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Mann celebrates; Condi Rice will play



By Peter Dobrin

Inquirer Classical Music Critic

At the Mann Center this summer, the Philadelphia Orchestra will host Aretha Franklin, jazz/pop trumpeter Chris Botti and pianist André Watts.

Regis and Joy Philbin will narrate Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*.

And Condoleezza Rice - yes, the 66th U.S. secretary of state but also a pianist of a certain level of accomplishment - joins the orchestra for the middle movement of Mozart's *Piano Concerto in D minor*.

This season the Mann Center is taking a moment to celebrate 75. But 75 what?

Philadelphia Orchestra musicians, playing under the moniker of the "Robin Hood Dell Orchestra," established a series of concerts in Fairmount Park in 1930; the Mann was not opened (as the Robin Hood Dell West) until 1976. The anniversary that's being recognized marks 75 years since the incorporation of the Robin Hood Dell, the Mann's predecessor organization, says Mann president Catherine M. Cahill.

The anniversary-flavored season makes a nod to some Mann traditions - the all-Tchaikovsky fireworks night, the appearance of Watts, who played Mendelssohn with the Dell Orchestra at age 10 - but ignores others. The popular free lawn-ticket program will not be made available this year, Cahill said.

The season of nine orchestra concerts is decidedly more poplike than previous years, and even the straight classical concerts aim popular pieces at the largest possible audience.

On the classical side, opening night, June 15, features Rossen Milanov leading Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* and Tchaikovsky's *Piano Concerto No. 1*. The soloist is

Haochen Zhang, a Curtis Institute of Music student and gold medal winner in the 2009 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition.

Milanov continues the next night with a program Cahill says "looks back at the years [Eugene] Ormandy made great recordings" with the *Sinfonia concertante (K. 297b)*, attributed to Mozart, for winds and orchestra with soloists from the orchestra, *Peter and the Wolf* with the Philbins, Dukas' *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, and the Ravel *Boléro*.

Curtis conducting graduate Giancarlo Guerrero, visits on June 23 for Barber's *Second Essay for Orchestra*, Beethoven's *Piano Concerto No. 4* with Watts, and Rachmaninoff's *Symphonic Dances*.

Curtis once again figures in the programming July 26 in an all-Tchaikovsky program and Milanov in the "Polonaise" from *Eugene Onegin*, *Marche slave*, a suite from *Swan Lake*, the *1812 Overture*, and *Rococo Variations* for cello and orchestra with Chicago-born, 17-year-old Curtis student Gabriel Cabezas.

At the end of the programming spectrum that puts less emphasis on the orchestra itself, the ensemble will back trumpeter Chris Botti June 17 in tunes such as "The Look of Love," "Time to Say Goodbye" and "Cinema Paradiso."

George Fenton, film composer for the Planet Earth series, leads the orchestra July 29 in music written for the nature documentaries while audiences watch footage from them on video screens.

Actress and singer Idina Menzel (*Glee*, *Rent*) sings with the orchestra and conductor Steven Reineke June 24.

Aretha Franklin and Condoleezza Rice are guests July 27 for a gala celebration.

Soprano Angela Brown, mezzo Marietta Simpson, tenor Vinson Cole, and baritone Gordon Hawkins perform with the orchestra June 22 in a program called "Summertime Songs: A Celebration," an evening of opera excerpts.

Brown precedes her performance with a one-woman program, "Opera From a Sistah's Point of View," on June 21 at Old Pine Presbyterian Church, Fourth and Pine Streets. The non-Mann venue was chosen because "Eugene Ormandy is buried at that church, and they've been reaching out and finding connections to a very diverse constituency," Cahill said.

In addition to the orchestra, the Mann's classical slate includes a visit Aug. 11 from the Silk Road Ensemble with Yo-Yo Ma, the New York Pops on Sept. 22, and a family concert on Sept. 25 by the Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia led by new music director Dirk Brossé.

For its pop music acts, Cahill said the Mann signed a deal with presenter AEG in January.

"We're very pleased to have a partner of that stature, of their clout," she said. "We're in one of the most dense and complicated marketplaces in the nation."

More renovations to the center likely lie ahead, she said, declining to discuss details.

As for the free lawn-ticket program that has been a core aspect of the Mann's identity, Cahill said the center will continue to distribute 50,000 free tickets to organizations serving disadvantaged populations, but will no longer give free lawn spots to anyone who mails in a coupon or signs up on the Web.

"We didn't have the strongest results on that, and the people who did that program can afford the \$10 tickets," Cahill said.


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Further information.

Tickets go on sale Wednesday: At the Mann Center box office, 52d and Parkside Ave., 215-893-1999, www.manncenter.org.

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