

Solti signs contract, shines with Mozart

CLASSICAL

By Robert C. Marsh

Georg Solti signed a new four-year contract with the Chicago Symphony at noon yesterday and then proceeded that evening to conduct a program that provided every occasion to rejoice that he will now be here through his 19th season. Moreover, he will be on hand for 10 weeks of concerts, conducting a third of the subscription series.

The new pact extends through June, 1989. Add two more years and you will have Solti conducting for CSO's 100th birthday.

It is ironic but true. The movies have made Mozart a popular composer. Although not exactly unknown before "Amadeus" established him as a mass culture hero, Mozart is reaching more listeners today than ever before, largely, I suspect, because the fear of the unknown has been overcome.

Solti's program at Orchestra Hall last night combined one of the best known of all the Mozart piano concertos, the ever-incredible K. 466, with the rarely heard and liturgically incomplete C Minor Mass, K. 427. Solti is apparently a champion of the work. He first directed it here in 1978. Unquestionably, he knows how to go to the heart of the music and the text and make this both an artistic and a spiritual experience.

It may be the effect of the movies, but Macho Mozart is decidedly in favor. The delicate, music box style of concerto playing which I recall in the past has been replaced in popularity by a bold, gutsy style that, in my mind, is much closer to the real Wolfgang who, judging from his letters, was that kind of guy.

Tamas Vasary, who played the K. 466, gave it all the bold qualities you normally expect in Beethoven and may have played us a Beethoven cadenza. (I confess I'm unsure.) In any case it was a big, flamboyant statement for the solo instrument, perhaps a little too big and flamboyant for the work, but undeniably effective. So

Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, Georg Solti conducting, with Tamas Vasary, piano, and Mavis Martin, Anne Sofie von Otter, Jerry Hadley and Malcolm King. All-Mozart program: Piano Concerto K. 466; Mass in C Minor, K. 427.

this was a performance in which the most powerful and extroverted elements of the score were fully revealed without any loss to the most sensitive and expressive pages. The piano melody of the slow movement, one of the most beautiful ever written by anyone, was wonderfully well stated.

One element of Mozart's character which "Amadeus" did not emphasize was that he was deeply religious, and his church music is not merely the work of a supreme musician but one who held every word of the Latin mass to be precious.

For this performance of the C Minor Mass, Solti had reduced forces from the Chicago Symphony Chorus as impeccably prepared as always, singing with exemplary style and taste and good Austrian-type Latin. The big choral pages were breathtaking.

Of the quartet of soloists, Mavis Martin and Anne Sofie von Otter have the largest part of the music. Soprano Martin can do extraordinary things. The voice is not very large, but her "Et incarnatus est" was remarkably beautiful. Mezzo von Otter (she is Swedish, not German) has a big, warm voice which she uses with consistent intelligence and fine musical intuitions. Bass Malcolm King had little to do but did it splendidly. The fine tenor of Jerry Hadley was a consistent asset.

But the key to the success of the performance was Solti's unerring sense of drama. He builds this music from the quiet pages of the Kyrie to the triumphant Osanas of the close. This mass begins with us begging for divine mercy and ends with a shout, the Lord is with us, rejoice. The traditional ending, the Agnus Dei with its prayer for peace, might in this setting be anti-climactic.