

LIVE FROM LINCOLN CENTER

January 12, 2000, 8-10 PM

"New York Philharmonic: Modern Times, Romantic Visions"

Kurt Masur, conductor; Anne-Sophie Mutter, violinist

Program Notes by MARTIN BOOKSPAN

For the second Live From Lincoln Center telecast of the New Year, we take our cameras and microphones back to Avery Fisher Hall for a concert by the New York Philharmonic and Kurt Masur, aided and abetted by famed violinist, Anne-Sophie Mutter. Nothing less than three masterpieces of the 20th century is the evening's menu, and their composers--Prokofiev, Berg and Sibelius--have earned honored places in the pantheon of creators whose music will continue to be heard as long as there are players to perform it and audiences to listen.

The concert begins with extracts from Prokofiev's music for the ballet, "Romeo and Juliet." Composed in 1935 for Moscow's Bolshoi Ballet company, Prokofiev's score was heard first in concert form in Moscow in October of that year. For reasons unclear it was three years before a ballet production was mounted--and not in the Soviet Union but in Brunn, Czechoslovakia. That 1935 concert presentation was something of a harbinger of things to come: for though a number of ballet companies around the world have the work in their active repertoires, one is much more likely to encounter Prokofiev's music for the ballet in the concert hall--a consequence of his having put together three Suites from the full score for concert performance. Indeed, one of the sections, "Montagues and Capulets," has been appropriated by Madison Avenue as background music for numerous radio and television commercials.

The New York Philharmonic and Prokofiev's "Romeo and Juliet" are old friends: more than 40 years ago the Orchestra recorded extended excerpts from the score under the direction of Dimitri Mitropoulos; and Kurt Masur has also recorded selections from the Prokofiev ballet music with the New York Philharmonic. So the January 12 performance on Live From Lincoln Center will be a reunion between conductor, orchestra and audience.

One of the highlights of the New York Philharmonic's January schedule is a two-week residency by the brilliant violinist, Anne-Sophie Mutter. During the course of the fortnight she will have played no fewer than 8 different works for violin and orchestra by such stalwart 20th century composers as Lutoslawski, Bernstein, Rihm and Penderecki. For our January 12 concert she will be heard in the Violin Concertos by Alban Berg and Jean Sibelius.

The immediate stimulus for Berg's Violin Concerto was a commission offered him in 1934 by the American violinist Louis Krasner. Berg, however, hit one of

those "composer's block" (similar to "writer's block") periods: inspiration was not forthcoming. The fact that he was at that time working feverishly on his opera, "Lulu," may have had something to do with it. However, an unexpected event spurred Berg's imagination: the sudden death, at the age of eighteen, of Manon Gropius, the brilliant and beautiful daughter of famed architect Walter Gropius and the charismatic Alma Mahler, widow of Gustav Mahler. Manon Gropius was apparently a remarkable young lady, described by Berg as "an angel." Berg composed his Violin Concerto in a very short time as a requiem in her memory. The Concerto is relatively brief, lasting barely 25 minutes, and is in two parts, each in two sections. In the second section of the first part Berg quotes a German folk song seemingly as a portrait of Manon Gropius. And in the second section of the second part he weaves a series of variations around the Bach Chorale "Es ist genug" (It is finished).

The Violin Concerto proved to be Berg's last completed work. In December, 1935 he suffered an abscess--apparently from a bee sting. The infection spread throughout his body and before the end of the year he himself was dead. In some respects, then, the Violin Concerto became Berg's own requiem.

An English Berg scholar named Douglas Jarman has divined a secret agenda in the content of Berg's Violin Concerto. Encoded in metronome markings, bar numbers, anagrams and other notational devices, Jarman deciphered references to a long and passionate affair Berg had conducted with the sister of the novelist, Franz Werfel. In a delicious real-life counterpart to the Austrian decadent world depicted in Schnitzler's fictional "La Ronde", Werfel himself later became another conquest of Alma Mahler (Gropius Werfel, etc., etc.).

After the intermission Anne-Sophie Mutter rejoins Kurt Masur and the New York Philharmonic on stage for the Violin Concerto by Finland's Jean Sibelius. Himself a violinist, Sibelius worked long and hard on his only Concerto for the instrument. He completed it in 1903 and it was performed in Helsinki the following year. But Sibelius was dissatisfied with it and he spent the better part of the next year revising the work. The new version--the form in which we know the Concerto today--was performed for the first time in Berlin in 1905 by a violinist who has long since been forgotten. The conductor of that Berlin performance, however, has left an indelible mark on the history of music; he was Richard Strauss.

The Sibelius Concerto is in the customary three movements and is rich in Romantic and dramatic expression. The second movement is a particularly soulful one, and the Finale is a rhythmic tour de force which Sibelius once called a "danse macabre."

This, then, is the program that awaits us on Live From Lincoln Center on the evening of Wednesday, January 12 at 8PM Eastern time. Again I urge you to

check your local listings for the day and time in your area. See you then!