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UCLA receives \$1 million to establish chair in Jewish music

UCLA alum and wife make gift in honor of Yiddish entertainer Mickey Katz

Carolyn Campbell, ccampbel@arts.ucla.edu
Eleanore Reznikoff, earez@arts.ucla.edu
(310) 825-6540

Philanthropists Ron and Madelyn Katz have donated \$1 million to establish the Mickey Katz Endowed Chair in Jewish Music at UCLA in honor of Ron's late father, the master musician and performer.

The establishment of the endowed chair will help to preserve and expand the study of Jewish music on the UCLA campus. Funding from the chair may be used to support graduate students and postdoctoral fellows, staff, and services; underwrite research efforts and innovative teaching techniques; foster educational activities; and finance related special projects. Those appointed to the chair will be referred to as the Mickey Katz Professor.

The Katzes are longtime donors to UCLA, and projects across campus have received their support, but this most personal tribute has special significance for both of them.

"This music was played all the time in our homes growing up — it means a lot to us," Ron Katz said. "Maddie and I felt it would be sad if the legacy of Jewish music, especially Jewish music reinterpreted in America, were to be lost. A whole new generation of musicians and scholars are being drawn to the work my father did, the music he created, and it just makes sense for UCLA to be at the forefront of this resurgence."

Christopher Waterman, dean of the UCLA School of the Arts and Architecture (UCLA Arts), believes the university and its host city are the perfect home for this generous gift.

"Mickey Katz was proud of his music and his culture, and he exposed people to a tradition that many of them knew little about," he said. "For others, it was a reminder of something they held dear and the home they left behind. I believe this school and this city are the perfect place to foster further understanding of Jewish music and musical history."

"This gift in honor of Mickey Katz will find fertile ground in the new UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music," said Timothy Rice, the music school's dean and a professor of ethnomusicology. "Mickey Katz's music fascinates composers and jazz musicians, music historians interested in American popular music of the last century, and ethnomusicologists interested in music as the expression of cultural life and social groups. The Mickey Katz Chair will create a space where students, no matter their major, can come together around a particular repertoire and the problems and challenges it presents."

Mickey Katz first gained fame as a member of Spike Jones' City Slickers band in the late 1940s. He then went on to record more than a dozen of his own albums with Capitol Records. His virtuosity on the clarinet and saxophone and his klezmer style made him a hit on Broadway and at Borscht Belt resort hotels popular with Jewish New Yorkers at the time. But he is probably best remembered for his humor and the unabashed way that he embraced his ethnicity and used it to connect with his audience.

"He was a musician first and foremost," Ron Katz said, "but he also loved to make people laugh, and he was a great user of the Yiddish language and the Yiddish accent to have fun and create a bridge to the audience."

UCLA Arts is well known for its commitment to the study of music in all of its global diversity. The legacy of Mickey Katz, with his genre-bending approach to music, comedy and composing, is a perfect fit for the school and the students it attracts.

"Now is the perfect time to make this gift," Katz said. "There is a real revival in interest in this kind of music, and it's coming from some very interesting corners of the musical and academic world."

Ethnomusicologists are fascinated with the highly ethnic klezmer music that Mickey Katz popularized, and they see parallels with Hispanic and other ethnic music that allows an assimilating culture to maintain and strengthen its roots even while becoming part of their host culture.

"But musicians and composers love it too, for the pure musicality of it," Katz said. "Its composition is unique; its syncopation and complex structure fascinates them. If my Dad were here, he would be thrilled."

While, formally stated, the Mickey Katz Endowed Chair in Jewish Music will help preserve the study of Jewish music at UCLA, Ron and Madelyn Katz are excited to see how that plays out in real life.

"First, the professor will be sought, and then we'll watch how the program develops, attracts students, scholars, researchers and performers," Ron Katz said. "Watching how all this develops and evolves — that will be 'the honey,' our great reward."

The Mickey Katz Endowed Chair in Jewish Music is part of UCLA's Ensuring Academic Excellence initiative, a five-year effort aimed at generating \$250 million in private commitments, specifically for the recruitment and retention of the very best faculty and graduate students. The initiative was launched in June 2004. Its goals include raising \$100 million to fund 100 new endowed chairs for faculty across campus, increasing the total number to 331. In addition, campus officials plan to increase support for an estimated 3,500 graduate students per year by raising \$100 million to fund fellowships and scholarships in the UCLA College of Letters and Science and \$50 million for fellowships and scholarships in UCLA's 11 professional schools.

UCLA Arts plays a vital role in the cultural and artistic life of the campus and the Greater Los Angeles community. Providing a full range of academic degree programs and public arts programs, the school comprises six degree-granting units: architecture and urban design, art, design and media arts, ethnomusicology, music, and world arts and cultures.

The school also houses The UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music (comprising the departments of ethnomusicology, music and musicology), five centers (the Art | Sci Center, the Art | Global Health Center, the Center for Intercultural Performance, the Experiential Technologies Center and the Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts), two museums (the Fowler Museum at UCLA and the UCLA Hammer Museum) and a major performing arts program, UCLA Live. For more information, visit www.arts.ucla.edu.

As a major research university, **UCLA** explores a broad range of subjects essential to creating real-world advances in health care, education, science, commerce, arts and culture, scholarship, and community service. The wealth of cultural treasures and programs — museums and concert halls, theaters and dance studios, galleries and sculpture gardens, libraries and archives — makes UCLA a leading arts and cultural center of the West and the flagship arts campus of the University of California system.