asked what brings acclaim to the world’s greatest opera houses. “Institutions—such as the Metropolitan Opera and the New York Philharmonic—most admire their artists’ qualities, the Met has set an example of how to work with other performing-arts organizations. At Columbia, Montrone says, the Met is “a phenomenon.”

A great supporter of the arts, Montrone is chairman and CEO of Fisher Scientific International Inc. in Hatfield, Pa., which supplies products and services to clinical and research laboratories. He is also a director or trustee for numerous scientific, financial and nonprofit organizations. At Columbia, Montrone is a member of the Board of Overseers at the Business School, and his support has established the Paul M. Montrone Professorship of Finance and Economics and the Paul M. Montrone Student Activities Center.

Montrone was asked to lead the Met in 1999. “I’ve always been a music lover, as is my wife,” he says. “I’ve been involved to try to give back both my business background is essential in running a major arts organization. Staffing changes and the issues within the organization.”

“With the two most important things—the financial strength and the artistic excellence of the Philharmonic—everything was fine,” he explains. But “there were some real interpersonal relationship issues within the organization.”

He got to work addressing the matter on every level of the organization. Staffing changes and the arrival of Zarin Mehta as executive director improved the dynamics significantly. “I was here virtually all the time, trying to get people to work together and dealing with issues. What the job really entailed was being the day-to-day CEO,” says Guenther.

Today, Guenther’s focus has shifted toward general oversight, long-term planning and continued fund-raising. “All not-for-profits—certainly in New York—have become very sophisticated about fund-raising,” Guenther explains. “You have to be sensitive to what the organization’s mission is, whether it’s gourmet music or education or health care. But a business background is essential in the management. You have to run them all with the same business acumen you have.”

Ultimately, Guenther and Montrone both provide something larger and less tangible to the Philharmonic and the Met than business leadership and management excellence. The power of classical music to “bring a sense of calm to troubled waters,” says Guenther, was demonstrated in the weeks after September 11. On Sept. 22, two days prior to its scheduled opening-night gala, the Met announced that Placido Domingo, as a tribute to victims of the terrorist attacks. On three days’ notice, the Philharmonic prepared a stunning rendition of a hauntingly beautiful German Requiem in lieu of its own opening-night gala. During the Met’s said the Philharmonic’s sold-out performances, thousands gathered in Lincoln Center’s Damrosch Park to view live relay broadcast.

The Philharmonic also played a series of free lunchtime chamber music concerts in Lower Manhattan and recorded an entire American concert for the HBO film In Memoriam: New York City, 9/11/01. Amidst the chaos, the concerts brought about a sense of comfort and normalcy.

To have the opportunity, through a premier arts organization, to contribute to the life of the city, as well as people’s lives worldwide, Montrone explains, “is very rewarding.” But he would say it’s more of a responsibility than a dream. I have taken this on as a kind of awesome responsibility.”