

VIP

Martha Writes

A Letter

By Maxine Cheshire

Martha Mitchell, not knowing that a group of admirers were pushing her for this year's Symphony Ball chairmanship, has charged erroneously that an item on that subject in this column last week was created "out of whole cloth, a bunch of poppycock."

Mrs. Mitchell flatly denied ever "being involved or connected" with the Ball.

But as the column correctly observed, her name was being put forward informally for the prestigious chairmanship—without her knowledge apparently—as early as last spring.

The name of the wife of the Attorney General was first mentioned as a front runner to this columnist by National Symphony manager M. Robert Rogers in connection with an official announcement that the British Embassy had agreed to sponsor the 1970 fund-raising Ball.

Reliable sources disclosed last week that Mrs. Mitchell continued to have strong support, including backing within the White House, right up until a largely Democratic special events committee selected a Democrat.

When Mrs. Mitchell was assured yesterday that the story was true and had been verified through reputable sources who were willing to sign affidavits, she said:

"You have my permission, if you can produce people like that, to say it was a complete misunderstanding on my part."

Mrs. Mitchell, who says she has had so much press exposure recently that she is starting to think like a reporter herself, sat down at her typewriter last Thursday to give vent to her displeasure.

She formally requested the American Society of Newspaper Editors to launch a special investigation of "the kind of reporting being done by people like Maxine Cheshire and The Washington Post."

In her letter, Mrs. Mitchell protested the story was "absolutely false and seems to have been written only as a rotten way to get my name into print."

Mrs. Mitchell has calmed down considerably since writing the letter and mailing eight copies at 6 p.m. on Thursday night to President Nixon, American Society of Newspaper Editors Washington Post publisher Katharine Graham, president Newbold Noyes, various Washington Post editors and several White House staff members.

She laughingly conceded that she had been so angry that she forgot to sign any of the letters.

Recipients would have been mystified by the sender's identity if the letters had not been written on her personal engraved stationery. She also, in her en-

ment, dated them incorrectly as having been written on June 10, the day before the column appeared.

"It was the headline that made me maddest of all," she continued. "It said 'Martha, Music Won't Mix. I'm an amateur musician . . . I love opera . . . music is the hobby closest to my heart. I was so mad I was going to hand-deliver the letters in person. Then somebody talked me out of it. They said there would be photographers waiting for me.'"

She wrote the three-page letter herself, she said, although her departing press secretary, Kay Woestendieck, edited out "some parts" that were stronger in tone than what finally went out.

In the copy of her letter to Mrs. Graham at The Post, Mrs. Mitchell said:

"Unfortunately, the press in general and the Washington Post in particular, has seen fit to print many stories about me, including several that have seemed insignificant."

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Martha Writes

VIP, From B1

"I realize that it is your newspaper's privilege to report anything I might say or do because of the overemphasis placed on the activities of the wives of public figures in this city. Even though I may not have liked some of the articles, I knew that anything I did or said was fair game."

"However, I think your privilege ends when the truth ends. I do not believe your newspaper—or any publication—has the right to create stories out of whole cloth just because you want to capitalize on someone considered 'controversial' . . ."

Mrs. Mitchell went on to call Thursday's story "so bad" and "such blatantly irresponsible journalism" that she hoped the ASNE "will take some action to prevent such abuse in the future."

In a more cheerful mood yesterday, Mrs. Mitchell laid down her own guidelines for a journalistic code of ethics:

"You be fair with me and I'll be fair with you."