

The Sheldon: A Rich History

The Sheldon Memorial, named after Walter Sheldon who founded the St. Louis branch of the Ethical Society, was designed by the noted 1904 World's Fair architect Louis C. Spiering and opened its doors in 1912 as the home of the Ethical Society of St. Louis. Speakers such as Margaret Mead, Thurgood Marshall, R. Buckminster Fuller, Norman Cousins and Martha Gellhorn have spoken from its stage and the St. Louis Chapter of the League of Women Voters was founded in The Sheldon's Green Room. The day after music was first heard in The Sheldon, the headline in the *St. Louis Globe Democrat* declared: "Acoustics found perfect." Musicians and music lovers have been enjoying those perfect acoustics for 100 years and the Sheldon Concert Hall has been called "The Carnegie Hall of the Midwest."

When the Ethical Society relocated to St. Louis County in 1964, concert programs continued and the Society also used the facility as a community center for social action programs such as job training. From 1973 to 1984 The Sheldon was two different gospel churches and outside promoters began presenting concerts of jazz, blues and folk music. In 1984, Eugene Golden, a California attorney with a love for chamber music, purchased The Sheldon, began restoration of the hall, and engaged Walter Gunn as the first executive director. The non-profit Sheldon Arts Foundation was formed in 1988, and with Leigh Gerdine as chairman, purchased the facility in 1991 to preserve the venue as one of St. Louis' important cultural resources. Paul Reuter became executive director in 1994 and a major capital campaign begun in 1996 made possible major renovations to the Concert Hall, Ballroom and the adjoining Annex, formerly a parking garage. A street level entrance and two elevators made the Concert Hall and Ballroom accessible for the first time in its history, a second floor lobby was added along with a sculpture garden between the two buildings, and the 7,000 square foot Sheldon Art Galleries were created on the first and second floors of the Annex. One year later in 1999, the third floor 500-seat ballroom called the Louis Spiering Room was opened. In 2006 new stained glass windows designed by Rodney Winfield were installed by Emil Frei & Sons in the Sheldon Concert Hall.

Today The Sheldon is the site of over 350 events each year, including great jazz, folk and classical music in the Sheldon Concert Hall, featuring the world's finest musicians. Artists such as Dave Brubeck, Diana Krall, José Carreras, Herbie Hancock, Doc Watson, Joan Baez, Willie Nelson, Lyle Lovett, B.B. King, Wynton Marsalis, Judy Collins, Renée Fleming and many more have performed at The Sheldon. In addition, The Sheldon presents a wide range of educational programs for schools, Matinee Concerts for families, Coffee Concerts for seniors, and Sheldon Sessions and Ballroom Concerts for college students and young professionals. The weekly Notes From Home series showcases St. Louis musicians in every genre. The Sheldon Art Galleries present a wide range of exhibits in photography, architecture, St. Louis artists and collections, jazz history, children's art, sculpture and emerging artists. Recent exhibits have included *Josephine Baker: Image and Icon* that drew visitors from Europe and around the country, was named best exhibit in 2006 by the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and travelled to the National Portrait Gallery at the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. The Sheldon has also shown *City of Gabriels: The History of Jazz in St. Louis* and published the accompanying book of the same name, the first full-length book on St. Louis' important contributions to jazz.

The Sheldon collaborates with a host of community organizations on programs such as First Night, What's Right with the Region Awards, Grand Center Visionary Awards, the 9/11 Commemoration, jazz and blues programs for Cardinals Care's Redbird Rookies, and many fundraising events for other non-profit organizations in the St. Louis region.