

Music at Our Saviour's Atonement: Its Mission and Meaning

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Being a musician is not a profession and it's not just a job, and it's not something occasional—it's the totality of your life and your devotion to something in which you believe profoundly. And, you have to believe in order to make other people believe. Music is not important for creating musicians; it's creating a civilized society. The sooner we realize that strength, the better we will be for the future. - - Isaac Stern¹

The first time I heard these words I stood up and shouted, 'Yes!...*Yes!!*' Deep in my heart it seems I had always held a *feeling* for why I was a musician, but until that moment, never in my life had I heard such a concise and thoughtfully articulated *explanation*. And, to rescue a recent phrase from its more sinister connotations, it was an epiphanal 'shock' rendering me in 'awe' of the man who possessed such insight. Thus, when the opportunity arose in 2002 to become the Artistic Director of a concert series in Washington Heights, now called MOSA, I knew right away that the mission for the events would be a direct outgrowth of these uplifting sentiments.

While the number of skilled musicians graduating from colleges and conservatories is growing ever larger, the number of meaningful opportunities for these artists to perform and be reasonably compensated (in both money and appreciation) is ever dwindling. So, here was Our Saviour's Atonement, with its warm and inviting acoustics and well-maintained concert grand piano (bought in part with money donated by Alice Tully herself), surrounded by a community filled with world-class musicians: a perfect match! In the first few years and with unwavering support from our Series Administrator, Nancy Lustenring, an emphasis was placed on chamber music presented by neighborhood artists, featuring local composers. Now, with the tireless efforts and enthusiasm of our General Director, Brent Ness, our season is now more fully supported with grant money, and includes joint presentations with the Juilliard School and Carnegie Hall. Collaborations with visual artists have often been part of the mix, and as always, there is a complimentary reception to follow.

But, where is the meaning in all of this? It is in the concert pianist who is grateful for his first-ever New York recital – an *unforgettable* experience! It is in the artist whose mother stayed home for his Carnegie Hall debut due to her anxieties about terrorism after 9/11, but then came to his MOSA concert scheduled on Mothers' Day – a *joyful* reunion! It is in the composer who later told me that his MOSA concert was a life-changing event – a *spiritual* awakening! It is in the woman who unexpectedly ran into friends after not seeing them for over twenty years – a *renewal* of friendships! It is the audience members who comment on the healing effects of these concerts – such *soulful* nourishment! It is in a luthier having the only concert in her career dedicated to and played on the instruments she made – an *inspirational* gathering! It is in a Pulitzer Prize-winning composer featured on the series – such *communal* talent! Imagine what more can and does happen!

But there is more to be done. For those on the all-volunteer staff (which also includes Katherine Ness, Sarah Krasnow, Matt Mitchell, and Serapha Reed), MOSA is something to which we are devoted and in which we believe profoundly. This is why for our seventh season we will work to make each and every concert free and open to the public. Let us ensure that the message of MOSA will resonate loud and clear. For those who can hear, lend me your ears!

¹Isaac Stern, *Musical Encounters*, Educational Broadcasting Corporation and the Hopewell Foundation, Inc., 2000.