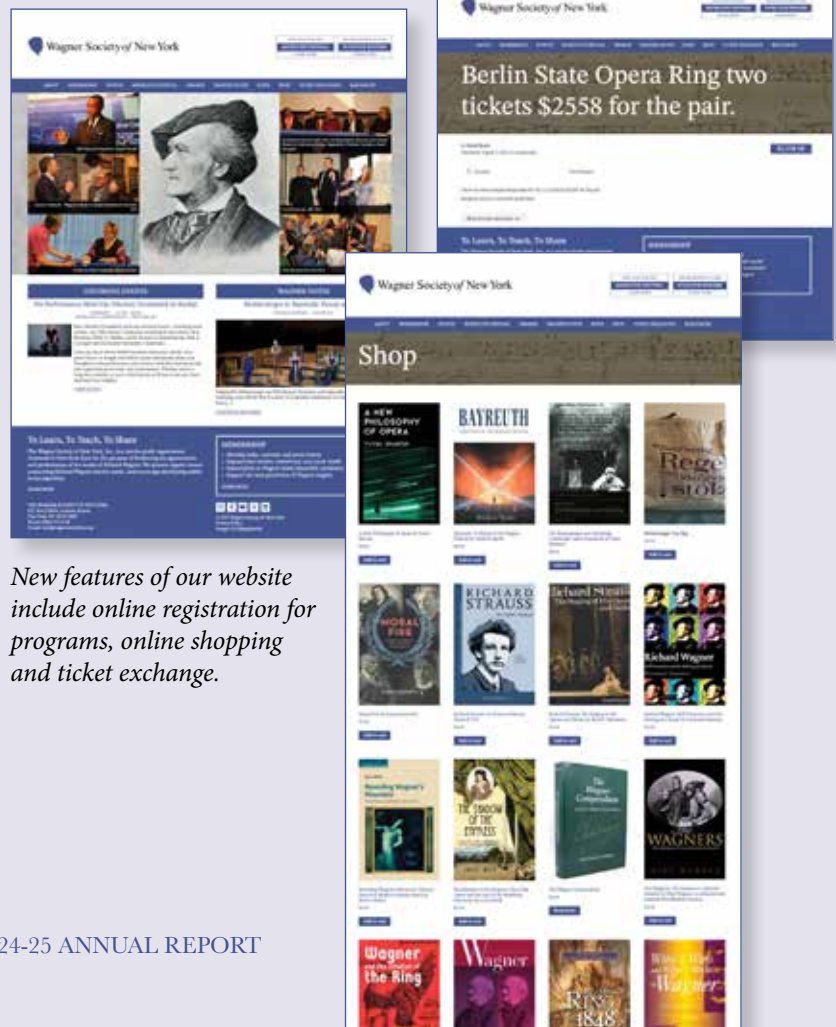
The Society's website, redesigned during the 2023-24 season, continues to provide robust information to a worldwide audience. Members and others receive periodic announcements of events and other information through electronic communications and mailed notices. The revamped website also includes many other features, including online registration for programs, an online shopping capability and a ticket exchange/donation section.

### WAGNER NOTES



*Wagner Notes* newsletter is published bimonthly for members.

### WAGNER SOCIETY OF NEW YORK WEBSITE



*New features of our website include online registration for programs, online shopping and ticket exchange.*

## Singers' Awards

The Society oversees certain restricted-use funds established by individuals seeking to support the careers of promising singers. Awards are funded by generous Society members who established the **Robert Lauch Memorial Endowed Fund**, the **Ursula Springer Endowed Fund** and the recently established **Wagner Society of New York Fund for Singers**. Additional grants are occasionally offered, supported by member contributions, including bequests. Grants and awards are made upon audition.

Following auditions held at Merkin Hall on Tuesday, May 20, 2025 (to which Society members were invited), mezzo-soprano Sadie Cheslak was awarded the Robert Lauch Memorial Fund Award (\$6,000) and tenor Alec Carlson was awarded the Ursula Springer Award (\$3,000). Encouragement grants of \$1000 were extended to tenor Michael Deshield and soprano Allyson Bennett. Grants of \$500 were made to soprano Lynnesha Crump, mezzo-soprano Kate Farrar, mezzo-soprano Ani Kushyan, soprano Danielle Lombardi, contralto Ema Mitrovic, soprano Celeste Morales, and bass-baritone Johannes Schwarz.



The judging panel comprised Cori Ellison, Tyson Deaton and Deborah Surdi (each a co-Chair of the Singers' Committee); Ken Benson; and Roger Malouf. Our special guest judge was the distinguished Wagnerian soprano and vocal teacher, Jane Eaglen.

The Society looks forward to welcoming Ms. Cheslak and Mr. Carlson to perform a vocal recital in Winter 2025. We are pleased to recognize the talents of these exceptional artists and wish them the best in their career development.

# Activities

## Bayreuth and Other Affiliated Organizations

### Member Access to the Festival



One of the most coveted benefits of membership in the Wagner Society is the opportunity to procure priority tickets to the Bayreuth Festival. We receive ticket allocations from the Festival Kartenbüro and from the Gesellschaft der Freunde von Bayreuth (the “Gesellschaft”), of which the Society is a member. The Society enjoys longstanding professional and personal relationships with staff in both organizations.

In 2025 the Society brought new technology to ticketing. This permitted invoices to be sent quickly in a standardized way, as well as acceptance of online credit card payments. These new procedures proved to be a success, saving a great amount of volunteer time and providing clarity for our members.

The Society sold 203 tickets to 38 members. All of the tickets allocated to the Society were in the best price categories (A1 and A2). All members who requested tickets within the time frame announced were able to be accommodated.

### The Bayreuth Stipendium

The Richard Wagner Scholarship Foundation awards young people between 18 and 35 years old – aspiring singers, instrumentalists, scholars, designers and performers – a stipendium that allows them to visit the Bayreuth Festival with over 200 young people from around the world in an atmosphere of artistry and exchange. *Stipendiaten* learn about the development and history of the Festival; attend tours, talks, and concerts; and meet and network with their peers in the opera world.

In addition to attending three opera performances, *stipendiaten* are offered accommodations, lectures and tours, and social receptions. Awardees are nominated by local Wagner Societies around the world.

Scholars attended performances of *Das Rheingold* (August 15, 2025), *Parsifal* (August 17, 2025), and *Siegfried* (August 18, 2025), as well as the Scholarship Concert (August 16, 2025). Lodging and activities in Bayreuth were paid for by the Richard Wagner Scholarship Foundation. The Wagner Society of New York paid for certain costs of the program, as well as reasonable travel expenses to and from the Festival.

Nominees are not limited to vocalists or instrumentalists; our goal is to select individuals best positioned to benefit from the Bayreuth experience in a broad sense. The Wagner Society has previously sponsored a variety of artists, including a scenic designer, a filmmaker, a bass-baritone, a conductor, and an arts administrator.

### 2025 Bayreuth Stipendium



Soprano Jaclyn Grossman and Bassoonist Sanford Schwartz

This year, due to the generosity of Mr. Kevin Salinger and Dr. Edward Seidel, the Society was able to send two talented and highly qualified young participants as *Stipendiaten* for the 2025 Bayreuth Festival: Jaclyn Grossman, a soprano currently engaged to sing Brünnhilde with Edmonton Opera; and Sanford Schwartz, a New York City-based bassoonist and audio engineer.

The Society is proud to support both the Scholarships Foundation's mission and the careers of these aspiring Wagner professionals.

## The Verband and the Gesellschaft

The Society is a longstanding member, and financial supporter, of the Gesellschaft and the Richard Wagner Verband Internationale (RWVI). It was represented at the 2025 Verband Kongress by Caroline Couch, a recent graduate of New York University who is currently studying as a Fulbright Scholar at Radboud Universiteit in Nijmegen, Netherlands. She reported that RWVI President Harry Leutscher arranged for the Kongress to convene in Bayreuth under the banner of returning to Wagnerian roots for a weekend of networking, reconnection, and organizational proceedings, which were held in the famed theater's Chorsaal. President Leutscher presented his strategic plan "RWVI: Future Proof," discussing pathways to increase the RWVI's global influence through preserving, promoting, and engaging Wagner's legacy among non-European and youth stakeholders. Caroline herself had productive conversations with several international society presidents regarding youth engagement and retention. Three workshop-paradigms for delegates were convened: "Networking the Richard Wagner Local Associations: Internet as a Means of Strengthening the Community," "Development of Scholarship Holders & International Orientation," and "Online Program for Members: Shared Experiences Worldwide." Plans for the 2026 Wagner Congress in Amsterdam were announced.

## Other Organizational Affiliations

The Society has maintained contact with other Wagner Societies in North America and the United Kingdom, periodically hosting Zoom discussions and seeking collaboration and mutually advantageous new initiatives. It has also enhanced its productive relationship with such producing organizations as the Metropolitan Opera and Atlanta Opera.



# Membership

The Wagner Society of New York closed its 2024-25 season with 629 members. The season realized 46 new members, six of whom are student members.

During this year, continued work was performed to improve the infrastructure by which membership data are retained, tracked and used. Additionally, the process of membership renewal was enhanced, employing both online and postal notices.

During the recent pandemic seasons, members were retained regardless of their maintaining dues payments. This practice was discontinued during the 2022-23 season. It is noteworthy that, although some minor attrition was experienced in overall dues-paying membership during this time, membership revenues increased. This was the result of many of our members' increasing their membership categories, or making outright contributions in addition to their membership dues, in recognition of the challenges that the Society confronted during that period and their commitment to its continued success. We are grateful for the consistent support of our members, whose dues and contributions constitute by far the largest single source of revenue for our programming.

Member Benefits	Programs, Recitals, Lectures, Classes, Film Screenings, Concertgoing, and many more events	 Conductor Jakob Lehmann
	 Tenor Shawn Roth	Hear, meet, and support the next generation of Wagner Singers
	 2024 Scholarship Awardees	Access to priority tickets at the Bayreuth Festival
	Scholarships, Grants, & Singers Awards for students and young professionals	 Author Michael Downes
	 Conductor Thomas Guggeis	Subscription to <i>Wagner Notes</i> , our bimonthly newsletter



# Finances (as of August 31, 2025, unaudited)

## Revenue

Membership dues consistently constitute the bulk of the funds annually supporting the Society’s programs and the publication of the highly acclaimed *Wagner Notes* (63%).

Another form of support is the level of contributions made primarily by members, some of which are donor restricted (12%). Between dues and contributions, a full 75% of the funds fueling the Society’s activities come from our membership.

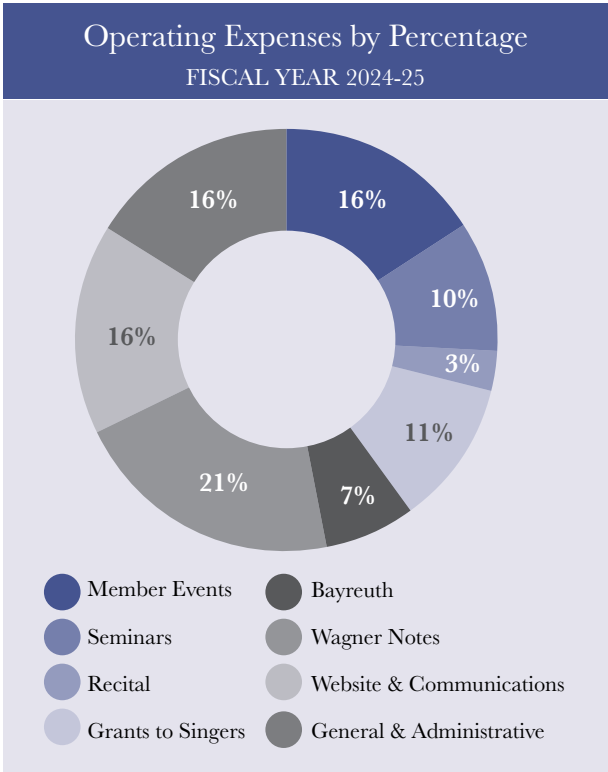
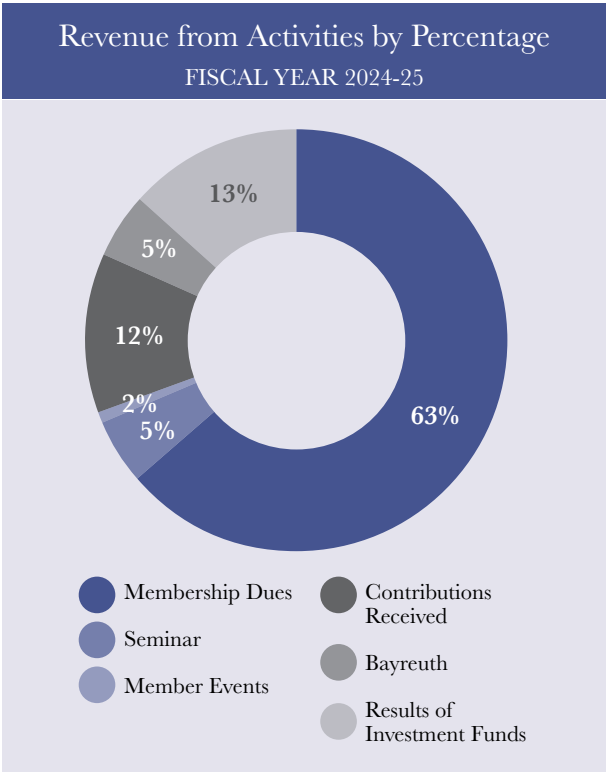
Significantly, funds received from endowment investments have allowed the Society to offer increased support to aspiring Wagnerian singers (13%).

## Operating Expenses

The publication and distribution of *Wagner Notes* constituted the highest cost of operating the Society, together with operating and maintaining the website (37%).

Member events – why we are a Society – include the annual Seminar, recital, and lectures, and accounted for 29% of operating costs. Thus, membership events together with *Wagner Notes* amounted cumulatively to 66% of the operating costs for the year, providing our membership with meaningful products and activities.

Another significant Society activity, providing grants to singers, consumed 11% of operating costs. Bayreuth lectures and outreach was an additional 7%. General and administrative expenses, which include insurance, rental of meeting space, and dues to other organizations, took up 16% of all operating costs.



# Leadership (as of August 31, 2025)

## Board of Directors

The Board of Directors governs the Society. Its members are:

John Ryan (Chair)  
Donald Crawshaw  
Paul Deutschmann  
Raymond Ko  
Jillian Murray  
Dolores Perin  
F. Peter Phillips  
Kevin Salinger  
Mark Luis Villamar  
Nathalie D. Wagner

## Officers

The Society's officers are responsible for fulfilling the operational responsibilities set forth in the by-laws and executing the activities of the Society as determined by the Board of Directors.

The officers are:

Chairman of the Board:	John Ryan
President:	F. Peter Phillips
Secretary:	Dolores Perin
Treasurer:	Mark Luis Villamar
Assistant Treasurer:	Paul Deutschmann
Registrar:	Jillian Murray

## Committees

The work of the Society is substantially performed by various committees appointed by the Board of Directors. These Committees and their members are listed below.

## Executive Committee

The Executive Committee consists of the Chair of the Board of Directors, the President, the Treasurer, the Registrar, the Secretary, and the Chair of the Governance and Nominating Committee. It is convened by the Board Chair at request of any officer, and renders advice or takes corporate action between Board meetings, subject to the limitations in the Bylaws and to the further limitation that it may not authorize the expenditure of Society Funds in an amount greater than \$1,500. Its members are:

John Ryan (Chair)  
Donald Crawshaw  
Jillian Murray  
Dolores Perin  
F. Peter Phillips  
Mark Luis Villamar

## Governance and Nominating Committee

The Governance and Nominating Committee acts as resource to Board in regard to best practices in governance. It also makes recommendations to the Board regarding nominations of directors and officers, and Committees (including membership of Committees). Its members are:

Donald Crawshaw (Chair)  
Raymond Ko  
Kevin Salinger  
Mark Luis Villamar

We actively seek volunteers for leadership positions and hope that anyone interested in furthering the work of the Society will contact the President at:

[info@WagnerSocietyNY.org](mailto:info@WagnerSocietyNY.org)

## **Affiliated Organizations Committee**

The Affiliated Organizations Committee undertakes all responsibilities involving relationships between the Society and other similar entities. It manages the annual Bayreuth Stipendium program and manages the relationship between the Society and the Bayreuth Festival, the Richard Wagner Verband International, and the Gesellschaft den Freude von Bayreuth. It also initiates and maintains mutually beneficial relationships with other Wagner Societies, music and theatre departments of regional universities, the Metropolitan Opera, and other organizations producing or teaching about Wagner's works. Its members are:

Caroline Couch (Richard Wagner Verband International Liaison)  
Claudia Deutschmann (Bayreuth Liaison)  
Raymond Ko  
Kevin Salinger  
Edward Seidel

## **Singers' Committee**

The Singers' Committee makes recommendations to the Board for grants from Lauch, Springer, and other restricted-use funds. The Committee is responsible for producing at least one recital of a Lauch or Springer awardee per year. Its members are:

Tyson Deaton, Cori Ellison and Deborah Surdi (Co-Chairs)  
Ken Benson  
Roger Malouf

## **Development Committee**

The Development Committee plans and executes initiatives to enhance revenues, including special events. It prepares grant applications as opportunities arise and, with President, fosters relationships with major donors. The Committee is planned to be re-activated in the 2025-26 season.

## **Finance Committee**

The Finance Committee creates the annual budget for Board approval; monitors financial

activity and fiscal health of corporation; and makes recommendations to the Board regarding financial matters (including investments) as it deems appropriate. Its members are:

Mark Luis Villamar (Chair)  
Paul Deutschmann  
Betty Kranzdorf  
William W. McGinty  
Gary Mezzatesta  
John Ryan

## **Membership and Communications Committee**

The Membership and Communications Committee devises strategies for membership retention and growth, including managing membership value proposition, encouraging membership growth among students and younger people, investigating joint membership with other Societies, and other initiatives. It maintains and updates the Society's web site; manages communications to members and to general public; and maintains an active presence on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. Its members are:

Jillian Murray (Chair)  
Doru Bercea  
Marco Catella  
Paul Deutschmann  
Betty Kranzdorf

## **Programming Committee**

The Programming Committee creates substantive programming for Society members and the public, including the annual seminar. It selects topics and speakers, engages venues, oversees marketing, and executes each event (hosting, venue management, financial accounting, post-event reporting, etc.). Its members are:

F. Peter Phillips (Chair)  
Carey Alexander  
Noble Bratton  
Donald Crawshaw  
Griffin Kaiser  
Alice Kenny  
John J.H. Muller, IV  
Jillian Murray  
Dolores Perin

# Contributors (fiscal year ending August 31, 2025)

The Society is fortunate to have among its members many individuals who regularly contribute amounts beyond their dues. These contributions make the work of the Society possible, and we are proud to acknowledge their generosity.

## Sustainers' Circle

(\$5,000+)

Donald Crawshaw & Matthew Hoffman  
Mark Luis Villamar & Esther Milsted

## Visionary

(\$2,500 – \$4,999)

Diana Paine  
Edward Seidel  
Stephen Wagley  
One anonymous donor

## Ring Leader

(\$1,000 – \$2,499)

Page Ashley & Robert Bruce Tipton  
Sandra Barlow  
Alberto Cribiore  
Claudia Deutschmann  
Elizabeth Eveillard  
Andrew L. Gangolf  
Robert J. Krackeler  
Betty Kranzdorf  
Eleanor Kress  
William Lauch  
Gary Mezzatesta  
Suzanne Rohr  
Dennis Schall  
Marian M. Warden  
Ursule Yates

## Benefactor

(\$500 – \$999)

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Alfred & Sally Jones  
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Fernand Lamesch  
Randal Leason

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James Perrin  
Elizabeth Peyton  
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Saul D. Raw  
Sheila Rao  
Samuel Roth  
Jean Shropshire  
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Henry & Jo Strouss  
Isolde Thalmann  
Elizabeth Tunick  
Norman Velten  
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(\$375 – \$499)

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Donald Miller  
Grace Repetti  
Michael Young & Debra Raskin  
One anonymous donor

## Patron

(\$250 – \$374)

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