

ASTON MAGNA CELEBRATES 35TH ANNIVERSARY WITH CONCERT AND DINNER HONORING PHYLLIS CURTIN

Aston Magna, the baroque music society, had its 35th anniversary concert and gala party honoring American icon soprano Phyllis Curtin on August 4, 2007.

The sold out performance at the Daniel Arts Center at Simon's Rock College in Great Barrington featured works by the great composer Purcell. A mesmerizing performance by tenor Frank Kelly of the song "Music for while" opened the evening followed by works of both intimate beauty and barroom humor. Instrumental pieces included "3 parts upon a ground" and "Lesson for Harpsichord", the latter played by Peter Sykes. Among the more comic vocal works were four catches, which inspired visual antics on the part of the singers, particularly Frank Kelly and Kristen Watson.

The jewel of the evening was a semi-staged complete performance of Purcell's opera "Dido and Aeneas" with mezzo-soprano Deborah Rentz-Moore as Dido and bass baritone David Ripley as Aeneas. Through gesture and voice Ms. Rentz-Moore captured the psychological depth of the main character, supported throughout by the accomplished artistry of Dominique LaBelle in the role of Belinda. Alto Lynn Torgove turned in a riveting Witch. The entire production was overseen by violinist and artistic director Daniel Stepner, who conducted a chamber orchestra and the Cantilena Chorus prepared by Andrea Goodman. Photographs of Ms. Curtin's career highlights were presented at the concert site in a slide presentation prepared by Gordon Hyatt.

Following the performance, 225 guests attended the gala party honoring the contributions made by Phyllis Curtin as a performer, a muse, and a mentor. The party was held at Aston Magna, the estate in the Berkshires owned by Lee Elman, which was the site of the first Aston Magna concert after which the annual musical festival is named. Mr. Elman graciously contributed the use of his estate which was a magical venue for cocktails at sunset over the Berkshire hills and dinner served by candlelight under festive tents at beautifully decorated tables. Mr. Elman, one of the founders of Aston Magna, has served on its board for all 35 years. He chaired the event along with co-chairs Alexia Lalli and Carole Hyatt.

Phyllis Curtin was honored for her distinguished operatic career, her contributions to American music, her years of teaching and inspiring young musicians at Yale, Boston University, and Tanglewood, her support of Aston Magna including her attendance at the very first Aston Magna concert, and her long and productive life in the Berkshires.

The speakers at the dinner who paid tribute to Ms. Curtin were all personally acquainted with her and included Aston Magna Board Chair Robert Strassler, Boston Globe Music Critic Richard Dyer, Associate Professor of Music at Yale University Richard Lalli, former pupils of Ms. Curtin, the performers Dominique LaBelle and Lynn Torgove, Aston Magna Musical Director Dan Stepner and his wife and ensemble member Laura Jeppeson and the three chairs of the event, Lee Elman, Carole Hyatt and Alexia Lalli. Tributes were read by David Ripley and Laura Jeppesen that had been sent by composer

Carlisle Floyd, whose opera *Susannah*, featured Ms. Curtin and who wrote several other operas for her; and Dr. Robert Silber, the President Emeritus of Boston University, who appointed Ms. Curtin Professor of Voice and Dean of the School of the Arts at Boston University from 1983 until she retired in 1992.

The event generated \$50,000 towards Aston Magna's expenses for both its summer and winter festivals and its many outstanding recordings of Baroque masterpieces. . Aston Magna performs 15 concerts each summer and 3 each winter. The winter concerts, this year scheduled for October 27, 2007, February 9, 2008 and May 10, 2008 are to be held at St. James Church, in Great Barrington, a return for the winter season to a familiar venue for Aston Magna fans. The summer festival is held at three venues: Simons' Rock College in Great Barrington, MA; Bard College in Annandale, NY; and the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, MA. Information about the AM concerts and recordings can be found at www.astonmagna.org.