

LIVE FROM LINCOLN CENTER

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Mostly Mozart Festival 40th Anniversary

By MARTIN BOOKSPAN

Forty summers ago, in 1966, Lincoln Center undertook a daring and unprecedented venture: the presentation of a concert series in New York City at a time of year when it was customary for artists and audiences to abandon traditional concert halls in favor of such summertime venues as Tanglewood, Ravinia and the Hollywood Bowl. Lincoln Center's new series, called "Midsummer Serenades: A Mozart Festival", took place in air-conditioned Philharmonic Hall (before it was renamed Avery Fisher Hall) and was played by a specially assembled orchestra of fine players from the large corps of New York free-lance musicians. To the surprise of many observers, the concerts were an immediate hit and the series, under its new name "Mostly Mozart", has become one of the glories of New York's summer season—and incidentally, a format imitated in cities around the globe.

We of Live From Lincoln Center have been privileged to bring directly into your homes many of the Mostly Mozart opening nights. And again this year we'll be in Avery Fisher Hall with our cameras and microphones on Wednesday evening, August 2 to bring you this year's Opening Night concert. The conductor will be the Music Director of the Mostly Mozart Festival, Louis Langrée; the soloists will be pianist Garrick Ohlsson, and a quartet of singers: soprano Hei-Kyung Hong, mezzo-soprano Sarah Connolly, tenor Matthew Polenzani, and bass John Relyea, along with the Concert Chorale of New York whose conductor is James Bagwell. The program will consist of two works by Mozart, the so-called "Coronation" Piano Concerto and the so-called "Coronation" Mass. I'll eventually explain my use of the term "so-called".

A startling innovation was introduced at last summer's Festival. A stage was built some thirty feet into the auditorium, with seating to the sides and in back of the musicians. In effect Avery Fisher Hall became a concert hall in the round. It was noticed at once that the sound was richer and fuller and that a new feeling of intimacy was established between players and audience. Over the next decade Avery Fisher Hall is scheduled to undergo extensive renovation. The in-the-round configuration is said to be one of the contemplated designs.

Now to the so-called "Coronation" Piano Concerto and "Coronation" Mass. In the four years between 1782 and 1786 Mozart produced no fewer than a dozen piano concertos, mostly for his own use as a concert pianist. In the last three years of his life, 1788 to 1791, he produced only two more. The penultimate one, Number 26 in D Major, has a less than happy history. Its first performance was not a particular success. On something like a whim Mozart decided that he would

attend the 1790 coronation in Frankfurt of Emperor Leopold II. There he played his recent D Major Piano Concerto, hoping to realize some much needed income; he was disappointed. He wrote at the time "The Frankfurt people are even more stingy than those in Vienna," and though his concert "was a splendid success in terms of honor and glory, it was a failure as far as money was concerned." Years after Mozart's death, some marketing genius of the time decided to label the D Major Concerto, K.537, the "Coronation" Concerto simply because Mozart had played it at the Frankfurt coronation of the Emperor.

Some eleven years earlier Mozart had taken up a position at the Court of the Archbishop of Salzburg. Among his duties was a requirement to "provide the court and church with new compositions of his own creation." Quick to fulfill this obligation Mozart composed a relatively brief Mass which was first performed on Easter Sunday, 1779. In a letter Mozart described his task. "Our church music is very different from that of Italy, especially since a mass with all its movements....must not last more than three quarters of an hour. One needs some special training for this kind of composition, and it must also be a mass with all instruments—war trumpets, tympani and so forth." Here, too, a performance at the coronation of an Emperor, this one for Francis I, successor to Leopold II, in 1792 (after Mozart's death) earned for this Mass the nickname "Coronation". One of its striking elements is the similarity between its Agnus Dei soprano solo and the "Dove sono" aria of the Countess in Mozart's "The Marriage of Figaro".

Garrick Ohlsson, who will play the "Coronation" Concerto, has a particularly busy summer. Both at the Boston Symphony Orchestra's Tanglewood Festival and at Chicago's Ravinia Festival he is playing all 32 of the Beethoven Piano Sonatas. And the four vocal soloists in the "Coronation" Mass are among the youngest and brightest of the emerging singers of today.

These, then, are the musical joys that await us when Live From Lincoln Center once again goes into New York's Avery Fisher Hall for the opening of another Mostly Mozart Festival. The date again is Wednesday evening, August 2. But as usual I advise you to check your local PBS station for the exact date and time of the telecast in your area.

Enjoy!