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## **Simon property gift will support creation of Great American Songbook museum**

### **107-acre Asherwood estate valued at over \$30 million**

*CARMEL, Ind.* – The Great American Songbook Foundation today announced a transformative gift in the form of one of Indiana’s most stately and renowned private residences.

The 107-acre Asherwood estate in Carmel is the former home of philanthropist Bren Simon and her late husband Mel Simon, cofounder of Simon Property Group, the nation’s largest shopping mall owner and real estate investment trust. Bren Simon’s gift includes all the real estate and personal property at Asherwood, with a total value appraised at more than \$30 million.

The Songbook Foundation will leverage the donation toward its goal of creating a freestanding Great American Songbook Hall of Fame Museum, dedicated to the timeless popular music of Tin Pan Alley, Broadway and Hollywood. Founded in 2007 by internationally known performer and preservationist Michael Feinstein, the Foundation is based at the affiliated Center for the Performing Arts in Carmel.

“This is a historic moment for the Songbook Foundation and for our nation’s musical legacy,” said Melissa Stapleton Barnes, chair of the Foundation’s Board of Directors. “Mrs. Simon’s generosity represents a great leap forward in establishing a permanent home for the Songbook Archives, expanding the Foundation’s outreach and education programs and creating an interactive visitor experience of international caliber.”

The Asherwood property holds enormous promise as a potential museum site and as the basis of an endowment to support the Songbook Foundation’s mission. No longer occupied by Bren Simon, it includes a fully furnished 50,000-square-foot main house, an 8,000-square-foot clubhouse, a 6,000-square-foot guesthouse, several other structures and two golf courses.

“During my time at Asherwood, my fondest memories were when we welcomed guests into our home and hosted events to support causes we care deeply about,” Simon said. “I am so pleased that Asherwood is now transitioning into a place that will support the Great American Songbook Foundation and be seen and used by the Foundation, its guests and the public at large. I can think of no finer use than for Asherwood to become an asset to the Songbook Foundation and to support the mission of celebrating American music.”

Up to now, the Songbook Foundation has operated with a modest staff and budget that belie its broad impact. Its Songbook Archives & Library, with over 100,000 items, is second only to the Library of Congress as a repository of documents, recordings and other artifacts from the 20<sup>th</sup> century heyday of the Great American Songbook. The holdings include personal papers and other pieces from legendary performers and songwriters including Meredith Willson (*The Music Man*), Johnny Burke (“Swinging on a Star”), Gus Kahn (“It Had to Be You”) and Hy Zaret (“Unchained Melody”). The collections, which

attract musicians and researchers from around the world, are currently stored at a facility near the Palladium concert hall, where the Foundation maintains its offices and a public exhibit space.

In July, the Los Angeles-based Grammy Museum® named the Songbook Foundation to its Cultural Affiliate program, which includes only four other institutions worldwide: The Beatles Story in Liverpool, England; the Bob Marley Museum in Kingston, Jamaica; the Woody Guthrie Center in Tulsa, Okla.; and the National Blues Museum in St. Louis, Mo. Cultural Affiliates collaborate on exhibitions, educational initiatives, research programs, internship opportunities, technical support and more. The Grammy Museum is among the entities providing expertise and assistance to the Songbook Foundation in its museum planning.

The Foundation staff and board will begin work immediately to evaluate the many possibilities for the use of the donated property, starting with a comprehensive feasibility study.

“This gift is undeniably a game-changer for our organization, and it comes with great accountability,” said Chris Lewis, Executive Director of the Great American Songbook Foundation. “We will proceed very deliberately and strategically to maximize its value as Mrs. Simon intended. We also recognize the interests of the residents and property owners in the area, and their input will be very important.”

Carmel Mayor Jim Brainard noted that the eventual creation of a Songbook museum has been a key element of the city’s arts-based economic development strategy.

“Since Michael (Feinstein) accepted our invitation to locate the Great American Songbook Foundation in Carmel, we have worked to create a permanent site for its growing collection of artifacts,” Brainard said. “It has been a pleasure to introduce Bren to Michael so that they could learn how their resources could work toward the goal of preserving part of our American heritage of music and culture.”

Feinstein, who also serves as Artistic Director for the Center for the Performing Arts, said the gift brings a longtime dream a profound step closer to reality.

“In the decade since we founded the Songbook Foundation and Archives, we have been driven primarily by the challenge of preserving this musical history – literally a race against time, in many cases,” he said. “Now, thanks to this gift, we can look forward to a future of endless possibility.”

### **About the Great American Songbook Foundation**

The mission of the Great American Songbook Foundation, founded in 2007 by five-time Grammy® Award nominee Michael Feinstein, is to inspire and educate by celebrating the Great American Songbook – the timeless standards of pop, jazz, Broadway and Hollywood. Headquartered at the Center for the Performing Arts in Carmel, IN, the Foundation advances this rich legacy by curating physical artifacts of its creators, performers and publishers; operating a multimedia exhibit gallery; overseeing the Songbook Hall of Fame; offering programs for the public and research opportunities for scholars and artists; and providing educational opportunities for student musicians, including the annual Songbook Academy® summer intensive. The Foundation is a Cultural Affiliate of the Los Angeles-based Grammy Museum®. More information is available at [www.TheSongbook.org](http://www.TheSongbook.org).