

LIVE FROM LINCOLN CENTER

June 15, 2005, 8:00 p.m. on PBS

New York Philharmonic

Shaham's Sibelius

Our next Live From Lincoln Center telecast, on the evening of Wednesday June 15, will mark the return of our microphones and cameras to Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Hall for a concert by the New York Philharmonic conducted by its Music Director, Lorin Maazel. The brilliant violinist Gil Shaham will play the Sibelius Violin Concerto; in addition we'll have music by Dvorak (the "Carnival" Overture), and a post-intermission menu of the Second Suite from Roussel's ballet *Bacchus and Ariane* and more Sibelius - *The Swan of Tuonela*.

Dvorak's "Carnival" Overture is one of a trio of concert overtures---the other two are "In Nature's Realm" and "Othello"---all of which share one common musical theme: a relaxed folk-like melody which in the "Carnival" Overture has its most memorable statement as an English horn solo. This, in fact, is an earlier example of Dvorak's love for the sound of the English horn which had its later fulfillment in the slow movement of his Ninth Symphony, the "Symphony From the New World." The "Carnival" Overture, as the title implies, is a rollicking, boisterous overture that serves as an ideal concert opener.

Where Dvorak composed one concerto each for cello, piano and violin, Sibelius composed but a single concerto---that for violin. As a violinist himself, Sibelius poured into his concerto a full measure of passion and profundity, along with daunting technical challenges for the soloist. Completed in 1903 and revised two years later, the Sibelius Concerto was almost immediately recognized as a masterpiece, and over the years it has become a true test of a violinist's emotional and executant capacities. The concerto has figured twice previously in our Live From Lincoln Center series, when Sarah Chang in 1998 and Anne-Sophie Mutter in 2000 both played it memorably with Kurt Masur and the New York Philharmonic. In Gil Shaham the violin world has one of its most polished and charismatic performers, an artist who has made the Sibelius concerto something of a specialty.

Gil Shaham was born in 1971 in Champagne-Urbana, Illinois, where his late father was a professor at the University. Two years later the family moved to Israel, and at the age of 7 Gil began studying the violin at the Rubin Academy of Music. His studies continued with Chaim Taub, former co-concertmaster of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, and he made his solo debuts with the Jerusalem Symphony and the Israel Philharmonic when he was 10 years old. Later that year he attended the Aspen School of Music, where his principal teacher was the late and legendary Dorothy DeLay. As a scholarship student at New York's Juilliard School he continued to work with Miss DeLay, while pursuing academic studies at Columbia University. His international career blossomed while he was still in

his teens after he made a sudden substitute appearance in London for an indisposed Itzhak Perlman. Ever since he has been among the most sought-after violinists in the world. He plays the 1699 "Countess Polignac" Stradivarius instrument.

In common with many composers in the latter half of the 19th century Nationalism was at the top of Sibelius's creative juices. In the 1890s he composed "Finlandia," which came to serve as the Finnish unofficial anthem for political independence. Also in the 1890s Sibelius turned for inspiration to the Kalevala, the Finnish national epic which told of mythological tales. One result was his "Kullervo" Symphony---Kullervo was one of the heroes of the Kalevala. Another was Lemminkainen, and it was around the exploits of Lemminkainen that Sibelius composed four inter-related tone poems. They can be, and often have been, played separately: the second of them, titled *The Swan of Tuonela*, is one of Sibelius's best known works.

The score carries the following inscription: "Tuonela, the land of death, the hell of Finnish mythology, is surrounded by a large river with black water and rapid current, on which the Swan of Tuonela floats majestically singing." Sibelius gives the voice of the swan to the English horn, which will be played by the Philharmonic's peerless English horn soloist, Thomas Stacy

Albert Roussel (1869-1937) was an almost exact contemporary of Maurice Ravel (1875-1937), and the two shared similar creative instincts. Nowhere is this similarity more apparent than in the ballet scores they each wrote based on ancient Greek legends: *Daphnis and Chloe* in the case of Ravel; *Bacchus and Ariane* in Roussel's case. The basic story of *Bacchus and Ariane* is the same as Strauss's opera, *Ariadne auf Naxos*. Ariadne, the daughter of Minos, has been abducted by Theseus to the island of Naxos. Youths and virgins celebrate their freedom from the monster, Minotaur, when a mysterious stranger creates panic and seizes Ariadne. It is the god, Bacchus, and Ariadne proceeds to enjoy herself in the company of fauns and bacchantes. Roussel extracted two suites from his score for the ballet, the second of which is a riot of orchestral color. Its concluding section, a Bacchanale, is an apt companion to the concluding General Dance from Ravel's Second *Daphnis and Chloe* Suite, and I have often wondered why Roussel's suite has not achieved the popularity of Ravel's similar suite from his *Daphnis and Chloe*. In any case, Maestro Maazel has chosen a fitting conclusion to what promises to be a most stimulating and exciting concert.

So there are the facts, ladies and gentlemen: Dvorak, Sibelius and Roussel played by the New York Philharmonic conducted by Lorin Maazel on Wednesday evening, June 15---our next Live From Lincoln Center presentation from the stage of Avery Fisher Hall in New York City's Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. As usual, I leave you with the suggestion that you check your local PBS station for the exact date and time of the telecast in your area.

See you then!