

LIVE
FROM LINCOLN CENTER



September 16, 2009 at 8:00pm on PBS
New York Philharmonic Opening Night Concert with Maestro Alan Gilbert and Renée Fleming

The opening of each new season of the New York Philharmonic is always a special event in the music world. For us at Live From Lincoln Center it is special because it marks the start of a new season of telecasts. This year's opening, on Wednesday, September 16 is super-special: it marks the beginning of the Alan Gilbert era at the Philharmonic. Though he has conducted the Orchestra numerous times over the past several years---most recently at the summer series of concerts in the Parks of New York City---September 16 will inaugurate his assumption of the role of Music Director.

Alan Gilbert is truly a Philharmonic "kid". Both his parents are violinist-members of the Orchestra. His father, Michael, retired a few years ago, but his mother, Yoko, continues playing in the Philharmonic. An incident frequently cited by Philharmonic insiders concerns a rehearsal some years back when Alan, on the podium, looked down at one of the violinists and castigated her mildly with the single word "Mom!"

For the Gala Opening Concert of the new season Alan Gilbert has chosen a program that telegraphs his musical enthusiasms: open ears for new music and a healthy respect for repertory staples. The concert begins with a world premiere, an Overture composed for the occasion by the esteemed Finnish composer, Magnus Lindberg, who will serve as Composer-in-Residence for the Philharmonic for the next two seasons. Following the Lindberg will be the song cycle "Poèmes pour Mi" by French composer Olivier Messiaen. After the intermission we'll hear one of the cornerstones of symphonic music, the "Symphonie Fantastique" by Berlioz.

Magnus Lindberg was born in Helsinki, studied at the Sibelius Academy and is part of an extraordinary generation of Finnish musicians who have become prime movers on the international scene. Two of his classmates were Esa Pekka-Salonen, who recently completed an historic tenure as Music Director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the highly-acclaimed composer Kaija Saariaho. Together the three of them formed a new music performing ensemble called Ears Open Society. In his years as Music Director of the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra Alan Gilbert came into contact with much music from Scandinavia and Finland. He is an enthusiastic devotee of the music of Lindberg.

Olivier Messiaen composed his "Poemes pour Mi" for soprano and piano in 1936, orchestrating it in 1937. It was dedicated to his first wife, the violinist Claire Delbos; "Mi" was her nickname. The nine songs of the score are divided into two books, four in the first book, five in the second. The songs of the first book deal with preparations for marriage; those of the second book are concerned with marriage as a spiritual union. The texts were written by Messiaen himself.

Our soloist for the Messiaen songs will be the beloved American soprano, Renée Fleming, a veteran of Live From Lincoln Center both as singer and host. A native of Indiana, Pennsylvania, Renée Fleming was born into a musical household: both her parents were music teachers. She grew up in Rochester, N. Y. and studied at the Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester. Her voice teacher was the formidable Jan DeGaetani. A Fulbright Scholarship enabled her to study in Europe with the renowned American soprano, Arlene Auger, and also with Elisabeth Schwarzkopf. Returning to America she

enrolled at the Juilliard School's Opera Center where she sang a number of leading roles. She made her Metropolitan Opera and San Francisco Opera debuts in 1991. The rest, as they say, is history!

The "Symphonie Fantastique" of Berlioz that concludes the program is one of music's pathbreaking works. Composed just three years after the death of Beethoven, it opened the door for entirely new music vistas. Berlioz himself concocted a scenario for the symphony: "A young musician of morbid sensibility and ardent imagination" (a self-description?) "poisons himself with opium in a fit of amorous despair. The narcotic dose, too weak to result in death, plunges him into a heavy sleep accompanied by the strangest visions, during which his sensations, sentiments and recollections are translated in his sick brain into musical thoughts and images. The beloved woman herself has become for him a melody, like a fixed idea which he finds and hears everywhere."

Music by Lindberg, Messiaen and Berlioz; thus on Wednesday evening, September 16 begins the Alan Gilbert Music Directorship of New York's great orchestra. Be sure to check the schedule of your local PBS station for the exact date and time of the program in your area.

Enjoy!

By MARTIN BOOKSPAN