

## June LeBell, Pioneering Radio Announcer, Dies at 73

By Sam Roberts [New York Times May 2, 2017



June LeBell on the job in an undated photo. Credit WQXR Archive Collections

June LeBell, a professional concert soprano who became one of the first women to be hired as a staff announcer and interviewer in the male-dominated realm of commercial classical music radio broadcasting, died on Sunday in Sarasota, Fla. She was 73.

The cause was ovarian cancer, her husband, Edward L. Alley, said.

Ms. LeBell produced, wrote and hosted programs on WQXR in New York for nearly three decades beginning in 1973 after she learned from the station manager that he was looking to hire a minority announcer. She recommended a black friend, who tried out for the job and then rejected it.

Ms. LeBell contacted the program manager again and asked, "What do you have against a nice white girl?" she told The Bradenton Herald in Florida in 2012. He replied that she had misunderstood, and that his meaning of minority included women.

"He said, 'I offered it to you but you turned me down,' " Ms. LeBell recalled.

This time, she accepted.

She became a familiar voice on the station, hosting “IBM’s Salute to the Arts” and “Kitchen Classics,” which coupled her favorite subjects, music and food.

“She changed the face of classical music radio in this country from its former somewhat stodgy and patrician sound and format to a warmer, friendly and more conversational medium,” Mr. Alley said in an email. “The ‘smile in her voice’ was verbal honey for her millions of listeners.”

Ms. LeBell was 29 when she joined WQXR, an FM station then owned by The New York Times Company, becoming what the station described as its first full-time female host and the first woman on the staff of any major commercial classical radio station.

She built on the work of trailblazers like Gertrude Mittelmann, who was hired by WQXR in 1940 to adapt her interpretive “Come Dance Through the Ages” programs for radio.

June Wendie LeBell was born on April 29, 1944, in Manhattan to Irving LeBell, a pediatrician, and the former Harriet Adler, a painter.

She graduated from the High School of Music and Art (now Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts) and the Mannes College of Music in New York and attended the Hartt College of Music (now the Hartt School of the University of Hartford).

After performing professionally as a soprano, she was also the host of a lecture series, “The Sound of Broadway,” at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and compiled a book of recipes from musicians titled “Kitchen Classics From the Philharmonic: A Culinary & Musical Celebration of the 150th Anniversary of the New York Philharmonic” (1992), which was illustrated by Al Hirschfeld.

After the 2001 attack on the World Trade Center, a few blocks from where she lived, she retired to Florida, where she hosted a regular public radio program and a series on music at the [Sarasota Institute of Lifetime Learning](#).

Her marriage, in 2009, to Mr. Alley, who met Ms. LeBell when he was orchestra manager of the New York Philharmonic, was her first. When she was 27, she was engaged to the violinist [Michael Rabin](#), who suffered from a neurological condition and whom she found dead in his apartment at age 35 after he had slipped on his freshly waxed floor and struck his head.

In addition to Mr. Alley, she is survived by her sister, Barbara Joseph.