

# GIVING

Gifts, Grants, and Good Works

## 12-Year Philanthropic Partnership Leads to Tough-Love Advice Book

By Ian Wilhelm

NEW YORK

WHEN Charles R. Bronfman met Jeffrey R. Solomon, the two men didn't hit it off immediately.

Mr. Bronfman, who was searching for a person to lead his foundations, found Mr. Solomon an imposing figure with a "Beefeater's beard." "I thought he was too elegant and serious," says the 78-year-old billionaire.

But he eventually warmed to Mr. Solomon's charms and offered him the job.

It was a fateful decision; it led to a 12-year partnership overseeing the \$75-million Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies, where Mr. Solomon is chief executive and Mr. Bronfman is chairman. And it has led to a new book, *The Art of Giving: Where the Soul Meets a Business Plan*, to be published next month by John Wiley & Sons, with proceeds supporting the Bronfman funds.

Part memoir, part how-to guide for would-be donors, the book was written as a love letter, albeit one laced with some criticism, to the nonprofit world.

"In many ways, we saw this as a love story. And truth is a very important element in love," Mr. Solomon says during an interview at his foundations' headquarters on the east side of Manhattan.

"We weren't out there to knock people," adds Mr. Bronfman. "We were out there to try to help people become better philanthropists."

And while the down economy has hurt giving, including their own, the two men argue their advice is sorely needed as donors struggle with fewer resources.

"Smart retreats win wars," says Mr. Solomon. "So even if you have to cut back, cutting back with a strategy makes all the sense in the world."

Despite their friendship, the two men came from very different worlds. Mr. Bronfman was born in Canada, and his family owned the Seagram beverage company; he helped oversee the corporation for a time and also started the Montreal Expos baseball team.

Mr. Solomon, 64, was the son of a New York butcher. After working at his family deli for several years, he took jobs with social-service and mental-health charities.

He was the chief operating officer at a large Jewish group before joining the Bronfman Philanthropies, which primarily support Jewish and Canadian causes.

### 'Noses in, Fingers Out'

Sitting in Mr. Bronfman's office, which is peppered with whimsical glass artwork, they explain that the core message of *The Art of Giving* is "purposeful" philanthropy, in which charitable projects and nonprofit leaders are rigorously examined.

"If you can't measure the impact of your gift," they write, "you should not make it."

But they also warn against meddling, saying grant makers should be "noses in, fingers out."

"Too often, foundations think that all wisdom comes with the money," says Mr. Solomon. "The greatest wisdom is to have respect for those people who are actually on the ground doing the work."

When asked if there's any contradiction in being involved but hand's off, Mr. Solomon says good philanthropy requires a balance between the two, just as it needs to balance passion with strategic thinking.

"If one looks at the progression of philanthropy, there were times when it was too much heart, and there were times



Jeffrey R. Solomon (left) and Charles R. Bronfman (right) write: "If you can't measure the impact of your gift, you should not make it."

when it was too much head," he says. "Philanthropy 3.0 hopefully will be the blend."

### A Jeep or a BMW?

In the initial chapters of *The Art of Giving*, the authors offer mental exercises to help people find the right blend.

In one, they ask donors if their giving were a car, what type would it be? Someone answering Jeep, for instance, would indicate a penchant for a prac-

tical, stripped-down vehicle for giving, like a donor-advised fund.

Asked what type of charitable automobile he prefers, Mr. Bronfman responds: "An Israeli BMW"—that is, a well-engineered philanthropy with a Jewish heart.

Of course, that BMW hit a road bump this year.

Due to the recession, the Bronfman Philanthropies are decreasing their grant making by 35 percent, to about \$11-million. They are not making new commitments and are stretching out some grant payments for longer periods of time, says Mr. Bronfman, whose wealth *Forbes* magazine estimates has declined from \$2.4-billion in 2008 to \$1.8-billion.

The organization is set to spend out its endowment and close in 2016, an end date Mr. Bronfman says he set because his children have opted to do other philanthropic work; it is a plan that the financial woes have made more challenging to complete.

"I used to say trying to guide a spend-down foundation was like trying to land on an aircraft carrier," says Mr. Solomon. "This recession has made the aircraft carrier a rowboat."

### A 'Selfish Endeavor'

Regardless of the recent economic difficulties, the Bronfman Philanthropies has a well-established track record in grant making. Since it opened in 1986, the Bronfman Philanthropies, which consist of three funds, has

## Grant Makers Offer Thoughts About Raising Money, Too

THE NEW BOOK by Charles R. Bronfman and Jeffrey R. Solomon, *The Art of Giving: Where the Soul Meets a Business Plan*, is a how-to guide for giving but also offers an unusual perspective on fund raising.

While the two men are grant makers—Mr. Bronfman is chairman and Mr. Solomon chief executive of the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies, in New York—they have raised money for several causes. Most notably, they have garnered tens of millions of dollars for Taglit-Birthright Israel, a group that helps young Jews visit Israel.

During an interview, they describe how they make charitable pitches—and what pitches appeal to them.

"The best fund raisers don't position themselves as fund raisers. They believe they are engaging in the mission of their organization," says Mr. Solomon, who led several mental-health and

social-service charities before becoming a grant maker.

"In some ways the professionalization of development has framed them as super salesmen, and that's misguided," he adds. "It really is a blessing to help somebody else do the right thing."

### How Not to Ask

As a billionaire philanthropist, Mr. Bronfman has been asked for money by all types of people, some not so tastefully.

In the book, he and Mr. Solomon write that "solicitors can get greedy."

Mr. Bronfman recalls a major university, which he does not name, asking for a gift to its capital campaign. He offered \$5-million, but the university balked, saying it would "destroy the campaign" by setting the bar too low for other big donors.

"Then I'll make life easier for you by withdrawing my gift entirely," Mr.

Bronfman responded. The institution quickly backed off its earlier statement, the authors write.

Mr. Bronfman does empathize with the challenges of asking for money—and the occasional odd situations that arise with it.

In *The Art of Giving*, he discusses an awkward moment when he was wooing a prospective donor for Birthright. After a few meetings, he learned he wasn't the only one doing the wooing; the possible contributor wanted Mr. Bronfman to date his niece.

"The expectation wasn't apparent until after the niece showed up at the strangest places, including the donor's home where we had been invited for breakfast very early one morning," Mr. Bronfman and Mr. Solomon write. "No sparks flew, the niece returned home, and her uncle, the potential donor, was never heard from again."

—IAN WILHELM

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## Philanthropist Says His Late Wife's Vision Continues to Guide His Charitable Giving

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awarded more than \$300-million and created such venerable groups as Taglit-Birthright Israel, a charity that has helped hundreds of thousands of young Jews visit Israel.

His personal fortune fuels the grant-making consortium, but Mr. Bronfman credits his late wife with giving it vision. It is her guidance he sorely misses.

In 2006 Andrea M. Bronf-

man, whom friends knew as Andy, was hit and killed by a New York taxi while walking the family dog. She was 60.

"She was my partner, my love, and for sure my greatest critic," Mr. Bronfman says with a tearful smile.

Perhaps with Mrs. Bronfman in mind, the authors meditate on the meaning of philanthropy in the final pages of *The Art of Giving*. They put aside the prac-

tical advice and personal anecdotes to speak philosophically about what drives their charitable passion.

They reject the notion of "giving back" or altruism, instead arguing that philanthropic work offers a deep, transcendent joy that makes it an almost selfish endeavor.

And on the last page of their love letter to philanthropy, they say it can leave a legacy more important than any monument or memorial. They write: "In many faiths, our souls live on after our death, not as ghosts but as animating spirits that enliven the memories of our friends and defendants and make us, through them, immortal. And so does our philanthropy."

### LIFE'S LESSONS

To read an excerpt of *The Art of Giving: Where the Soul Meets a Business Plan*, a new book by Charles R. Bronfman and Jeffrey R. Solomon, go to:

<http://philanthropy.com/extras>

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### NOTABLE GIFTS

## Gift to N.Y. Philharmonic Provides for Composer

**How much:** \$10-million

**Who got it:** New York Philharmonic

**Who gave it:** Henry R. Kravis, a founding partner of Kohlberg Kravis Roberts & Company, a private-equity firm in New York.

**Purpose:** The gift will endow the orchestra's new composer-in-residence post, and will establish a prize for new music, both of which will be named for Mr. Kravis's wife, Marie-Josée, an economist. The prize of \$250,000 will be awarded every two years/

**How it happened:** The New York Philharmonic has

not had a composer-in-residence since the late 1980s or very early '90s, says Zarin Mehta, the philharmonic's executive director. When the orchestra's newly appointed music director, Alan Gilbert, began his tenure at the philharmonic last month, he and Mr. Mehta discussed reinstating the composer-in-residence post, but the two men knew their organization didn't have enough money to support such a position. Since Ms. Kravis regularly commissions new works, the music officials thought to make a pitch to Mr. Kravis. The financier jumped at the idea, and told Mr. Mehta that the donation would make a perfect birthday gift for his wife.

Mr. Mehta says the philharmonic hopes the gift will inspire other philanthropists to donate money to the orchestra.

"Let me be clear," says Mr. Mehta, "This is an extraordinary gift, but we're still implementing major cuts in spending and we're still having a hard time raising funds. But this is something that has been extremely encouraging to us going forward and in terms of contemporary music."

To see details about other big gifts made in recent weeks, go to *The Chronicle's* Web site, at <http://philanthropy.com>.



SIGURD GARTMANN

**Magnus Lindberg is the new composer-in-residence at the New York Philharmonic**

## Soros Pledges \$100-Million For Climate-Change Advocacy

**By Ian Wilhelm**

The billionaire George Soros has pledged \$100-million to support a new advocacy effort to push politicians to fight climate change, and in addition said he will invest \$1-billion in clean-energy technology.

The latest move is part of a string of philanthropic gifts the Hungarian financier has made this year, which so far tally \$240-million.

The new donation will establish the Climate Policy Initiative, in San Francisco, a think tank that will examine environmental policies worldwide and seek to advise governments as they negotiate new climate agreements. It will receive \$10-million a year for 10 years.

### Growing Trend

Mr. Soros, who is chairman of Soros Fund Management, a hedge fund in New York, ex-

pects his clean-technology investments to make money, but also contribute to finding new sources of energy that are more environmentally friendly than coal and oil.

The decision to couple his philanthropy with equity investments is part of a growing trend among wealthy donors. In 2006, for example, the British billionaire Richard Branson promised to invest \$3-billion over 10 years to slow climate change by developing alternative energy sources.

While most donors are cutting back giving this year, Mr. Soros has stepped up his efforts. Besides the environmental gift, in 2009 he has pledged \$100-million to assist Eastern Europe, \$35-million to help students in New York buy school supplies, and \$5-million to support antipoverty programs in Baltimore.