

“Multi-Media: A Fait Accompli for Attorney Peter Thall”

When Peter M. Thall, New York entertainment attorney, arrives in Cannes for his twentieth MIDEM, he will have behind him a year’s worth of activities that virtually define the term “multi-media.”

In January 1993, Thall was contacted by Gilbert Levine, conductor laureate of the Krakow Philharmonic Orchestra, and the first American to hold the post of Musical Director of a major East European orchestra, regarding a concert in commemoration of the Holocaust. This concert was to be held at the Vatican as a gesture of conciliation between the Jewish people and the Catholic Church.

Because of his specialty in the exploitation of the intellectual property rights, Levine contacted Thall to assist in making a permanent record of this history-making event. Thall soon put together a consortium of entertainment executives who shared the vision that, according to Thall “this unprecedented event could be presented in all the facets that modern technology offers.” What had begun as an orchestral concert rapidly evolved into a multi-media event of enormous proportions.

The concert itself, officiated by the Chief Rabbi of Rome and then the Pope, and attended by almost eight thousand people, including twenty three cardinals, the President of Italy, numerous world dignitaries and 200 Holocaust survivors, featuring the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and the renowned cellist, Lynn Harrell. This spectacular event, which combined concert footage of the grand concert hall with visuals from rarely seen portions of St. Peter’s Basilica and the private residence of the Pope, was televised live to 52 countries.

The fall of 1994 saw the release on Justice Records of a comprehensive CD consisting of the concert, remarks of the Pope, and in a specially accessible portion of the CD to which Justice holds a patent, a conversation among Levine, Harrell and Richard Dreyfuss, the Academy Award winning actor who narrated the Bernstein Kaddish Symphony.

Released simultaneously by Rhino Home Video was a 90 minute video cassette which combined documentary footage filmed in Rome with historic footage and the entire concert.

John Walker and the PBS Great Performances staff under the aegis of Jac Venza developed a sixty minute version of the home video which was broadcast throughout the United States. Plans are being developed for an April 1995 broadcast in the United States, England and France, which will be combined with outreach materials for schools and libraries.

Many other educational derivatives are also in the works, including a CD-ROM which features interviews with members of the Curia, world Jewish organizations and holocaust survivors, a trade book, a children’s book and several television specials aimed at promoting interfaith dialogue. The world press has also generated innumerable articles and reviews on the event, the CD and video cassette releases, the numerous television broadcasts, and the stories that lie within the main story—for example, the conductor’s remarkable relationship with the Pope.

Thall, whose firm specialized broadly in media, including popular and classical music, book publishing, film, theater and television, took special pride in assisting Levine in developing the “afterlife” of the project. “Unless the entertainment industry as a whole identifies those people like Maestro Levine whose ideas transcend one medium, an extraordinary opportunity will have been wasted. In the classical music field particularly, given the widely reported plight of many of the world’s greatest orchestras and the difficulties in familiarizing the public with new instrumentalists, this is the time to grasp that opportunity.”

What’s next? “I have a strong stubborn streak,” says Thall. “I like the challenge of taking a valid idea to its ultimate potential. By virtue of this multi-media nature, this event will be a

perennial on world television and have an unlimited life—not only to music enthusiasts, but to historians and people of all religions. Maestro Levine has in mind a wide range of future events to explore which have a musical, educational, historic and visual appeal unequalled by anything that's out there now. So have I.”