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Remembered

Leonard R. Levine—“Len” to his friends and associates at Chamber Music America—died in early September, a few weeks shy of his 77th birthday. Hired as publisher of *Chamber Music* magazine in 1993, he served CMA in that capacity through most of the following decade.

“The magazine’s editor used to do everything,” says Dean K. Stein, a former CMA executive director. “We decided to hire a publisher for the business side, so that the editor could focus on editing. Finding Len was too good to be true. He had the perfect mix—he was a publishing and marketing expert who also knew lots of people in the music world.” Adds David Rubin, a professor and dean emeritus, S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University, who served on the magazine advisory committee in the 1990s: “That he was a fan of chamber music made it even better. He really wanted our field to succeed.”

A New York City native, Len Levine grew up in the Bronx. He is often described as a born communicator and salesman, but his path into marketing wasn’t direct. After three and a half years of pre-med courses at the University of Virginia, he came to the conclusion that medicine wasn’t what he wanted. Two years of Army service during the Korean War era intervened before he transferred to New York University’s School of Commerce, Accounts and Finance (now the Stern School of Business), where he earned a bachelor’s degree in marketing. His first jobs were with newspapers, selling ad space for the *New York Herald Tribune* and *The Washington Post*.

Len’s move into magazines came in 1968, when he accepted a post with ABC Leisure, the firm that published *Modern Photography*, *McCall’s Needlework and Crafts*, and a number of music titles. In his thirteen years there, he rose through the ranks, eventually becoming vice president and publisher of the company’s High Fidelity



LEN LEVINE

Group, which included not only *High Fidelity* magazine itself but also the Schwann Record and Tape Guides and other music annuals. In 1981, Len moved on to become vice-president of marketing at Historical Times, Inc., publisher of *Country Journal*, *American History Illustrated*, and *Fly Fisherman*, among others.

Striking out on his own in 1987, he founded a consulting business, the agate group, inc., which offered services in market research, sales training, circulation, and promotion. Agate continued during his Chamber Music America years and beyond.

“As a marketer, Len had one piece of advice,” recalls development consultant David Bury, who got to know Len in the 1990s. “He’d say: ‘The most important thing you can do is to make five calls a day.’ Of course, he made many more than that. But the majority of his calls were not about sales; they were about building relationships with people, and gathering information about their situations and thus knowing their interests and needs.”

Len was also relentlessly inventive. “He generated more ideas than anyone I had ever worked with,” remembers Dean Stein. “He would come into my office six times a day with ideas. In-

continued on pg. 62

Len Levine Remembered *continued from page 9*

evitably, 75 or 80 percent of them we couldn't do—whether because we didn't have the human resources or the money—but he was fine with that. 'I'll be back,' he would say—and he never stopped thinking."

Probably Len's best-known CMA brainstorm was the transformation of the organization's membership directory (at that point a modest, slim supplement) into an expanded, special issue of *Chamber Music* magazine, modeled on *Musical America*. Victoria Roth, then CMA's senior director of programs, remembers: "Len partnered with some wonderful editors—Gwen Freed, Philip Kennicott, and Johanna Keller—to make the Directory a visual record and story-telling device that alerted the whole world to how vital and innovative chamber music was. It became an essential tool that no professional could risk being without."

Adds David Bury: "Len understood that in a national field where the people are dispersed, the directory would become representative of the field—and that people all over the country could get a sense of the field by reading it."

Artist manager Rob Robbins describes Len as someone who "followed a path of giving without asking. He cared deeply about

musicians and those who served them. As a mentor, he offered guidance—particularly to those young or new to the field—without reservation or prejudice, and always with the best interests of those he guided in mind."

Although he didn't play an instrument and (according to his wife, Harriet) sang off key, Len loved music and was genuinely interested in it, even starting a Sunday afternoon chamber music series at his synagogue. Says bassoonist, composer and former CMA board member John Steinmetz: "We musicians are members of a tribe, and we rely on people who connect us—Len was full of friendly affability: he always remembered who was connected to whom and would tell you news of that person."

Connection was everything to Len, according to violinist Shem Guibbory, who describes Len Levine as paradoxically down-to-earth yet highly spiritual. Len was "strong, truthful, and committed," says Guibbory. "He was deeply involved in the activities of his synagogue, which emphasized community and *tikkun olam*, a Hebrew phrase that means 're-creating the world by performing good works on behalf of others.'"

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