

## Park Tower Profile

# Ann Murray, Park Tower's Very Own "Classical Music Ambassador"

by Bob Shamo



**H**ave a nice voice and a feel for classical music? Well then, join the thousands of other amateur musicians who sign up each December for Chicago's own **Do-It-Yourself-Messiah**. More on that later, but in truth the DIY Messiah is but one of many subjects I discussed with Park Tower owner, Ann Murray, when we sat down to talk one bright Sunday afternoon.

Ann is Executive Director of Chicago's International Music Foundation, an umbrella organization for presenting mainly classical music programs: 230 concerts this past year for almost 74,000 adults and children. She has lived at Park Tower since 1997, having come to us by way of Scotland, London, Paris and Turkey. Here's how it all happened.

Ann's interest in classical music was late in coming. Born in Scotland, she grew up listening to The Beatles and Rolling Stones. At the appointed time, she enrolled at St. Andrews University. But feeling not quite ready, she soon left for Paris where for the next year she worked as an au pair (live-in nanny), attended classes at the Alliance Française, and absorbed the culture.

Returning to London, Ann made two inspired choices. First, she took a full time administrative job, and second, she began attending orchestra concerts. Those experiences would, several years later, land her the coveted position of assistant to the general manager of the BBC Symphony Orchestra.

Set for life, right? Well, not really. At age 27 Ann was finally ready for college. Vacations in Greece had whet her appetite for archaeology, and that became her major

at St. Andrew's University. Upon graduation she was hired as Assistant Director of the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara in Turkey where she spent 6 years.

While in Ankara, Ann renewed her friendship with a professor on assignment from University of Chicago. The two had worked together on digs in nearby Syria, and he was about to return to America. But they married first and then endured a two-year separation until she was able to wrap up her own work and join him in Chicago.

They lived first in the Ravenswood neighborhood while Ann continued her PhD studies as an "external student" of the University of London.

Then a friend told her about Al Booth. Mr. Booth was a much-loved producer of classical music in Chicago, and he needed some help. So, as she had once before, Ann interviewed for a music administrative position and in 1989 became Mr. Booth's assistant at the International Music Foundation. Today, as Executive Director of the Foundation, she manages its three initiatives.

The **Dame Myra Hess Memorial Concerts** feature young, up-and-coming musicians from around the world. These 45-minute programs are on Wednesdays at 12:15 pm in Preston Bradley Hall at the Chicago Cultural Center (corner of Michigan Avenue, between Washington and Randolph), and are also broadcast live on WFMT. The concerts are free – donations only – but arrive early; the 550 seats fill up fast.

**Live Music Now!** is the Foundation's educational initiative, and it has two formats. Kids can attend the monthly Young People's Concerts at Preston Bradley Hall and Kenwood Academy. Or, small ensembles will go to the children, performing at their own schools. Either way, the musicians include some of Chicago's finest, and generous materials are provided to teachers for preparation and follow up.

About its **Do-It-Yourself Messiah**, the Foundation's website says..

*"A Chicago holiday tradition since 1976, the Do-It-Yourself Messiah brings together a world-class conductor and soloists, an*

*all-volunteer orchestra of local professionals and amateur musicians and thousands of chorus/audience in a thrilling performance of Handel's masterpiece."*



For the timid, help abounds. While reading music is not essential, being able to follow it is! So musical scores are available at modest cost, as are "choral Tutor CDs" in soprano, alto, tenor and bass versions depending on the part one intends to sing at the performance. Read more at [www.imfchicago.org](http://www.imfchicago.org).

Tickets are on sale now for performances on Monday and Tuesday, December 21 and 22, 7:00 pm, at the Harris Theater, at the northern edge of Millennium Park on Upper Randolph Street.

As we wound down our interview, I asked Ann about her time at Park Tower. She still lives in the 11 tier, two-bedroom unit she first occupied in 1997, enjoying the building's aesthetic, its backyard being the park, and the Red Line just a few blocks away.

But now, she says, the building is better managed than when she first arrived, the staff more forthcoming, and work orders more quickly attended to. "And," she adds, "I like that there are more young people here now, in varied family combinations, of different races and nationalities."

Ann is a delight to interview – careful but forthcoming, with a steady gaze but warm smile, and an obvious appreciation of our building and its residents. We're proud to have her as a neighbor **II**