

# The Bata Shoe Museum



**Chairman**

**The Bata Shoe Museum Foundation**

## **Sonja Bata**

Sonja Bata was born in Switzerland, where she studied architecture. In 1946 she married Thomas J. Bata, the son of a well-known Czechoslovakian shoe manufacturer who had emigrated to Canada at the beginning of World War II. His family enterprise in Czechoslovakia had been nationalized under the Communist occupation. From the beginning, Sonja Bata shared her husband's determination to rebuild the organization and took an active interest in what was to become a global footwear business.

Over the years, she grew increasingly fascinated by shoes, their history and the reasons why specific shapes and decorative treatments had developed in different cultures. During her travels, she realized that some traditional forms were being replaced with western shoes, reflecting changing lifestyles to some extent influenced by the production of the spreading Bata factories serving local markets.

Since the 1940s, Sonja Bata has scoured the world for footwear of every description, from the most ordinary to the most extraordinary. Her combined interest in design and shoes has led to a very personal collection, with examples from many cultures and historic periods.

Her strong belief that in a democratic country citizens should actively contribute their talents to community needs is reflected in her many philanthropic activities. She has been active in many volunteer organizations in the educational, health and environmental fields, including: Chairman, National Design Council; Honourary Chairman, World Wildlife Fund Canada (Chairman 1983–1985); Governor, Junior Achievement of Canada (Chairman 1985–1988); Chairman, Governor's Council of North York General Hospital; The Council for Canadian Unity; The Council for Business and the Arts in Canada; and Founding Chairman of the Bata Shoe Museum in Toronto. In addition, Mrs. Bata has served on a number of business boards including Alcan Aluminum, Canada Trust, and the Canadian Commercial Corporation.

Honours awarded to Sonja Bata include: Officer of the Order of Canada, Honourary Doctor of Laws, Honourary Doctor of Humane Letters and Honourary Captain (N). An edited list of her awards includes: Shoe Person of the Year, 1985; Woman of the Year, North York Chamber of Commerce, 1992; McClure International Service Award, 1991; Canadian Business Hall of Fame, 1991; CESO Award for International Development, 1990; B'Nai Brith Humanitarian Award, 1984; and Silver Medal of the United Nations Environmental Programme, 1982.