

## A Patron for Cultural Diplomacy

Written by Ana Carcani  
Sunday, 25 March 2012 18:17

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Susan Lehrman is no stranger to the Diplomatic community in Washington. A consummate philanthropist and businesswoman, she has also served her city and her communities as a de facto cultural ambassador. In a city full of top ranking diplomats, she stands out in her efforts to bring people together. And her work has not gone unnoticed. Two of Washington's celebrated ambassadors are honoring Lehrman with top honors. In April, Lehrman has been nominated to receive the Medal of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation for her "Contributions to International Cooperation". Also that month, Lehrman will receive another top honor; she will become a Chevalier in France's national Order de Légion d'Honneur. She was specially recognized for this honor by France's President, Nicolas Sarkozy, who made the award from his personal reserve.

Lehrman, who supports many charities in Washington, DC and New York City, is also Founder and Advisory Chair of American University's Initiative for Russian Culture, an initiative created to promote greater understanding of Russia's cultural diversity through film screenings, student exchanges, musical performances and other events. The initiative is open to all consortium students within the Washington DC Metropolitan area. Her credentials are numerous, but one stands out in this occasion: at American University she has also endowed a Chair in Russian History and Culture.

But it was her work with the National Opera Ball—she has chaired four—that set her apart from her peers in the diplomatic community. The events—some of the most spectacular in the spring season—have allowed her to work closely with Washington's foreign ambassadors to create programs of major cultural and diplomatic significance.

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In a statement to the Diplomatic Courier, Lehrman said: “I am honored to receive this award from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. I am particularly grateful to Ambassador Sergey Kislyak for his vision, generosity and support.” And as the daily news cycle reminds us of a often cynical worldview of our relations with other countries, Lehrman has focused on the positives, the very things that bring humanity together: art and culture.

“In addition to appreciating our shared connections through the Arts, promoting a greater understanding of cultural achievement and diversity is helpful to overcoming past and present stereotypes, as well as opening our hearts and minds toward better communication, mutual respect and cooperation,” said Lehrman. These are not just wise words but the very creed Lehrman lives by.

### **An Order of Merit**

When Napoleon Bonaparte created the Légion d'Honneur award after the French Revolution, for the first time the award was to be given not based on the old nobility system but based on merit. In being nominated for this honor, Susan Lehrman joins an eclectic group of people such as Julia Child and Thomas Keller; economist Alan Greenspan; U.S. Ambassadors Pamela Harriman and Felix Rohatyn; patron of the arts Virginia Portia Royall Inness-Brown; designer Ralph Lauren; and entertainers Barbra Streisand and Liza Minnelli.

The Order is the highest decoration in France, and may be awarded not only to French citizens, but also to foreigners, although such recognition is somewhat rare. French Ambassador François Delattre joins a chorus of top diplomats who have something good to say about Lehrman. He said, “Mrs. Lehrman has a profound understanding of the diplomatic value of culture, and of the lasting impact it can have in forging bonds of solidarity between countries with very diverse traditions. Her personal involvement in this sphere—including Kids Euro Festival, the Washington National Opera, the American University Initiative for Russian Culture, the Youth Orchestra of the Americas, and others—is a reflection of her commitment and dedication to the expansion and strengthening of international relations through the language of the arts.”

Recently, Diplomatic Courier named Lehrman a Top Global Woman for the annual International Women’s Day special edition. Lehrman was selected among her peers for her significant work

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in the realm of Cultural Diplomacy. And as all good things come in threes, Lehrman's two other awards are a testament to her achievements in this field. She will receive the honor at a formal ceremonial presentation conducted by Ambassador Sergey I. Kislyak at the Embassy of the Russian Federation.

***Photo above: HE Sergey Kislyak and Mrs. Kislyak and Susan Lehrman (center) at the inaugural event launching the Initiative for Russian Culture (IRC) on September 2011. Photo courtesy of the IRC***



**The Medal of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation** "For Contributions to International Cooperation" is awarded to citizens of the Russian Federation, foreigners, and people without official citizenship for cooperating with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in facilitating mutual cooperation to promote Russian language and culture and supporting Russian citizens abroad as well as other specific achievements. The Medal is also awarded to veterans of diplomatic service who continue to contribute to the strengthening of Russia's international standing. The Medal is not an institutional award for professional achievements. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation approves the award based on recommendations of Deputy Ministers. The decision to award the Medal is approved by a decree of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation or his deputy.

The Medal of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation is in the form of a classical seven-ray star with its white beams designed in the form of a "sparrow tail" (a ray of the Maltese Cross), with every beam containing a triangle of turquoise enamel with its base in the middle and its pinnacle resting on the obtuse bottom angle of the beam's upper part. The reverse side of the medal has an edge inside of which there is an inscription in three lines "For

Contributions to International Cooperation".



**About the Légion d'honneur. After the French Revolution, Napoléon Bonaparte, the First Consul and sole ruler, created an award to commend soldiers and civilians. This became the Légion d'Honneur, which was no longer an order of chivalry based upon the old nobility system, but an order of merit. From its beginning it was conferred on illustrious individuals in all walks of life — the military, magistrates, administrators and civil servants as well as those of distinguished achievement in the arts, teaching, agriculture, trade, and industry.**

The Order is the highest decoration in France, and is divided into five various degrees: Chevalier (Knight), Officier (Officer), Commandeur (Commander), Grand Officier (Grand Officer) and Grand Croix (Grand Cross). The Order may be awarded not only to French citizens, but also to foreigners, although such recognition is somewhat rare.

Members of the Légion d'honneur are appointed for life. Candidates are nominated by the various Ministers, who submit their names to the Grand Chancellor of the Order. He in turn presents them to the President of the Republic. In addition, the President has his own contingent of recipients which he can personally name. This is called the “réserve présidentielle”.

Selected American recipients include chefs Julia Child and Thomas Keller; economist Alan

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Greenspan; U.S. Ambassadors Pamela Harriman and Felix Rohatyn; patron of the arts Virginia Portia Royall Inness-Brown; designer Ralph Lauren; and entertainers Barbra Streisand and Liza Minnelli.

Prior to the French Revolution, The Order of St. Louis was the most significant decoration in the French kingdom. Founded by Louis XIV in 1693, it was comprised of grand crosses, commanders and chevaliers (or knights).