League of American Orchestras to Honor Former Boston Symphony Orchestra Principal Harpist Ann Hobson Pilot with the Gold Baton

New York, NY (February 28, 2017) – Esteemed musician Ann Hobson Pilot will receive the League of American Orchestras’ highest honor, the Gold Baton, at the League’s 72nd National Conference in Detroit, June 6-8, 2017. Pilot, who performed for 40 years with the Boston Symphony Orchestra (29 as principal harpist), is a renowned soloist, teacher, and mentor, and was the first African American woman to serve as a principal player in a major orchestra.

Pilot will be presented the award during the League’s Opening Plenary, June 6, 4:00-5:30 p.m., at the Detroit Symphony Orchestra’s Max M. & Marjorie S. Fisher Music Center.

“For over 50 years, Ann Hobson Pilot has been a trailblazer in the world of orchestras and classical music,” said Jesse Rosen, League of American Orchestras President and CEO. “From her earliest years, she has been a compelling musical presence and an inspiration to colleagues, students, and audiences. We are proud to present her with the gold baton, the League’s greatest honor, recognizing her immense impact on the orchestra field.”

“Beyond being one of the world’s greatest harpists and a role model and inspiration to many, Ann remains the epitome of kindness and elegance,” said Mark Volpe, Managing Director, Boston Symphony Orchestra. “She left an indelible mark on the Boston Symphony and her legacy is firmly intact. She is a most deserving recipient of the League’s Gold Baton award.”

Given annually since 1948 for distinguished service to America’s orchestras, the Gold Baton recognizes individuals and institutions whose far-reaching contributions to the field serve to champion and advance the cause of orchestras and symphonic music throughout the country.

Previous Gold Baton recipients include, among many others, Leonard Bernstein (1959); John D. Rockefeller, III (1963); Paul Mellon (1964); American Federation of Musicians
(1965); The Ford Foundation (1966); Leopold Stokowski (1968); Arthur Fiedler (1976); Aaron Copland (1978); Beverly Sills (1980); Isaac Stern (1987); Carnegie Hall (1990); and John Williams (2006). Click here for a full list of Gold Baton recipients.

The first African American principal at a major orchestra, Ann Hobson Pilot has been a pioneer for over 50 years. A graduate of the Cleveland Institute of Music under Alice Chalifoux, she performed with the Pittsburgh and National Symphony Orchestras and became principal harp of the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1980, after serving as assistant principal harp and principal with the Boston Pops since 1969. She retired from the BSO in 2009, but continues to have an active solo career, with recent performances including the opening of the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC, and performances of the Ginastera Harp Concerto in Buenos Aires and Boston.

A documentary about her life, A Harpist’s Legacy – Ann Hobson Pilot and the Sound of Change, is available to view here

According to the documentary’s press materials, Pilot “triumphed over barriers of race and gender to become an artist and teacher, whom many, including John Williams, Yo-Yo Ma and James Levine, revere as one of the world’s great harpists.”

In his review of the documentary, the Boston Globe’s Jeremy Eichler described Pilot as “an exceptional harpist” with “a courageous career.”

Click here for Ann Hobson Pilot’s biography.

The League of American Orchestras leads, supports, and champions America’s orchestras and the vitality of the music they perform. Its diverse membership of more than 2,000 organizations and individuals across North America runs the gamut from world-renowned symphonies to community groups, from summer festivals to student and youth ensembles, from conservatories to libraries, from businesses serving orchestras to individuals who love symphonic music. The only national organization dedicated solely to the orchestral experience, the League is a nexus of knowledge and innovation, advocacy, and leadership advancement. Its conferences and events, award-winning Symphony magazine, website, and other publications inform people around the world about orchestral activity and developments. Founded in 1942 and chartered by Congress in 1962, the League links a national network of thousands of instrumentalists, conductors, managers and administrators, board members, volunteers, and business partners. Visit americanorchestras.org.