

LIVE FROM LINCOLN CENTER

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Opening Night of the Great Performers Season Renée Fleming and Dmitri Hvorostovsky

Our next Live From Lincoln Center telecast on Wednesday evening, October 4 will feature two of the brightest stars on the international opera scene: the American soprano, Renee Fleming, and the Russian baritone, Dmitri Hvorostovsky. Together with the Orchestra of St. Luke's conducted by Mark Elder they will be heard in a program neatly divided into two parts. The first may properly be designated Opera's Greatest Hits: our two singers will perform several of the best-loved arias in the repertory, along with two of the most popular and familiar duets for soprano and baritone.

The second half of the program will consist of semi-staged scenes from Tchaikovsky's "Eugene Onegin," and it will involve three titans from the theater world. The renowned playwright and opera authority, Albert Innaurato, has written a narrative for Frances Sternhagen, the distinguished actress, to link the musical scenes that are performed. The staging of the action will be the product of one of America's most brilliant stage directors, Frank Corsaro.

As if to anticipate the Russian second half Maestro Elder and the Orchestra of St. Luke's begin the program with the romp that is the Overture to the opera "Russlan and Ludmilla" by the man generally credited as the father of Russian nationalist music, Michael Glinka. Mr. Hvorostovsky will then make his first appearance of the evening singing the aria "Avant de quitter ces lieux" from Gounod's "Faust." Here Valentin, the brother of Marguerite, worries about her welfare while he is off to war. (Gounod originally set this aria to the English words Even Bravest Heart May Swell.)

Renee Fleming will then take center stage to sing "O mio babbino caro" from Puccini's "Gianni Schicchi." Rapacious relatives have gathered by the death bed of Buoso Donati, eager to learn the details of his will. In the end, they are all outsmarted by Gianni Schicchi who concocts a wily scheme. But before that scheme unfolds, Schicchi's daughter, Lauretta, implores him to find a way to solve the wrangling of the Donatis so that she can marry her beloved Rinuccio.

Following "O mio babbino caro" Dmitri Hvorostovsky joins Renee Fleming on stage for the duet "La ci darem la mano" from Mozart's "Don Giovanni." Here the intrepid seducer oozes charm as he pursues the damsel he hopes will be his next conquest, the peasant girl, Zerlina.

This duet is followed by another, from Franz Lehar's "The Merry Widow," one of the most popular operettas ever written. The story revolves around the (eventually successful) attempts to reunite the former lovers, Hanna and Danilo,

so that Hanna's inherited fortune may remain in the kingdom of Pontevedro. In the duet "Lippen, Schweigen," a tune better known as The Merry Widow Waltz, Hanna and Danilo express their rekindled love.

Following the duets, Dmitri Hvorostovsky returns to sing an aria from "Ernani," Verdi's fifth opera, based on a play by Victor Hugo. The third act of the opera opens with a soliloquy, "Gran Dio...Oh, de' verd'anni miei" ("Oh, of my youthful years") in which the King, Don Carlos, awaiting word that he has been elected Emperor, turns from the vanity of his youthful passions and pledges himself to nobler pursuits so that his name will live in history, alongside that of his famous ancestor Charlemagne.

Renee Fleming concludes our first half singing another aria from Gounod's "Faust." Marguerite's brother, Valentin, was prescient in worrying about her welfare during his absence. She has now been singled out for "special attention" by the nefarious team of Faust and Mephistopheles. Pursuing his plot to ensnare Marguerite for Faust, Mephistopheles leaves a case of jewels in her garden. When Marguerite finds them, she bedecks herself with the jewels and sings the rapturous aria that has come to be known as the "Jewel Song."

In devoting the second half of the October 4th program to extended excerpts from Tchaikovsky's "Eugene Onegin," Renee Fleming, Dmitri Hvorostovsky, Frances Sternhagen and Mark Elder and the Orchestra of St. Luke's turn to one of the most personal of all Tchaikovsky's works. The story, from a verse novel by Pushkin, tells of the human tragedy of multiple instances of unrequited love. Renee Fleming is the opera's heroine, Tatiana, and Dmitri Hvorostovsky is Eugene Onegin, the dashing nobleman she falls in love with. Frances Sternhagen represents the memory of Tatiana, looking back at the turbulent events of her youth, particularly her futile love for Onegin. Following the orchestral Prelude, Frances Sternhagen begins the story and introduces the Letter Scene, sung by Renee Fleming, in which Tatiana pours out her love for Onegin asking only for pity in return. Dmitri Hvorostovsky joins Renee Fleming for a scene from the end of Act I, in which Onegin tells Tatiana that he respects and admires her, but marriage is out of the question.

Frances Sternhagen leads us through the events of the opera's second act. A quarrel at Tatiana's eighteenth birthday party ends with a duel in which Onegin kills his best friend.

The Third Act of "Eugene Onegin" takes place three years later and opens with a magnificent ball in the home Prince Gremin, who is now the husband of Tatiana. Onegin, recently returned from travels abroad and unaware that Tatiana has married, attends the ball. Dmitri Hvorostovsky sings Onegin's opening soliloquy, expressing his discomfort at being back in society. The meeting between Tatiana and Onegin at the ball is briefly recounted, and Hvorostovsky sings Onegin's arioso that closes the scene, in which he glories in his newfound love for the now

glamorous and self-possessed Tatiana. Our program concludes with the opera's closing duet. This time the tables are turned: Onegin professes his love for Tatiana but, though she admits she still loves him, she refuses his pleas that they run away together and leaves him broken-hearted.

An evening of opulent opera awaits us on the 4th of October on our next Live From Lincoln Center telecast. I leave you with the usual suggestion that you consult your local listings for the exact time and date the program will be shown in your community. See you then!