

The Arts: News and Reviews

Washington Square Music Festival In 29th Season of Alfresco Concerts

By TIM PAGE

I WAS brought up to believe that one should contribute to the community somehow," Peggy Campbell said, "and the Washington Square Music Festival is my baby."

Mrs. Campbell, the chairman since 1956, used to carry scrapbooks and petitions to local businesses and corporations to keep the festival solvent. Now 86 years old, she has much to be proud of. On Tuesday night, the festival begins its 29th season of free chamber-orchestra programs in Washington Square Park, with Daniel Asia conducting works by Mozart and Charles Ives. One of Mr. Asia's own compositions, "Three Movements for Trumpet and Orchestra" (1984) will receive its world premiere performance, with the solo part played by Wilmer Wise.

The festival was founded in 1953 by the violinist Alexander Schneider and the Washington Square Association. The first summer, Mr. Schneider conducted the chamber orchestra in music by Bach, Vivaldi, Mozart, Haydn and others; with the exception of a three-year hiatus for park renovation, the concerts have continued ever since. In addition to familiar classics, the festival has featured new works by Julia Perry, Philip Glass, Nikos Skalkottas and Silvestre Reyueltas as well as chamber operas and band concerts. The artists who have appeared with the

festival include Marilyn Horne, Wynton Marsalis, Lukas Foss, Henry Lewis and Gerard Schwarz.

There will be four concerts this year on Tuesday nights through Aug. 12. In case of rain, the concerts will take place in the Loeb Student Center of New York University, one block south of the park on La Guardia Place.

A Patch of Green

Mrs. Campbell moved to New York in 1922 with her husband, the late Courtney Campbell, and settled on Grove Street. She recalls Washington Square as a patch of green where mothers took their children, artists scribbled and eternal chess games flourished near Macdougall Street.

"Alexander Schneider suggested presenting concerts in the square," she said. "The idea worked, and then it fell to me to take it over. My husband asked me what I knew about music. Well, I didn't know very much, but I've learned a lot. And now my Peggy is carrying on."

Peggy Friedman, Mrs. Campbell's daughter, founded and is a partner in the public relations firm of Peggy Friedman Associates. "Washington Square was my first job in the arts," she said. "When I was a girl, my parents gave me 50 cents an hour to type envelopes. Later I ushered. I've been involved with the festival most of the time since. In 1953, the entire

budget was \$1,300, and everybody thought that was incredibly expensive. It's up to \$30,000 now, and we still have to raise about half of it to cover this season. I'm just grateful that the musicians play for union scale. I could never tell you what we pay them, because it would be too embarrassing. They're worth a lot more, I can assure you."

Mrs. Friedman became the executive director of the festival in 1979. "It's not a full-time job, and I have to do many other things as well," she said. "Sometimes I feel like a super gofer, doing a little bit of everything from ironing tablecloths to talking to the press. Even in the wintertime, which should be a time to mend our nets, there is still something to do."

Reflecting Past and Present

"We want to reflect the character of Washington Square Park," Mrs. Friedman continued. "It's not just a museum but historic and contemporary at the same time. So we've tried to find music which reflects the past and the present. There's no doubt that the classics go over most successfully, but we've played a lot of contemporary music, too."

The fortunes of Washington Square Park have fluctuated considerably since Henry James cast a serene eye across the southern terminus of Fifth Avenue. "I can't deny that there are a lot of spaced-out people in the park," Mrs. Friedman



29th season: Peggy Campbell, left, chairman of the Washington Square Music Festival; the trumpeter Wilmer Wise, who will be the soloist on opening night, center, and the conductor Daniel Asia, above.

said. "But the police help us a lot by sending an extra detail. And on festival night, the old people in the village come out in droves because they feel safe."

"I can't really think of any troubles we've had. Oh, once somebody threw a popsicle and hit an instrument. No major harm was done. And then another time, two people got into a drunken fight in the middle of the concert. My mother, who was then in her 70's, walked over, separated them and threw them

out. And they went. I don't think they knew what else to do. She was outraged."

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"There's no permanent band shell in the park," Mrs. Friedman said. "So we create one, every concert day, down by the statue of Garibaldi. We begin construction after

lunch, and by curtain time we have a concert hall, with acoustic panels, microphones and everything else we need."

Mrs. Friedman confessed some mild apprehension about Tuesday's concert. "We broke our acoustic panels, so some new ones are being shipped to us on Monday morning, to be delivered directly to the park," she said. "But one way or another, we'll be playing. You can count on that"