

LIVE FROM LINCOLN CENTER
December 31, 2003, 8:00 p.m. on PBS
New York Philharmonic
New Year's Eve Concert with Renée Fleming

Festive New Year's Eve concerts are a New York Philharmonic tradition of long standing---and we of Live From Lincoln Center have been privileged to bring many of them into your homes during the past two decades. During the tenure of Viennese-educated Zubin Mehta as the Orchestra's Music Director, the Philharmonic's New Year's Eve concerts generally revolved around the music of the Strauss family: Johann Senior and Junior, Josef and Eduard. Last year's concert, the first of Lorin Maazel's Music Directorship, was given over entirely to music by the great American composer, George Gershwin, with extended excerpts from the opera *Porgy and Bess*.

New Year's Eve 2003 will bring yet another variation on the theme of fun music: an all-French program, with representative scores by Debussy, Ravel, Bizet, Massenet and Offenbach. The last-named was born in Germany, of course, but his greatest triumphs were won in France and it is no stretch to refer to him as a French composer. The conductor for the evening will be Sir Andrew Davis, Music Director of the Chicago Lyric Opera, and the radiant soprano, Renée Fleming, will be the soloist. Once again our *Live From Lincoln Center* cameras and microphones will be in Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Hall so that at home you can become part of the joy of the evening.

Sir Andrew Davis has been a frequent Guest Conductor of the New York Philharmonic over the years. In the 1970s and '80s he was Music Director of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. For the better part of a decade after that he was Chief Conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra and also Music Director of the Glyndebourne Festival. And he has conducted regularly at the New York Metropolitan Opera. Apart from his outstanding musical gifts, Sir Andrew Davis is a cunning wordsmith; he delights in extirpating negative prefixes from words. For example, may refer to a performance as being "ruly" rather than unruly, or a particularly successful performance may elicit from him "may" rather than dismay.

For her part, Renée Fleming is at the height of her powers and popularity. She has thrilled Metropolitan Opera audiences this season as the tragic Violetta in Verdi's "La Traviata" and she continues to grace the stages of the world's other prestigious opera houses. It has been our pleasure to feature Renée Fleming on *Live From Lincoln Center* on several previous occasions: many of you will remember her joint concert with baritone Dmitri Hvorostovsky, a highlight of which was the Letter Scene from Tchaikovsky's *Eugen Onegin*. We also presented "Renée Fleming at the Penthouse," a celebration of songs and arias presented in the Kaplan Penthouse atop the building which also houses the

administrative offices of Live From Lincoln Center.

The Philharmonic's New Year's Eve concert will begin with one of the seminal works in the orchestral repertory: Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*. Composed in the 1890s, this brief gem is a virtual syllabus of orchestrational virtuosity and served instantly to establish Debussy as one of the leading composers of his time. The flute is the prominent solo instrument in the piece and the solo at the start is always one of the items in any audition for orchestral flute players.

The next great French composer after Debussy was Maurice Ravel. As Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun* came early in the composer's output, so was Ravel's ravishing *Shéhérazade* for female voice and orchestra an early product of its composer. It is Ravel's *Shéhérazade* that will serve as Renée Fleming's introductory appearance of the evening. Three poems by a writer whose nom de plume was Tristan Klingsor (an obvious admirer of the music of Wagner!) were set by Ravel: *Asie*, *La Flute Enchantée* and *L'Indifférent*. Ravel once remarked that "Debussy's spiritual influence in *Shéhérazade* is at least fairly obvious. And I have succumbed to the profound fascination which the East has held for me since childhood."

Our evening continues with an extended suite of excerpts from the most familiar of all French operas, Bizet's *Carmen*. Sir Andrew will conduct the *Prelude*, *Aragonaise*, *Habanera*, *Toreadors*, *Song of the Toreador*, *Act III Entr'acte* and the fiery *Gypsy Dance*. Thus having set the stage for French opera, the next part of the program will bring the return to the stage of Renée Fleming for a group of arias from the operas of Jules Massenet, including familiar items from *Herodiade*, *Thais* and *Manon*.

To cap the evening will come the Overture to Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld*. Probably no music better captures the spirit of the French Music Hall of the later 19th century than does this rollicking romp of an Overture with its concluding explosive *Can-Can*. An evening of merriment and good feeling is assured, so do join us on the evening of December 31 for the New York Philharmonic's Gala New Year's Eve concert on the next Live From Lincoln Center. As always, I leave you with the suggestion that you contact your local PBS station for the exact date and time of the telecast in your area.

See you then!