

LIVE FROM LINCOLN CENTER
September 22, 2005, 8:00 p.m. on PBS
New York Philharmonic
A Night of Firsts

Two works that bear the number 1---though one is misnumbered, of which more later---make up the musical menu for the opening concert of the new season by the New York Philharmonic and its Music Director, Lorin Maazel: Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 1 and Mahler's Symphony No. 1. Soloist in the Chopin Concerto will be the newest phenomenon of the piano world, Lang Lang. This mighty combination of forces will be our next Live From Lincoln Center presentation on the evening of Thursday, September 22.

It was in 1831 that the 21-year old Frédéric Chopin decided to leave his native Poland and take up his musical activities in the city that was then the center of European artistic life, Paris. He came armed with two piano concertos that he had recently composed, one in E minor, the other in F minor. In order of composition, the F Minor came first, but the E Minor was the first of the two to be published, and thus came to bear the number 1. The structural format of the Concerto is the traditional one: three movements, the first and third brisk, the middle movement slow and contemplative. Chopin was soloist at the first performance, in Warsaw, on October 11, 1830, and reported afterwards that the first movement was greeted with "deafening applause." A newspaper reported that the new Concerto "was regarded by connoisseurs as one of the most sublime of all musical works." Of the second movement Chopin himself wrote: "The Adagio is in E Major, and of a romantic, calm and partly melancholy character. It is intended to convey the impression which one receives when the eye rests on a beloved landscape that calls up in one's soul beautiful memories, for instance of a fine moonlit spring night. I have written for violins with mutes as an accompaniment. I wonder if that will have a good effect. Well, time will show." And time has indeed shown: the slow movement of the E Minor Concerto is an unbroken expression of romantic glow.

Pianist Lang Lang will be remembered by regular followers of Live From Lincoln Center from his spectacular appearance at a Mostly Mozart concert a few seasons ago. He and a soprano were the scheduled soloists, but literally 15 minutes before concert time the soprano had to cancel because of a throat infection. Into the breach leaped Lang Lang, who played a no-holds-barred performance of Liszt's Fantasy on Mozart's "Don Giovanni." Lang Lang since then has played with all the major orchestras everywhere in the world. He is the subject of a best-selling biography in his native China, and he was recently named Goodwill Ambassador to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). His performance of Chopin's E Minor Concerto will mark his second collaboration with Lorin Maazel and the Philharmonic: last October they

performed the Tchaikovsky B Flat Minor Concerto.

When the musicians of the Orchestra re-convene on stage after the intermission, they will play the Symphony No. 1 in D Major by Gustav Mahler, who was conductor of the Philharmonic from 1909 to 1911. It was during the years 1883 and 1884 that the 23-year old Mahler was the second conductor in the city of Cassel. It was probably in that time that he began work on his First Symphony. To his contemporaries he was best-known as a conductor, but in his own eyes his major significance was as a composer.

Thus it was not until he was ensconced in Budapest in 1889 that Mahler conducted the first performance of his First Symphony. For that performance Mahler had prepared a "Program Outline" for what he described as a "Symphonic Poem in two parts." And he gave the work the title "Titan" after a novel of the same name by the German Romantic writer who took the name Jean Paul. Early on, though, Mahler withdrew the elaborate "Program" for the Symphony and insisted that it be heard as a purely abstract work.

Originally the score consisted of five movements, the second of which Mahler called "A Chapter of Flowers." He later withdrew that movement from the score. Under the title "Blumine" the movement has had something of an independent life, and there are rare occasions when a conductor of the Symphony will re-insert it back into its original position. But as a four-movement score, minus the "Blumine," Mahler's First Symphony is a veritable colossus. There are two places, in the first and third movements, where Mahler quotes from two songs he had composed earlier for his cycle, "Songs of a Wayfarer." And the third movement begins, after alternating pianissimo tympani strokes, with a solo for the double bass that turns out to be nothing less than the French nursery tune "Frere Jacques" played in the minor. Numerous episodes follow, including one that summons the mood and atmosphere of an Eastern-European Jewish wedding of the time. The final movement is at the same time terrifying and jubilant. Bruno Walter, a friend and disciple of Mahler's (and Music Advisor to the New York Philharmonic in the late 1940s) wrote of the "raging violence" of this Finale: the music rises to an enormous climax, as if to burst its own bonds, and then it falls back exhausted to regain its strength for the final peroration. Mahler directs that at the end the horns must cut through the massive sound in "a chorale of salvation from paradise after the waves of hell." Most conductors have the horn players stand at this point to achieve maximum volume.

And so there you have it: An evening of number 1s, Lang Lang piano soloist with Lorin Maazel and the New York Philharmonic, our next Live From Lincoln Center on Thursday evening, September 22. I leave you with the customary advice to check your local PBS station for the exact time and date in your area.

See you then!

