



May 8, 2008, 8:00pm on PBS
Camelot
New York Philharmonic

"Don't let it be forgot
That once there was a spot
For one brief shining moment
That was known as Camelot"

Those lines from the final number in the Lerner and Loewe musical *Camelot* are said to have been the favorites of President John F. Kennedy during his brief years in the White House. Ever since, Kennedy's Presidency has been thought by many to have been Camelot years.

Continuing its now annual tradition of a springtime performance of a great American musical, the New York Philharmonic will present Lerner and Loewe's *Camelot* in May. And on Thursday evening, May 8 our cameras and microphones will be in Avery Fisher Hall to bring *Camelot* into your homes as the next offering in our Live From Lincoln Center series.

Lyricist Alan Jay Lerner and composer Frederick Loewe were eager to collaborate again following their tremendous success with *My Fair Lady*. After a considerable search for appropriate material, they came upon T. H. White's novel, *The Once and Future King*, a story about the legendary King Arthur and his Court. Here, they decided, were the makings of their next project and they plunged into it, enlisting the formidable Moss Hart as Director.

The birth of *Camelot*, however, was not an easy one. During the writing process Lerner's wife left him, and in the tryout period he suffered a bleeding ulcer and had to be hospitalized. Then Hart was stricken with a heart attack (no pun intended!) and Lerner, now recovered, stepped in as temporary director at the behest of Hart's wife, Kitty Carlisle Hart. Efforts were made to engage another director, and indeed an approach was made to Jose Ferrer but he was not available. At that point the show clocked in at over three hours, much too long; but Lerner and Loewe were loathe to effect any changes without Hart's input. At last Hart was released from the hospital, and the cutting of *Camelot* began---and continued even after the Broadway opening on December 3, 1960.

Camelot was propelled into the national consciousness by television. The commercial TV networks at the time were able to boast of a number of first-rate variety shows. The most important of them was CBS's Sunday evening *Toast of the Town*, presided over by stone-faced Ed Sullivan (the title was later changed to *The Ed Sullivan Show*). To his credit Sullivan regularly included performers from all areas of show business, including opera, ballet, the concert hall and Broadway. Soon after *Camelot* opened, Sullivan's show featured extended excerpts from the show (it didn't hurt, of course, that its two leading stars were Richard Burton and Julie Andrews!), and the original cast recording was a top seller for more than a year. Ultimately *Camelot* played 873 performances on Broadway and won 4 Tony Awards. There have been two Broadway revivals (in 1981 and 1993), and there was a production at Lincoln Center's New York State Theater in the summer of 1980. Among the many musical highlights in *Camelot* are Arthur's "I Wonder What the King is Doing Tonight", Guenevere's "The Lusty Month of May"; and Lancelot's "If Ever I Would Leave You".

The upcoming New York Philharmonic presentation of *Camelot* will reunite Director Lonny Price and Producer Thomas Z. Shephard, the Philharmonic's Broadway production team. Price was Director for the previous Philharmonic performances of *Sweeney Todd* and *Candide*; and Shephard was Producer for last season's memorable *My Fair Lady*. The conductor, also a veteran of Philharmonic Broadway shows, will be a

true Broadway legend, Paul Geminiani. The cast? Truly stars of stage, screen, opera and television: Gabriel Byrne, Marin Mazzie, Nathan Gunn, Fran Drescher, Christopher Lloyd and Bobby Steggert.

A memorable evening awaits us on Thursday, May 8, when Live From Lincoln Center will present the Lerner and Loewe classic, *Camelot*. I leave you with the usual advice: check your local PBS station's schedule for the exact day and time of the telecast in your area.

Enjoy!

By MARTIN BOOKSPAN