

MILDRED MILLER POSVAR



**Mildred Miller Posvar,
former opera star,
Pitt's First Lady, dies at 98**

Mildred Miller Posvar died in her Oakland home Wednesday evening, November 29, 2023. Known professionally as Mildred Miller, and Millie to her many friends and colleagues, she led a unique and full life as Musician, Wife, and Mother.

She was just weeks shy of her 99th birthday. Being diagnosed late in life with Parkinson's Disease did not hold her back: Until this last year, she maintained an active calendar, attending board meetings, the symphony, opera, football games, and family gatherings.

Mildred was one of the leading mezzo-sopranos of her day. She graced the stage and charmed audiences at the Metropolitan Opera and major opera houses across the United States and Europe.

She was born on December 16, 1924, in Cleveland, Ohio, daughter of German immigrants Elsa and Wilhem Müller. After graduating from the Cleveland Institute of Music in 1946, she attended the New England Conservatory of Music. During her time there she honed her operatic skills under the tutelage of Boris Goldovsky, making her opera debut at the Tanglewood Music Festival - conducted by Leonard Bernstein. Before embarking to Italy with a Frank Huntington Beebe Fellowship, she reconnected with high school classmate, Wesley Wentz Posvar, who after graduating from West Point, was headed to Oxford England as a Rhodes Scholar. In 1950, they married at the same chapel in Stuttgart where her parents had exchanged vows. Living in Oxford until her husband's graduation from Oxford, she continued to sing with numerous European Opera Houses.

Mildred Miller made her debut at New York's Metropolitan Opera on November 17, 1951, as Cherubino in "The Marriage of Figaro" (Le Nozze di Figaro), a role in which she holds the Met record for most performances. During her 23 years at the Met (1951-1974) she sang 338 performances, including 31 live radio broadcasts. In all, she sang 21 different roles including the title role in "Carmen," Suzuki in "Madama Butterfly" and, her favorite, Octavian in "Der Rosenkavalier." At the Met, she became known as "Legs Miller," having been cast in numerous "pants" roles.

She shared the stage with some of opera's greatest legends, both at the Met and in the major opera houses in the US and Europe. As a recitalist and soloist, she performed for audiences in North America, Europe and Southeast Asia. She sang at the White House, giving a recital at the retirement dinner of Chief Justice Earl Warren in 1969. In 1971, she sang the National Anthem at the first-ever night game of baseball's World Series, at Three Rivers Stadium in Pittsburgh.

She was known especially for her singing of German Lieder, and as a recording artist, she received the Grand Prix du Disque for the 1963 release of Mahler's "Songs of a Wayfarer" (Lieder eines Fahrenden Gesellen) and Brahms' "Alto Rhapsody," conducted by Bruno Walter with the New York Philharmonic.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Mildred Miller was a regular on radio and television including "The Bell Telephone Hour" and "The Voice of Firestone" while also appearing on "The Ed Sullivan Show." In 1965 she appeared on the big screen in the opera adaptation of "The Merry Wives of Windsor".

Mildred arrived in Pittsburgh in June 1967, after her husband was named Chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh. Extensively entertaining as First Lady of the University of Pittsburgh, she was a gracious host of countless dinners and receptions for incoming freshman, faculty, alumni and visiting dignitaries. She was also one of the biggest fans of Pitt football and basketball, never holding back her voice, yelling and cheering the teams on. They remained in Pittsburgh after his retirement in 1991.

After Mildred's retirement from performing on stage, in 1978 she and Helen Knox founded the Opera Theater of Pittsburgh. Modeled after Boris Goldovsky's New England Opera Theater, where she had fond memories performing as a young artist. The mission and purpose were dedicated to education and audience development by bringing professional opera to schools and performing many of the popular operas in English. Its mission was also to help leverage the careers of emerging artists. In 2011, the company (which became Pittsburgh Festival Opera) established the Mildred Miller International Voice Competition, as another vehicle for identifying and nurturing promising talent.

After retirement as Artistic Director of the Opera Theater of Pittsburgh for 21 years, Mildred incredibly began still another 20-year career to teach voice at Carnegie Mellon's School of Music. She didn't retire from teaching until the age of 95.

During these latter decades, Mildred remained on the Opera Theater of Pittsburgh's Board to provide guidance and inspiration. She was also a longtime board member of the Pittsburgh Opera and served on the Music Advisory Board for the National Endowment for the Arts. She was named a Distinguished Daughter of Pennsylvania and received a Gold Medal from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. The Cleveland Institute of Music, the New England Conservatory of Music, Bowling Green State University and Washington & Jefferson College recognized her with honorary degrees.

Mildred Miller Posvar excelled in every role she played, whether it was as Cherubino, Carmen, mentor and teacher, wife, mother, and Nana to her seven grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

Her legacy will live on in countless ways - through her music and recordings, the many students she taught at Carnegie Mellon and as a private coach, the Mildred Miller International Voice Competition and past and future beneficiaries of the University of Pittsburgh School of Music Mildred Miller Posvar Scholarship (established in 1972), and the Mildred Miller Posvar Papers housed at the University of Pittsburgh library and archives.

After 51 years of marriage, Wesley died in 2001. Her sister, Margot Müller Engelman, also preceded her in death.

Mildred is survived by her children and families: Wesley William Posvar, Marina Posvar, and Lisa Posvar Rossi (Nicholas); grandsons Wesley Fishwick Posvar, Winston Blair Posvar (Jackie), Brian Benjamin Green (Taylor), Derek Wentz Green (Meghan Gill), Christopher Posvar Rossi (Sarah di Marco), Nicholas William Rossi (Rebecca) and Gian Marco Rossi; and great-grandchildren Ethan Posvar, Jacob Posvar, Penelope Green, Noah Green, Flavio Rossi, Gemma Rossi, and Giada Rossi.

Friends will be received at **JOHN A. FREYVOGEL SONS, INC.**, (4900 Centre Ave. at Devonshire Street, Pittsburgh) from 1 to 4 p.m. and 6 to 8 p.m. on Friday, December 8. A Funeral Service will take place at 2 p.m., Saturday, December 9 at Calvary Episcopal Church (315 Shady Ave., Pittsburgh). A memorial service will be held at a date and location to be announced.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made in her honor to either the Pittsburgh Festival Opera, the Mildred Miller Scholarship at the University of Pittsburgh or the Carnegie Mellon University School of Music.

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