

Speight Jenkins '53

2017 Distinguished Alumna

Speight Jenkins graduated from Highland Park High School in 1953. While at Highland Park, he was a member of the Student Council, National Honor Society, served as manager of the baseball team and editor-in-chief of the yearbook. After graduating from the University of Texas at Austin, he attended Columbia University where he received his law degree in 1961. Following his 4 years in the Army in the Judge Advocate General Corps, he joined Opera News as news and reports editor. In 1973, Speight joined the New York Post as a music critic. He was host on the nationally televised Live from the Met from 1981-1983.

It was while delivering a speech at the Seattle Opera that his talent became obvious to the Opera Board who then hired him as General Director of the Seattle Opera, a position that he held for 31 years. An internationally respected arts advocate, Speight frequently lectures on the history of opera at Stanford University and the University of Washington.

In the third grade when Ms. Stimsen introduced him to opera, he was immediately hooked. Most of his friends had no idea what he was even talking about! This enthusiasm has continued to grow throughout his entire life and career. He brought the Seattle Opera Company to the forefront of world opera with the production of Wagner's Ring nine times, always with the highest possible acclaim.

During his prestigious career, he has been honored by many different organizations for his passion and energetic leadership including the National Endowment for the Arts, was named by the Seattle Times as one of the most influential people in Seattle and received the Mayors Award in 2009 as well as the Washington Governor's Arts and Heritage Award in 2014. He was named a Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters of the Republic of France in 2014. He received the Distinguished Service Award at the 2015 International Opera Awards in London. Also in 2015, the Seattle City Council changed the name of a street adjacent to Marian Oliver McCaw Hall to Speight Jenkins Way.

Speight and his wife, Linda, have two children and three grandchildren.