



Sylvia Kunin

Founder

Sylvia Kunin was born on July 14th, 1913 in Detroit. The first of three children of Russian immigrants Morris and Rachel Kunin, she and her family moved to Los Angeles when she was two years of age. At a very early age, she developed a passion for piano. Kunin graduated from Poly High School in Los Angeles, and in the mid-1930s went to

Europe to study with the legendary pianist Arthur Schnabel for three years.

Kunin, a brilliant student who won competitions, gave up her career as a concert pianist at the age of twenty-five. The ending of Kunin's performance career fueled her motivation to promote deserving young classical artists. In 1951, concerned by the low standard represented on television talent shows, Kunin created a televised classical music contest, "Young Musical America" that aired on KLAC-TV (now KCOP). In 1954 came a subsequent show, "Debut," with musicians competing for \$1,000 scholarships.

In 1955, Kunin established the Young Musicians Foundation. With the leadership of such giants in the field as Gregor Piatigorsky, Elmer Bernstein, Dr. Raymond Kendall, Johnny Green, Meredith Wilson, and Dr. Miklós Rózsa, the organization provided guidance and scholarship support to promising young classical music talents. The flagship of the organization was the Debut Orchestra, which within a few seasons was playing major venues such as the Hollywood Bowl.

Such was her knack at spotting budding talent, that she helped launch the careers of numerous widely-recognized artists, including pianist Horatio Gutierrez, violinists Glenn Dicterow and Arnold Steinhardt, cellist Nathaniel Rosen, guitarist Christopher Parkening, soprano Shirley Verrett, and conductors Michael Tilson Thomas, Lawrence Foster, and Henry Lewis, among many others.

In 1967, Kunin and her husband, actor Al Eben, moved to Hawaii. While there, she started a new television program featuring student musicians, "Musical Encounters," targeted to public and educational television channels across the United States. Production continued upon their return to Los Angeles in 1975, running for a total of sixty-five episodes for which Kunin won 3 L.A. area Emmy Awards for her work in T.V. Production.

Kunin died at age 101 in Seattle on February 12, 2015. She remained active in her mentoring and other support of talented young musicians until shortly before her death.