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Obituary: Cellist Ruth Saunders Braitberg; performed as Natasha Rubinstein, 59

By Sarah Bryan Miller
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Ruth Saunders Braitberg, known professionally as Natasha Rubinstein

Ruth Saunders Braitberg, who, using the professional name Natasha Rubinstein, was the principal cello with the Muny Orchestra and Webster University Symphony Orchestra, died unexpectedly of a heart attack on Jan. 2 while out walking near her home in Olivette. She was 59.

"She was always active," said her mother, pianist Ruth Saunders, a retired professor of music at St. Louis University. "She was always busy, always involved in things – teaching and playing all the time. And everything she did, she did with a full heart."

Ms. Rubinstein was born Oct. 13, 1950, in Boston. Her family moved to St. Louis when she was a child, and she was graduated from University City High School and Washington University.



Ms. Rubinstein's first instrument was the piano. At age 8, she took up the cello, and, said her mother, "she grew up playing in the University City orchestra."

She worked for several years in the New York area, returning to St. Louis to make a career as a freelance cellist and teacher. In addition to her work with the Muny, Ms. Rubinstein performed at the Repertory Theatre, the Fox Theatre, and in many other venues.

She also performed chamber music with the Eden Trio and other ensembles. She and her husband, violinist-violist Michael Braitberg, were co-owners of a booking agency, Elegant Ensembles, which provides musicians for weddings and other events.

Ms. Rubinstein was active in the Musicians' Association of St. Louis, and took an active part part in union contract negotiations. "She was a very fine musician," said a colleague, Association president Vicky Smolik. "She was very well thought of, both in the theater community and the classical (music) community in town."

In addition to her mother and husband, Ms. Rubenstein is survived by her three children, Alexander Braitberg, Tova Braitberg, a violinist and violist, and Gabriel Braitberg, a harpist, all of St. Louis County; by a sister, Catherine Saunders Dunphy of Denver, Colorado, and by a brother, David Saunders of Boise, Idaho.

A memorial service will be held at 2 p.m. on Wed., Jan, 6, at Berger Memorial Chapel, 4715 McPherson Avenue. In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be made to a charity of the donor's choice.