

“Music for Special Relativity”

Downtown Express, New York City

April 27-May 3, 2007

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Music for special relativity

BY HARRY NEWMAN

Albert Einstein and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart — two of history’s undisputed geniuses — never had the chance to meet in person. They were born 123 years apart and would probably have been too busy anyway. But for an hour and a half this Monday evening, April 30, the two will share a stage when “Einstein’s Mozart: Two Geniuses,” a unique concert work for verse and chamber music by Kate Light, has its New York premiere at the new Seaport District Cultural Association Performance Space on Beekman Street.

Equal parts poetry reading and chamber recital, “Einstein’s Mozart” was inspired by the 100th anniversary of Einstein’s “Miracle Year” — 1905, when he published five breakthrough papers on theoretical physics including the first formulation of $e=mc^2$ — and the 250th anniversary of Mozart’s birth in 2006. The piece combines a suite of original poems by Light about the two men’s lives and achievements with live performance of two of Mozart’s most well-known string quartets, “The Hunt” and “The Dissonant.”

The link between the two historical figures goes deeper than a coincidence in anniversaries. “Einstein was an amateur violinist who loved to play chamber music with his friends,” Light noted in an interview a few days before the performance. “He often said music helped him when he was stuck on a tough problem.” It was being introduced to Mozart when he was 13 that kindled Einstein’s passion for playing music and he would turn to the composer’s work for inspiration throughout his life.

“Einstein’s Mozart” is in two parts with the first devoted to Einstein. Poems with titles such as “An Age of Invention,” “Ether, Or...?” and “Time and Tempo” recount his early life from childhood to his mid-20s when his most famous work was completed and provide a concise, witty, accurate, (and rhyming!) explanation of his ideas along the way. A stanza from “A Remarkable Year: 1905” gives something of the flavor:

Though Newton’s mechanics till now
have been fine;
there are several old laws that I must
redefine.

You see, time is subjective,
and space needs perspective;
not even a measure of length stays
in line...

The second part focuses mostly on Mozart and his travels as a child prodigy performing through Europe. In both sections, rather than being performed together, the reading of the poems alternates with playing of the individual movements of the string quartets. In this way, the music and words become an ongoing counterpoint to each other and build during the course of the piece into a subtle, sustained exploration of the spiritual and intellectual connections between Mozart and Einstein and their work.

“I wasn’t sure how it was going to tie together,” she said. “Then I read [what Einstein wrote] late in life about men of the past and their achievements being his friends that could not be lost...And Mozart was this great friend of Einstein’s. I loved the idea that

POETRY/MUSIC

“EINSTEIN’S MOZART”

Written and Performed by Kate Light with the Albert String Quartet

April 30

Presented by MTP-Montauk Theatre Productions

Seaport District Cultural Association Performance Space

Beekman Street at Front Street

(718-852-7773; shootingstartheatre.org)

people and achievements were his friends. It just opened up so many possibilities.”

Light is the author of three books of poetry, “The Laws of Falling Bodies” (1997), “Open Slowly” (2003) and, last year’s “Gravity’s Dream,” and an earlier concert work, “Oceanophony,” written for the 100th Anniversary of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography. She is also a violinist with the New York City Opera.

Known for her spirited reading style, Light has presented her poetry and concert work across the country and will be the reader for Monday’s performance. The music will be performed by the Albert Quartet, a group created for the occasion, quite aptly, by her musician friends and colleagues in the city.