

LIVE FROM LINCOLN CENTER
September 21, 2004, 8:00 p.m. on PBS
New York Philharmonic
Opening Night Gala

"Another Opening, Another Show," Cole Porter's ode to the performing arts, may be said to be Janus-like in its implications. One head points to the anticipation of a new and brilliant experience; the other to a comfortable and pleasant routine. There is nothing of the routine in our next Live From Lincoln Center offering on the evening of Tuesday, September 21: the Gala opening of the New York Philharmonic's 2004-2005 season, with Music Director Lorin Maazel conducting, and with the extraordinary violinist, Maxim Vengerov, as soloist. Both Maazel and Vengerov will be appearing on Live From Lincoln Center for the second time: Vengerov played the Dvorak Concerto with Kurt Masur and the New York Philharmonic in a well-remembered performance in January, 1997; and Maazel conducted the Philharmonic in a gala all-Gershwin concert on New Year's Eve, 2002. This time around Vengerov has chosen the Everest of violin concertos-Beethoven's. And Dvorak will again figure on the program: in the second half Maestro Maazel will conduct the composer's last symphony, the Symphony "From the New World."

One of the exploited prodigies of the late 18th century was a child violinist named Franz Clement. From the age of nine Clement traveled all over the European Continent as a Wunderkind. In 1794 no less a figure than Beethoven wrote Clement an effusive letter singing his praises. It was a prophetic gesture, for ten years later Beethoven and Clement were thrown together in Vienna when Beethoven's opera "Fidelio" was being readied for its first performance. Concertmaster of the orchestra was none other than Clement. After the "Fidelio" premiere, which proved to be something less than a smashing success, a group of Beethoven's friends gathered at the residence of Prince Lichnowsky to discuss ways of salvaging the situation. One of those attending was Clement, who apparently proceeded to perform the entire "Fidelio" score from memory! It is no surprise, then, that when Beethoven came to compose a Violin Concerto soon afterward, he did so with Clement in mind.

The concerto had a great popular success at its premiere in December 1806, but there were some grumblings from critics caught unprepared to accompany Beethoven on his rarified flight into the sublime. History, in the intervening years, has proven that nowhere else in the literature for violin and orchestra is there a work to equal the radiant purity, glowing spirituality and disarming humor of Beethoven's Concerto. It might be added that as a further attraction at the premiere, Clement displayed a quality that today would earn him stardom on any one of the so-called "Performance Reality" programs on television: he played a work of his own while holding his violin upside down!

I can assure you that Maxim Vengerov will hold his violin right side up, and we can with confidence anticipate a superb performance.

A sidebar: in April, 1807, Beethoven was visited in Vienna by Muzio Clementi, the composer-turned-publisher, who hoped to secure exclusive English rights for the publication of a number of Beethoven's works. During the course of their negotiations Clementi suggested to Beethoven that he re-work the Violin Concerto into a more saleable concerto for piano (!) and orchestra. Amazingly Beethoven agreed to this proposition by transferring the solo line, nearly intact, to the piano while leaving the orchestral parts absolutely unchanged. The one major innovation in the conversion is in the first movement's cadenza: here Beethoven wrote out a full cadenza for piano that also employs a fanciful and highly effective part for tympani.

Dvorak's "New World" Symphony is, of course, one of the glories of symphonic literature. It was written during the period in the 1890s when Dvorak was living in the United States as the Director of the National Conservatory of Music in New York. The symphony was composed in the spring and summer of 1893, and the premiere was scheduled for a New York Philharmonic concert in December of that year. In advance of the premiere Dvorak made a statement for publication that served as a clarion call to American composers: "I am satisfied that the future music of this country must be founded upon what are called the Negro melodies. These can be the foundation of a serious and original school of composition to be developed in the United States." (Dvorak had been introduced to "Negro melodies" by three of his American friends: Henry T. Burleigh, the Negro baritone and arranger; and two critics, James Huneker and Henry E. Krehbiel.) His statement naturally aroused enormous interest in the new Symphony. Some commentators found in the second theme of the first movement a resemblance to the Negro spiritual "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," while others claimed to hear American Indian influences here and there in the score.

Resemblances and influences are present, to be sure, as there are in any work of art, but an objective look at the score and its content reveals Dvorak at his most personal and--dare I say it? --his most nationalistically Bohemian. Dvorak himself at one point denied using any actual Negro or Indian melodies in the Symphony. Even the familiar Largo second movement, the theme of which became the melody for the plaintive "Goin' Home", can only by a stretch be said to be "Indian" in character: Dvorak once told Krehbiel that he had Longfellow's "Hiawatha" in mind when he wrote it. The music, however, has no more special kinship with Indian music than do any of several of Dvorak's dumka movements with their Slavic folk song character and sudden shifts from melancholy to exuberance. It remains to be added, however, that Dvorak wrote a chapter of significant importance in the musical history of a country, which he touched for only a brief three-year period. By directing the attention of American musicians to the "songs of the common people", he set in motion the beginnings of

exploration into the music of the American folk which even a century after Dvorak's death is bearing creative fruit for the American composer.

This, then, is our menu for the next Live From Lincoln Center presentation: Music Director Lorin Maazel conducting the New York Philharmonic in music of Beethoven and Dvorak, with Maxim Vengerov as soloist in the Beethoven Violin Concerto-the Gala opening concert of the Orchestra's 2004-2005 season on Tuesday evening, September 21. I hope you all will be watching and listening. As always, I leave you with the suggestion that you check with your local PBS station for the exact date and time of the telecast in your community.

See you then!