THE MAKING OF THE MEYERSON

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANNY TURNER

Dallas is the city where, not so many years ago, the symphony went broke. Now, Dallas is home to one of the great concert halls of the world and to a symphony that shows every sign of belonging there. The unlikely story of how Dallas transformed itself from a musical backwater to a cultural star is chronicled in The Meyerson Symphony Center: Building a Dream, *a new book by Laurie Shulman due out this month from University of North Texas Press.*

These excerpts from Shulman's book reveal the inside story of the critical moments when the hall's future, not to mention its very existence, hung in the balance.

Thirty years ago, the reputation of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra was well established: It was financially inept, chaotically managed, and musically undistinguished. After a series of disasters in the 1973 season, including a musicians' strike, the board declared bankruptcy—a first in the history of any American symphony orchestra.

The emergency—and the embarrassing headlines—awakened the Dallas civic leadership. Longtime cultural stalwart Henry S. Miller, Jr. suddenly found himself and the symphony besieged with offers to help. With a renewed commitment from the business community, the symphony was reorganized, refinanced, and rejuvenated. An exciting young director, Eduardo Mata, was hired and ticket sales began to percolate. Inevitably the question arose: How can we conceive of building a great symphony without first constructing a hall to house it?

The answer to this question fell in 1979 to young Robert Decherd, scion of the Dealey family (now chairman of Belo Corp., publisher of the Morning News) who had been handed the symphony's reins. Decherd, in turn, started looking for someone to organize the building campaign. He needed someone organized enough, well connected enough, business-minded enough, savvy enough, charming enough to carry it off. He knew just who to call. And his know-who paid off.

MORT MEYERSON GETS RECRUITED

Morton H. Meyerson remembers the conversation clearly. "Robert started the breakfast by saying that as president he'd been talking with the board's executive committee. They had decided it was mandatory that the symphony get out of Fair Park, and that, to ever become what we should become, we'd have to get a new symphony hall. I replied, 'That's nice.' He said that they really didn't know what to do with that idea; that was the whole idea. That was the beginning and the end."

Then Decherd dropped the bomb. "I'm here to see if you will chair the committee that figures out what to do, and then goes and does it."

Meyerson thought, that's the whole thing? Figure out what to do, get

MANAGER
Mort Meyerson is no politician, but he brought the skills of a master organizer to the task of constructing—and paying for—a new symphony home.

the people to do it, supervise their doing it. Then he thought again. "I don't think that you're talking to the right person."

"Why not?"

"Well, number one, I've just become president of EDS, and I've got my hands full. Number two, and most important, I am very nonpolitical. I'm used to working in an environment where we get things accomplished. We spend little time on pomp and ceremony. We spend most of our time trying to do something. Everything that I know about symphony politics and what you have to do, and you have to get the players, and you have to get the city council, all this stuff, is going to require a dance, which I am not emotionally or intellectually suited to do."

Decherd asked, "Why is that?"

Meyerson replied, "Because I'm too impatient. I think I would come at it with too big a force."

He said, "You have just described why I have asked you."

"What do you mean?"

"We don't think that we can take the normal, politically safe chair and give it to him or her, because there's too much at risk here. Nobody knows what this is. Nobody knows what the purpose is, other than we can't stay in Fair Park. And, we think this project will be big and complicated. We thought [of you because of] your background with computer systems, etc., plus your personality, plus you happen to know music."

"How do you know that?" Meyerson demanded, taken aback.

Decherd said, "Well, I've done a little background checking, and I know that you play classical piano, and that your mother is a pianist, and that you've sung in choirs, that you were a choral singer at the University of Texas. So you know classical music, therefore you would be sensitive."

Meyerson said, "OK, so you're willing to take the risk. You don't mind if I'm going to be hard-nosed about it?"

He said, "No. If you were other than that, I wouldn't have selected you."

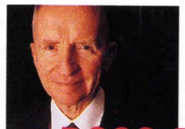
"What do you think it entails?" Meyerson asked.

"You'll be the chairman of the committee. You form a committee, you select the members, you work together, you meet twelve, fifteen, eighteen times over the next few years. That's it."

"Oh, I bet it takes more than that."

He said, "It might take a little more."

"OK," said Meyerson, "I'll do it." Right then on the spot. They shook hands. Meyerson returned to his office and said to himself, "What in the name of God have I done?"



ROSS PEROT GETS HIS WAY

Not realizing that he was undertaking a ten-year project, Meyerson met with Leonard Stone [general manager] to discuss who would be invited to serve on the committee. Leonard Stone opines, "In Mort, you had a guy who knew how to make things happen. He knew how to move things off a dime. I think the genius of Meyerson was the way he put the committee together and the reasons that he invited certain people. You had academics, people who knew music, the quintessential administrator: Mort. You had the elder statesman: Stanley Marcus. You had two ladies-Nancy [Penson] and Louise [Kahn]-who were diametrically opposite; one demure and ladylike, the other strong as battery acid. It made for interesting chemistry. What was good was that Mort did not fashion a group of people who were going to be 'yes men.'"

CHARMER
Stanley Marcus wooed I.M. Pei and lured Greer Garson into joining the Meyerson building team.

Negotiations for General Motors' acquisition of EDS began in earnest in February 1984, with a signed contract by September of 1984. Meyerson remembers, "I was up to my eyebrows in General Motors stuff at that time. One day in July, I went to see Ross in his office and said that the symphony needed one donation that would be the pacesetting donation, which would allow for the possibility that the hall would be actually built. The donation would be $10 million, and I was there to ask if he would consider donating the $10 million and naming it for his mother, who had recently passed away, or for the Perot family. That took me about five minutes.

"He looked at me and said, 'Yes, I will make that contribution,' which just floored me. Then he added, 'That would be upon only one condition.'

"I asked, 'What's that?'

"He said, 'That we name it for you, because you've put so much of yourself into this. I think it would be a wonderful honor.'

"I thought about that for a few minutes. I said, 'Ross, I now am embarrassed about this because you could—you might think that I've come here to ask you to do something, maybe with the hope that you would do that. I must tell you that I don't want to do that, that I think it's inappropriate, and I think it would best be named for Margot, your mother, or for the family.'

"He looked at me with his fierce eyes and said, "You're not listening to me, Meyerson. You can have the money, or you can not have the money. But you won't tell me upon what conditions I'll give it.'

"I said, 'I think I've heard you.... We'll do it.' I mean, how could you-what would you do? Say no to $10 million? The entire meeting took less than ten minutes."

In July 1984, Liener Temerlin was in Chicago for an agency meeting when his wife called him at his hotel. [Temerlin, now chairman of Temerlin McClain, had taken over as DSA president.] "Liener, Ross Perot wants you to call him." It was about 10:30 or 11:00 P.M. Temerlin said, "It's too late; I'll call Ross in the morning." He knew Perot, and talked with him often, but had no idea what he wanted. The next morning he returned the call.

After chatting briefly, Perot remarked, "Liener, you're very cavalier with $10 million."

Temerlin was taken aback. "What are you talking about, Ross?"

"Well, the symphony had sent a brochure [stating] that they would name the hall after anyone who would give a gift of $10 million. I'll tell you what. I will give you the $10 million, with a couple of provisions."

Temerlin collected himself and broke in. "First of all, Ross, I want to express my appreciation."

"Let me tell you what the conditions are," Perot continued without pausing. "One is that you follow the designs of I. M. Pei and make sure you deliver the world-class hall that we all want."

"We have no intention of doing anything *but* that, Ross."

"Two is that you don't name the hall after me [or my family]. I want you to name it after Mort. I want it to be called the Morton H. Meyerson, not the H. Ross Perot, because I know how long and hard Mort has worked on the hall. Also, Mort is the person who helped get EDS to the position it enjoys today. I don't want you to name it the Meyerson, but the Morton H. Meyerson; there are a lot of Meyersons around. Let the focus be on Mort."

I. M. PEI GETS ROMANCED

Despite the fact that I.M. Pei had initially excused himself from consideration, there was an underlying feeling among Meyerson's small group that he was the right architect for the job. Pei knew Dallas and understood the city. Stanley Marcus and Mary McDermott were personal friends. Marcus remembers, "A mutual friend of I.M.'s and mine in New York called me one day. He was familiar with the situation. 'Do you really want Pei to design your symphony hall?' I said, 'I think the whole community would feel greatly rewarded if he did.' He said, 'Well, it's very simple. If you want Pei, you ought to call him on the phone personally and tell him so. But don't quote me.'"

Stanley Marcus is nobody's fool, and he knew when a golden opportunity had presented itself. He telephoned Pei to schedule a meeting and flew to New York. They met for a leisurely lunch and caught up. Finally, Pei introduced the topic, asking how the symphony hall project was progressing. Marcus seized his moment.

"You know, I. M., we're pretty far into the architect selection process, and maybe we have not communicated well with you, but damn it, you're the person we want. We're about to make a decision in favor of an architect that nobody wants." Marcus wasn't even sure which of the finalists it would be, but he was certain there was no great enthusiasm among the other committee members for any of the six.

He continued. "I've come up here personally to invite you to design the Dallas Symphony Orchestra hall. We have a competition, a selection process, but I want to assure you that complete unanimity of opinion is shared among us all. We have the right to cancel the competition aspect for cause."

Pei asked, "Do you really want *me* to design this hall?"

"I've given you the honest truth, I. M. Why do you doubt it?"

"Well, you already have four or five buildings I've designed in Dallas. There's City Hall, which a number of people don't particularly like." He enumerated the other structures.

Marcus assured him, "Well, despite and because of those buildings, the building committee is prepared to recommend you as the architect."

Pei was bemused. "You know, I had figured that you wouldn't pick me because I had done so much work in Dallas. That really was the reason I said I wanted to be withdrawn from the competition." They talked for a while longer about various topics. Marcus was satisfied. He would return to Texas with his mission accomplished: Pei had reconsidered and would meet formally with the selection committee. This was good news for Dallas.

Pei arrived for his interview dressed in an impeccable grey suit, with a light grey shirt, a wine-colored tie with matching handkerchief in his breast pocket, sporting cufflinks and Corbusier-style glasses. "He was a picture of sartorial splendor, just perfect," Leonard Stone remembers.

After introductions, he sat down, and Stanley Marcus opened up with the same question. "Well, I. M., why would you like to design our concert hall?"

The committee heard the answer that it had been waiting for since the beginning of the project. Pei replied, "Stanley, I've never designed a concert hall before. But I've made up my mind before I die I must do a great concert hall."

"All I heard was 'great,'" Leonard Stone recalled. "If he was going to do it, it was going to be great. There was no question. You thought, clearly, this man would do that."

A key element in the selection had been Pei's pledge to be personally involved in every facet of the hall. Don Stone [serving his term as symphony president] told the press that the symphony board had "taken precautions" against cost overruns like those the city had encountered on prior projects, notably Dallas City Hall. "We've already made this quite clear," he said. "We've discussed this with Mr. Pei, and he has accepted the responsibility not to have cost overruns." Within a couple of years, that discussion and Pei's pledge

were to echo with profound irony, for the phrase "cost overrun" would become closely and painfully associated with the concert hall.

GREER GARSON GETS CHARMED

The Irish-born actress had zoomed to Hollywood fame in her first film, *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* (1939), which earned her an Academy Award nomination. Her career included six additional nominations, and she won the Best Actress award in 1943 for *Mrs. Miniver*. Garson married Texas oil magnate Buddy Fogelson in 1949 and retired from the screen in the early 1960s.

The trick was catching Garson when she was in town, because she also maintained homes in New Mexico and California. Committee member Louise Kahn, who resided in the same

Turtle Creek luxury high-rise as Garson, was the lookout, monitoring Garson's visits to her Dallas home. As it turned out, the opportunity to ask her occurred not in Dallas, but in New Mexico.

During a visit to his second home in Santa Fe, Marcus made an appointment to visit Garson at her ranch in Pecos, outside Santa Fe.

"Greer, I've come to see you on a cause. Actually, it's very important for Dallas. It involves a memorial to Buddy, who, as you and I both know, didn't give a damn about symphony orchestras. But I think that he would like the scope of this orchestra and what it does for children. I want to propose that you dedicate the south side of the building, which is our location for the restaurant, and name it in memory of Buddy." Marcus knew that Buddy loved to eat.

She didn't buy it. "That would be silly," she told Marcus. "People would remember that Buddy didn't even like classical music!"

Marcus suggested, "Well, we could call it Buddy's Delicatessen, or Buddy's Spot."

She reflected for a moment. "What will it cost?"

"Two million dollars."

"Let me think about it." A few days later, she called Marcus to say, "I think I'm going to have to do what you asked me to do."

Marcus was delighted. "That's wonderful!"

About two weeks later, Garson telephoned Marcus in Santa Fe again. "I want to see you," she announced. He went to her home. She said, "You know, it's written in the books that women have a right to change their mind."

Marcus knew what was coming. He said, "I'm not sure they have the right, but women *do* change their minds, and I'm very sympathetic. What's the problem?"

"I've been thinking about this thing, and it's been worrying me, because I just don't think it's the right gift. I'd like to withdraw from being a donor."

Marcus told her, "I think the worst thing you could do would be to live with something that you didn't like. Of course you can withdraw."

"Who will take my place?"

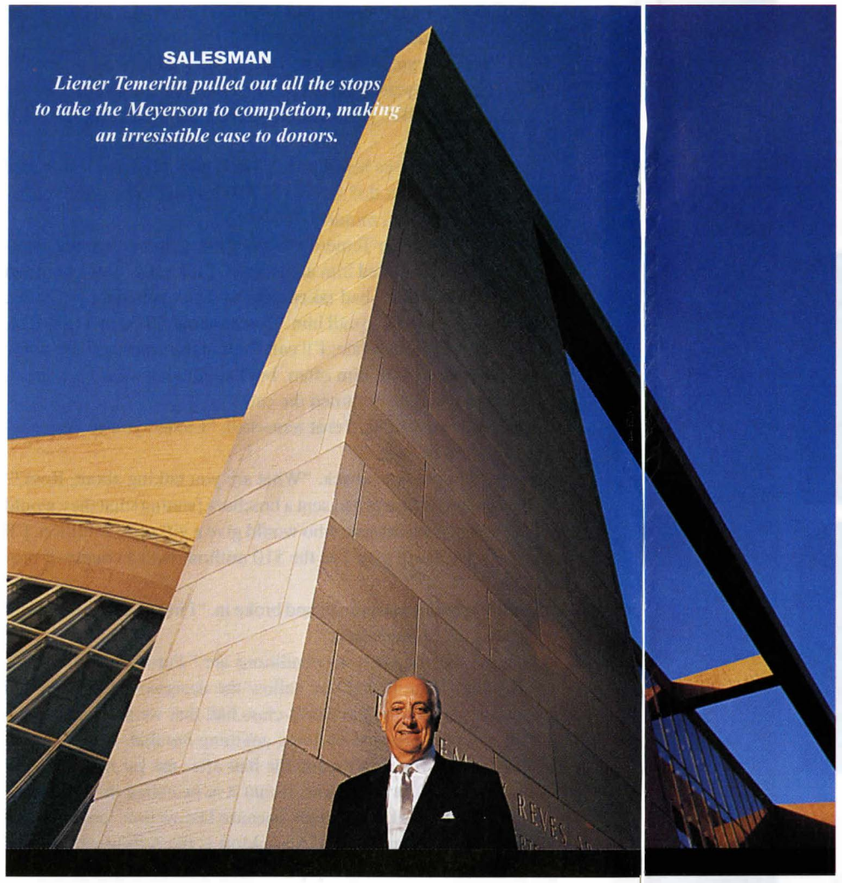
"Don't worry. We'll find somebody. It may take us a year or two to do it; we may miss the opening, but anyway, you should do it [withdraw] with an open conscience, and know that I love you just as much with or without the two million."

Less than six weeks later, she called him again, right before the hall was scheduled to open. "I want to see you again." They got together. "Remember I told you a lady had the prerogative to change her mind?" Marcus remembered.

She said, "Everybody at the symphony was so nice to me when I reneged, that I just haven't felt right since then. I want to reinstate my gift."

"We're not going to give you a chance to change your mind again!" Marcus warned her, smiling through his admonition. "We're going to start work *today*!"

Greer Garson's attorney and executor, Jack Roach, confirms Marcus's story with some additional details. "She said, 'Jack, he was so gracious I *had* to give him the two million dollars!' And she did."



SALESMAN

Liener Temerlin pulled out all the stops to take the Meyerson to completion, making an irresistible case to donors.

WENDY REVES GETS PITCHED

Liener Temerlin turned out to be an excellent choice [as the new symphony president], not only from the standpoint of marketing and advertising, but also for fund-raising and handling political issues. He was a strong personality who was accustomed to leadership.

Temerlin would need every ounce of that charm and savvy over the next few years. He became president at a very difficult time in the hall's development. Costs were rising, media coverage was increasingly negative, and tension between Pei and [acoustician] Johnson was ever more heated. The economy was about to head south. Although no one knew it yet, Meyerson was about to resign from the concert hall committee because of business commitments associated with General Motors' purchase of EDS.

Wendy Reves had previously donated a substantial collection of paintings, furniture, and *objets d'art*, all drawn from her villa in Southern France, to the Dallas Museum of Art. The collection, valued at the time at $40 million, more than doubled the value of the museum's existing holdings. One day in early 1988, Leonard Stone was touring the Reves rooms at the Dallas Museum. He spotted Reves, whom he knew by sight from newspaper and television coverage. "I approached her and introduced myself."

Coincidentally, the symphony had another link to Reves through Bette Mullins, a long-time symphony patron who was also president of the Museum League. "Liener, I think Wendy will give us money, but let's come up with something really attractive to induce her to donate a large amount," Mullins told Temerlin. "Also, you really ought to go to visit her in France, because she likes to have a face-to-face meeting." Mullins had provided Stone and Temerlin a copy of the book that Emery Reves had written, entitled *The Anatomy of Peace*. Although it had sold very well in its day for a political science book, after World War II the volume was out of print. One weekend, Temerlin called Stone excitedly and said, "Leonard, I've got it!"

I. M. Pei's building design included a flying, angular arch in front of the Flora Street entrance. Temerlin said to Stone, "This is a lady who is building pyramids to her husband's memory. We should dedicate the arch as the Emery Reves Arch of Peace. It's a stunning architectural design. It can be a peace arch."

Temerlin set about developing a presentation that would persuade Reves to make the major donation the symphony sought. Mullins arranged the appointment, which would take place at Reves' home in Southern France on June 22, 1989.

Stone recalls, "That night, before we met with her, we had a dress rehearsal in Liener's suite. Liener had each page of the proposal blown up to four feet by three feet." Mullins recalls, "We each had a part in the program. Liener was very uptight. I said, 'Liener, she's going to give us two million. I know she is.' 'Well, *I* don't know she is. I believe in being prepared.' *We were prepared.*"

Reves held Mullins's hand during the meal. Mullins remembers, "We made polite conversation and finished the meal. I thought Liener was going to have a heart attack, he was so cranked up! He wanted to walk in the front door and say, 'Wendy, we're here; let's talk about what you're going to do for the symphony.' Leonard was sitting next to me, fidgety beyond belief, saying in an undertone, 'What d'you think?'"

After the meal, Temerlin opened up the conversation after dinner by saying, "Now, Wendy, we've come to visit you with a purpose."

"All right. I'd like to hear what you have to say." Temerlin sat to Wendy's left and began his carefully rehearsed presentation. Wendy sat at the table with one hand on her forehead, the other hand in Bette Mullins's, ready to listen-but not to look.

"Wendy had her hand on her brow the whole time I was reading," declares Temerlin. "She *never* looked up."

Stone set up the easel and ascertained that the five pages of blowups were in order. Temerlin started reading. "Here we have it on a board."

Reves interrupted. "I don't want to see that. You just tell me what you have in mind." Temerlin went through the proposal: the Arch of Peace, the reprints of Emery's book, the musical composition and recording. As he drew to the end of the presentation, he concluded by saying, "From everything I've read about Emery, I believe this is something that Emery would be very pleased to see happen."

"So this would be the Wendy and Emery Reves Arch of Peace?"

"That's right," agreed Temerlin.

"Well, I don't want my name on it. I just want it to be Emery's."

In a chorus, they all protested, "No, Wendy, your name needs to be on there, too. This arch will greet everyone who comes to the hall. This is the face of the Meyerson. It will look to the museum."

Reves pondered for a moment. "All that sounds interesting. For two million dollars?"

"Yes," said Temerlin, "and we'll do all these—

"I don't want to hear that!" Reves interrupted again. For a moment she didn't move, then she squeezed Mullins's hand and said, "I will do it."

At that instant, a deafening clap of thunder split the summer night as lightning cracked outside. For a split second, everything was illuminated as if it were daytime. "It was like a Cecil B. DeMille movie!" Temerlin remembers. "The French doors were open, and winds blew the curtains parallel to the floors. And it rained like hell. It was as if the whole thing was staged. I had goosebumps. I got caught up in the whole mystique and magic of the evening, as did we all."

Wendy glanced upward, lifting her arms, and beamed, "Poochie is pleased." (Poochie is her nickname for Emery.) Leonard Stone echoed her sentiments and those of the rest of the table. "God in His Heaven is approving, too." Wendy Reves rose to close the windows and protect the room from the rain, which was coming down in sheets. She called for another bottle of Dom Pérignon, and they toasted the occasion again.

When they returned to the hotel, they sought out Karla Temerlin and Claudia McClain, and told them the good news. "Was it raining over there?" they inquired. "We saw this huge cloud in that direction." The thunderstorm had been a local cloudburst in just the few square kilometers around Villa la Pausa.

Upon their return to Dallas, Temerlin and Stone issued a formal announcement that Wendy Reves was making a $2 million gift to name the Emery Reves Arch of Peace at the front entrance to the hall.

The symphony commissioned Marvin Hamlisch to compose "Anatomy of Peace." Because Reves's husband had such an affinity and friendship with Winston Churchill, Stone engaged Abba Eban to speak the evening the symphony premiered the composition. Eban quoted from Reves's book. Stone remembers, "Abba Eban was the closest to a Churchillian-style talker: beautiful phrasing, beautiful use of the language. Wendy was very moved."

In September, at the time of the dedication ceremony, Wendy Reves declared, "We're standing here because of one man. This man could sell the Brooklyn Bridge to anybody, because he sold the arch to me, and his name is Liener Temerlin." D

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