

LIVE FROM LINCOLN CENTER

September 23, 1999 8-10 PM on PBS

New York Philharmonic Opening Night Gala: Masur & Rostropovich

Program:

Dvorak Cello Concerto in B minor, Op. 104- Mstislav Rostropovich, Cello

Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 5 in e minor, Op. 64

New York Philharmonic; Kurt Masur, Music Director

Program Notes by MARTIN BOOKSPAN

To celebrate the opening of the New York Philharmonic's 1999-2000 season on Thursday evening, September 23, Maestro Kurt Masur has chosen two beloved classics from the 19th Century: Dvorak's Cello Concerto (with the renowned Mstislav Rostropovich as soloist), and Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony. The event, broadcast live from New York City's Avery Fisher Hall, will also mark the beginning of the 24th season of LIVE FROM LINCOLN CENTER telecasts.

The two works were composed within a few years of each other- Tchaikovsky's in 1888 and Dvorak's in 1894-5, during the composer's three-year residence in New York City as head of the National Conservatory of Music. Interestingly, Tchaikovsky had preceded Dvorak in New York: he journeyed to the City in 1891 to take part in the ceremonies that dedicated Carnegie Hall.

Though brief, Dvorak's stay in this country had a profound effect on musical America. Ever the musical Nationalist, Dvorak in a controversial statement advised American composers to find their inspiration in Indian, Negro, and other Folk sources. Although several of his most honored works were created while he resided in the United States,- among them the "American" String Quartet and the Symphony "From the New World", in addition to the Cello Concerto- even these pieces pulsate with the national feeling and climate of his native Bohemia.

A prime motivator for Dvorak's Cello Concerto was Victor Herbert- the same Victor Herbert who later won renown as the composer of some of the best-loved Operettas of the early 20th Century. In the early 1890's, Herbert was a cellist in the orchestra of New York's Metropolitan Opera, and in 1894 he appeared as soloist with the New York Philharmonic in the premiere of his own Second Cello Concerto. Dvorak attended that performance and was deeply impressed with the musical potential afforded by the combination of solo Cello and Orchestra. Thus having been sparked, Dvorak proceeded to produce the work that has become the cornerstone of the repertory for Cello and Orchestra. And it goes almost without saying that the Concerto has an unmistakable Slavic Folk quality. In many of its pages there is a genuine nostalgia that can only be attributed to Dvorak's homesickness for the Bohemian countryside he loved so deeply. Indeed, he spent his American summers in the town of Spillville, Iowa, where there was a fairly

large community of immigrants from Bohemia.

Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony, too, may be seen as a work of musical nationalism, though of a more generic kind. It has moments of melancholy, brooding, and unabashed sentimentality, which we commonly identify as Russian in character. The Fifth Symphony was an uncommonly crucial one for Tchaikovsky; at a Moscow performance of his Violin Concerto in 1882, one critic suggested that Tchaikovsky was "written out", and that his music was tired, uninspired, and the work of a man past his creative prime. Tchaikovsky was particularly sensitive to this sort of criticism, for during the ten years that separated the Violin Concerto and the Fifth Symphony, he produced no symphonic work of major importance. Thus, he was eager to put his best foot forward in his new Symphony. After the early performances, however, he felt he had failed. In a letter to his patroness, Madame von Meck, he wrote: "I have come to the conclusion that it is a failure. There is something repellent, something superfluous, patchy and insincere which the public instinctively recognizes. It was obvious to me that the ovations I received were prompted more by my earlier work, and that the Symphony itself did not really please the audience."

Time, of course, has served as the counterbalance to Tchaikovsky's harsh view of his score. The Fifth Symphony is a work in the "victory through struggle" tradition of Beethoven's Fifth, and it is a perennial favorite with audiences and performers alike. The opening theme in e minor, introduced by the Clarinet, becomes a recurring motif in each subsequent movement, finally opening the last movement in a triumphant E Major. Tchaikovsky also endowed the Symphony with some of his most effulgent melodic inspiration, such that even popular American music of our own Century has been touched by Tchaikovsky's magic: in 1939, the main theme of the slow movement of this Symphony took on a new identity in Juke Boxes around the country, in a chart-buster by Mack David, Mack Davis, and André Kostelanetz called "Moon Love".

Much of the music is balletic: indeed, the Symphony was choreographed by Massine in a work called "Les Presages" ("Destiny"), presented in 1933 by the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. It is no coincidence that soon after he completed the Fifth Symphony, Tchaikovsky embarked upon the score of his ballet masterpiece, "The Sleeping Beauty".

This, then, is what's in store for us on the next LIVE FROM LINCOLN CENTER: two towering masterpieces played by the superb New York Philharmonic under the direction of its magnetic Music Director, Kurt Masur, and with Mstislav Rostropovich, one of the world's greatest cellists, who makes his LIVE FROM LINCOLN CENTER debut with this performance. Check your local listings for broadcast information in your area. See you then!