

LIVE FROM LINCOLN CENTER
October 12, 2006, 8:00 p.m. on PBS
Lincoln Center's American Songbook presents
Audra McDonald & Friends

"A supremely gifted lyric soprano and actress." Those are the words of Stephen Holden writing in *The New York Times* about "Build a Bridge," the latest CD recording by Audra McDonald. At New York's Lincoln Center one of the most admired offerings is the series called "The American Songbook." On Thursday, October 12 Audra McDonald and The American Songbook will come together on the stage of the Allen Room at Lincoln Center's Rose Hall for an evening called "Audra McDonald and Friends." Front and center will be songs by American singers/songwriters. The cameras and microphones of Live From Lincoln Center will be on hand to bring the event directly into your homes. This may be a good time to emphasize the word "live" in our title: I have occasionally been asked when the programs of Live From Lincoln Center are taped. Except for last May's program, which consisted of a kaleidoscopic survey of highlights from our thirty seasons of programs, Live From Lincoln Center is absolutely LIVE at the moment of transmission (though some stations along the PBS Network chose to schedule the programs on a tape-delayed basis).

Audra McDonald, raised in Fresno, California was born into a musical family. As a youngster she appeared in many local and regional theatrical productions, perhaps most notably as Aldonza in "Man of La Mancha." Coming to New York she enrolled at Lincoln Center's Juilliard School, and even as an undergraduate she won her first major role on Broadway as a replacement Ayah in "Secret Garden." The year after her 1993 graduation from Juilliard she was cast as Carrie Pepperidge in Nicholas Hytner's production of "Carousel." Never before had an African-American woman played the role, and her performance won for her her first Tony Award.

In 1995 she played Sharon, a student, in "Master Class." The Master Class of "Master Cass" was the unforgettable sequence of seminars presented at Juilliard in 1971 by the legendary Maria Callas. Opinion about the play was sharply divided: as a piece of theater it worked well; but some felt playwright Terence McNally had in fact grossly distorted Callas. The Callas of the play is angry and spiteful in her demeanor. But the Callas we saw at those Juilliard sessions was considerate, helpful and encouraging. It was for her portrayal of Sharon (to the Callas of Zoe Caldwell) that Audra McDonald won her second Tony Award.

1998 saw Audra McDonald win her third Tony, for her portrayal of Sarah in "Ragtime." Thus, by the age of 28, she had won three Tony Awards in the space of five years. Only three other actors in the history of the Tonys had accomplished that feat: Shirley Booth, Gwen Verdon and Zero Mostel. But there was more to come: In the revival of Lorraine Hansberry's "A Raisin in the Sun" a

couple of years ago, Audra McDonald won her fourth Tony for the role of Ruth Younger.

Along with her career on Broadway, Audra has appeared in concert with many of the world's leading symphony orchestras, and with such conductors as Michael Tilson Thomas, Sir Simon Rattle, Leonard Slatkin, Esa Pekka-Salonen and John Adams. With the New York Philharmonic last year she previewed a scene from John Adams's "Doctor Atomic" prior to the world premiere of the complete opera. She will make her operatic debut in March of this year at the Houston Grand Opera in a unique double bill: Poulenc's "La Voix Humaine," a monodrama of a rejected woman pleading on the phone for a reconciliation with her former lover; along with it will be the world premiere of "Send," composed as a companion piece for the Poulenc by composer Michael John LaChiusa, a longtime musical collaborator with McDonald. "Send" deals with the role of the Internet in 21st Century romance. Another unique accomplishment: she has been only the second American in over 100 years to sing at the London Proms famous "Last Night at the Proms."

In addition to her career on the Broadway, concert and opera stages, Audra McDonald has appeared as a guest actress on numerous television programs, including "Law and Order: Special Victims Unit," "Homicide: Life on the Streets," and "Mister Sterling." She played Grace in the ABC production of "Annie" and she received an Emmy nomination for her role in the television adaptation of Margaret Edson's play, "Wit." Her presence has also graced several PBS television specials, including "Leonard Bernstein's New York," "A Capitol Fourth," "Audra McDonald In Concert," "On Stage at the Kennedy Center" and appearances in three "Great Performances" programs.

This capsule of Audra McDonald's career began with a quote from a review of her latest CD recording. There are three previous Audra McDonald solo recordings: "Way Back to Paradise," "How Glory Goes" and "Happy Songs." All of them fully justify Stephen Holden's description, "a supremely gifted lyric soprano and actress" indeed.

Does the title "Audra McDonald and Friends" for her October 12th Live From Lincoln Center performance suggest some surprises in the offing? You bet it does! Audra has invited some very special friends to appear along with her...but to reveal who they are would spoil the surprise. I'll leave you, therefore, with what is perhaps an unfair tease, but I assure you that you will not be disappointed. Once again let me remind you to check your local PBS station for the exact time and date of the telecast in your area.

Enjoy!