



SOKA UNIVERSITY NETS \$500,000 FOR NINTH ANNUAL PEACE GALA

Photos by Robert Rook

Soka University of America (SUA) announced that its Ninth Annual Peace Gala, Celebrating a Vision of Peace, held at the picturesque university campus in Aliso Viejo netted approximately \$500,000. The money raised by the gala goes directly to SUA students via the Scholarship Endowment.

The evening began with around 550 guests gathering at the Soka Performing Arts Center to enjoy cocktails and hors d'oeuvres while browsing the silent auction. They were then led across the bridge over Peace Lake lined by grateful students holding candles, thanking each guests for attending as they passed by, and then welcomed by dynamic Japanese Taiko Drums as they entered the venue.

For the third year, actor Ron Glass, best known for his role as Detective Ron Harris on the TV sitcom "Barney Miller," served as master of ceremonies. Joan May and Dita Shemke returned as event co-chairs for the seventh consecutive year, with Carolina Shorter as the 2013 honorary chair.

Featured guest artists for the evening included three-time Grammy winning jazz bassist, cellist and singer Esperanza Spaulding, nine-time Grammy winning jazz saxophonist and composer Wayne Shorter, Grammy winning jazz drummer Terri Lyne Carrington, and acclaimed jazz pianist Leo Genovese.

Spaulding's Chamber Music Society in 2010 won multiple awards including the Best New Artist Grammy. Her latest release, Radio Music Society, won the 2013 Grammy for Best Jazz Vocal album and along with Thara Memory, she won the Grammy for Best Instrumental Arrangement Accompanying Vocalist(s) for the song "City of Roses."

Wayne Shorter's music transcends genre while keeping the improvisational genius and surprise of jazz burning at the center. Regarded as one of the most significant and prolific performers and composers in jazz and modern jazz, Shorter received Grammys in 1979, 1987, 1994, 1996, 1997, 1999, 2003 (two) and 2005 – including best album, best instrumental performance and best composition.

This year, the Peace Gala attracted some new and notable attendees including Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Grammy winning jazz pianist Keiko Matusi and Les Misérables Broadway star Ivan Rutherford. They, along with the other guests enjoyed personal experiences and performances by some of the students and a delicious dinner catered by The Resort at Pelican Hill.

DawnMarie Kotsonis led a lively auction, contributing \$74,000 to the evening's total proceeds. Highlights included a personally signed guitar from musician, activist and philanthropist Bono, garnering a winning bid from Jim and Sheila Peterson for \$25,000, a South Coast South Coast Plaza Shopping Spree for Pascal and Heron Houllion for \$11,000, a Studio Ghibli "Spirited Away" Package \$10,000 by Jim and Sheila Peterson, and a Private Jet to tour Pixar Studios won by Paul and Shannin Pickle for \$10,000.

Each year, the gala raises funds for scholarships for Soka University students who come from around the world to experience Soka's unique educational experience founded upon the principles of peace, human rights and the sanctity of life. SUA founder Daisaku Ikeda said, "The ultimate goal of a Soka education is to foster people of character who continuously strive for the greatest good – that of peace."

Soka University is a private, four-year liberal arts college and graduate school in Aliso Viejo, Calif. The university is ranked in the top 50 liberal arts colleges in the nation by US News and World Report's "Best Colleges 2014." Soka University offers a 9:1 student/faculty ratio and study abroad for every undergraduate student. Founded upon the Buddhist principles of peace, human rights and the sanctity of life, SUA is open to top students of all nationalities and beliefs. About 60 percent of Soka University's students come from the US and 40 percent have come from more than 40 other countries. Admitted students whose annual family income is \$60,000 or less may be eligible for Soka Opportunity Scholarships which cover full tuition. Additional scholarship opportunities are available for higher income levels.



Dita Shemke, Wayne Shorter, Joan May and Daniel Habuk



Clothilde Hewlett and George Joseph



Mijeong Jo and Michelle Nunn



Howard and Linda Knolls



Leo Genovese, Wayne Shorter, Esperanza Spaulding and Terri Lyne Carrington (Photo by Mitsu Kimura)