

LIVE FROM LINCOLN CENTER

December 31, 2006, 8:00 p.m. on PBS

Audra McDonald Sings the Movies for New Year's Eve

With Members of the New York Philharmonic

Over the course of the thirty years of Live From Lincoln Center telecasts we have had a variety of New Year's Eve events...centering mostly on the gala Holiday concerts of the New York Philharmonic. There have been Gershwin evenings, and French evenings, and Viennese evenings. Among the conductors have been Zubin Mehta and Kurt Masur and Sir Andrew Davis and of course, the Philharmonic's current Music Director, Lorin Maazel. Featured soloists have included Placido Domingo and Renee Fleming and Deborah Voigt and Angela Gheorghiu.

The tradition continues on New Year's Eve 2006. Our cameras and microphones will be in place in Avery Fisher Hall as usual, and members of the New York Philharmonic will be on stage, as usual. But the repertoire and featured soloist represent something of a departure from the norm. A cavalcade of great songs from great American films will be on tap, to be sung by one of the most charismatic artists now before the public: Audra McDonald. This will be a speedy return for Miss McDonald on Live From Lincoln Center: just a few weeks ago she was the featured artist in our telecast of one of the performances in Lincoln Center's American Songbook series.

In appraising Audra McDonald's Carnegie Hall concert of Broadway songs, New York Magazine wrote: "Most of her selections...are identified with the names who introduced them, but McDonald made each one her property by applying her saucy wit, shining tone, and technical virtuosity." Born in Berlin, Germany on July 3, 1970, and raised in Fresno, California she exhibited unusual musical talent at a very young age. One of her early regional triumphs was in the role of Aldonza in "Man of La Mancha." She came to New York to study at Lincoln Center's Juilliard School, and in 1992, while still a student, she won her first major Broadway role as understudy in "The Secret Garden." The year after her 1993 graduation from Juilliard, she won a major role in the Broadway revival of "Carousel." In 1995 came her definitive portrayal of Sharon opposite the Maria Callas of Zoe Caldwell in "Master Class." In little more than a decade, Audra McDonald has soared to the top of her dual career as singer and actress. She has received no fewer than four coveted Broadway Tony Awards for her performances in "Carousel", "Master Class", "Ragtime" and "A Raisin in the Sun." And her four CD recordings of standard and new material have been universally acclaimed.

Audra McDonald has appeared twice previously with the New York Philharmonic: in the staged performances of "Sweeney Todd" (recorded and available on CDs through the New York Philharmonic) and in the spring of 2005

in a preview performance of an aria from John Adams's opera, "Doctor Atomic." Last March she made her operatic debut at the Houston Grand Opera in a double bill of Poulenc's "La Voix Humaine" and the world premiere of a new work, "Send", written especially for her by one of her regular collaborators, the composer John LaChiusa. Next February she will make her Los Angeles Opera debut in Kurt Weill's "The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny" in a production to be conducted by the opera company's Music Director, James Conlon. The year 2007 will also see her in the role of Lizzie Curry, co-starring with another Tony Award winner, John Cullum, in the revival of "110 in the Shade" at New York City's Studio 54.

Alongside her Broadway triumphs, Audra McDonald has also had a flourishing career on television and in concert: a recurring role on NBC's "Kidnapped" and a soon-to-be-seen starring role in an ABC made-for-television movie version of "A Raisin in the Sun." On the concert stage she has appeared with many of the world's great symphony orchestras, including the Boston Symphony, the Chicago Symphony and the Berlin Philharmonic. Upcoming are appearances with the Philadelphia Orchestra in a tribute to Sidney Poitier, and duo concerts with Barbara Cook in Washington, Philadelphia and Orange County.

So there it is. the New York Philharmonic's gala New Year's Eve concert on Sunday evening, December 31, played by members of the Philharmonic conducted by Ted Sperling, and starring soprano Audra McDonald singing the American Movies Songbook. As usual, I leave you with the suggestion to check your local PBS station for the exact day and time of the broadcast in your area.

Enjoy....and a Very Happy New Year to you all!

Martin Bookspan