

Solti given a Chicago 'love' note for his 75th

By Don Terry and K. O. Dawes

In a tour de force Friday, Georg Solti conducted the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and simultaneously played a piano concerto before a sold-out audience in Orchestra Hall celebrating the maestro's 75th birthday.

It was Solti's first scheduled public U.S. performance as a pianist but was only the beginning of a gala night of glittering gowns, music and parties honoring Solti.

"He's one of the greatest conductors in the world," said Joan Harris, the city's commissioner of cultural affairs. "He's a hero to all of us. We want to show him how much we love him."

After Solti's performance in Mozart's Concerto for Two Pianos, K. 365, with Murray Peabha, Mayor Washington presented him with the Chicago Medal of Merit. Washington listened to the historic performance in Box O with

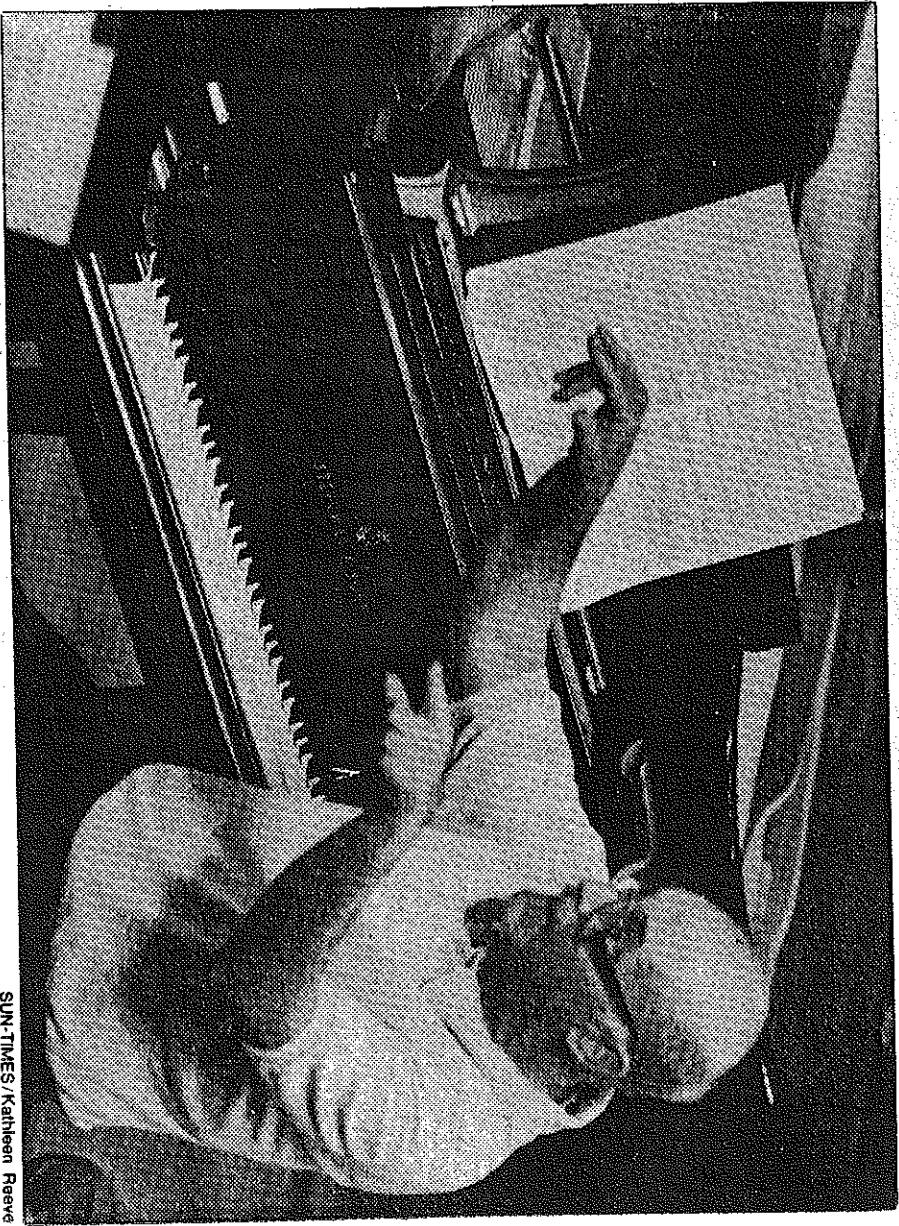
Mrs. Solti.

"She said he was always nervous when he played the piano," the mayor said. "He didn't sound nervous. I'm proud of this orchestra. Yes, presenting this medal is a personal statement. I know greatness when I see it."

Outside the hall, the ghostly white beams from two huge spotlights crisscrossed the damp sky as men in tuxedos and women in evening gowns entered under a canopy stretched to the curb. Inside, flowers and the 106-piece orchestra and chorus of more than 100 filled the stage.

Earlier Friday, after a rehearsal, the maestro looked nonplussed and a bit shy in the warmth of his reception from his musicians who cried "Bravo!" rapped their bows on their violins, and applauded their conductor and music director with delighted smiles.

The scene was repeated in the concert hall when the audience erupted into applause as the last



Georg Solti conducts the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in a rehearsal Friday for his 75th-birthday performance and celebration later at night.

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note from Solti's performance floated into the night. Solti stood and bowed gracefully, a slight smile on his face.

"It's wonderful to be with him," beamed tenor Placido Domingo, who appeared in the concert with Kiri Te Kanawa in excerpts from Act I of Verdi's "Otello."

After the concert, some 600 people gathered for a birthday dinner

and dance in the new Hotel Nikko. There, the maestro was presented with a 27-inch-long cake shaped like a grand piano. It took the hotel's pastry chef, Charley Barndegar, a week and 20 pounds of sugar to make, he said.

Although Friday night's performance at the piano was officially the first for Solti in the United States, it was preceded by an im-

promptu debut last Jan. 31 in San Francisco when 60 percent of the orchestra's instruments and all its dress clothes were in trucks stranded in a blizzard between Needles, Ariz., and the city by the bay.

Solti will celebrate his actual birthday, Oct. 21, with his family in London. But Friday was Chicago's turn to toast the the maestro, who is conducting his 19th season here.