

***LIVE FROM LINCOLN CENTER***

**January 22, 2003, 8:00 p.m. on PBS**

**Itzhak Perlman with Students and Alumni of the Perlman Music Program**

In the early days of commercial network television Sunday evenings were the province of the CBS variety show "Toast of the Town," later renamed "The Ed Sullivan Show" in tribute to its dour host. On Sunday, February 15, 1959 Sullivan devoted an entire program to performers from Israel, among whom was a 13-year old violinist. A victim of polio at the age of 4, he came on stage with the aid of crutches and offered a sterling performance of the final movement from Mendelssohn's E Minor Violin Concerto. His name was Itzhak Perlman.

A few days later I received a phone call from the Cultural Attaché of the Israel Consulate in New York, asking if I would listen to this young man and assess his future potential. (I was then Program Director of the radio stations of the New York Times, WQXR and WQXR-FM.) I carved out a half-hour a few days later and welcomed the violinist and his mother. When he had settled on the stage of the small auditorium, I asked him what he would like to play. "Anything you want to hear," was his reply. Okay, a wise guy I thought. "Play the Bach Chaconne" (one of the most challenging of all works for unaccompanied violin) was my reply. He proceeded to dazzle me! The half hour turned into a two-hour session in which I asked him to play Paganini Caprices, an unaccompanied sonata by Ysaye, more Bach, part of the Bartok Sonata for Solo Violin-anything I could think of. Afterwards his mother asked if I thought he might have a career, given his disability. "Your son has an extraordinary gift," I replied, "and he should continue to study and work hard. A career is certainly possible."

Fast forward: Perlman remained in New York and was accepted as a scholarship student at the Juilliard School, studying there with two legendary violin pedagogues, Ivan Galamian and Dorothy DeLay. In 1964, just five years after his "Ed Sullivan" appearance, Itzhak Perlman won the internationally prestigious Leventritt Competition in New York. There was good news for him that evening: he had won, and bad news: his violin, which was on loan to him, had been stolen backstage at Carnegie Hall. A few days later the violin was discovered in a pawnshop and there was a happy ending to the entire affair. Needless to say, Perlman's subsequent career has been one of the great ones in the performing history of music.

Study and hard work have been defining characteristics of Itzhak Perlman's life. And remembering the support and mentoring he received from Isaac Stern and others, Perlman has been a tireless supporter of and mentor to young, aspiring violinists of the new generation, primarily at Brooklyn College and most recently at the Juilliard School. A few years ago Perlman and his violinist-trained wife, Toby, decided to found a more organized approach. Thus came into being The Perlman Music Program whose mission statement "welcomes young musicians

of rare and special talent into a richly supportive musical community.”

The Program offers intensive summer activity, year-round mentoring, and international performance/study touring. “The program,” in the words of the mission statement “offers unparalleled musical training for students, ages 11 to 18, who play the violin, viola, cello and piano... and seeks to ensure that the very best musicians can take advantage of this opportunity, regardless of their economic background or financial means.” No student has ever been turned away because of an inability to pay: 82% of the student body is on full or partial scholarship assistance.

How does the program work? For six weeks during the summer the musicians in The Perlman Music Program are in residence at the facility’s campus on Shelter Island, New York. There they live, practice, eat, rehearse and perform together. The schedule includes individual lessons, solo practice, coaching and chamber music playing. In addition every student and faculty member is required to sing in the chorus. The reach of The Perlman Music Program goes beyond the summer activities. There are sessions, classes and performances throughout the year in New York City, along with monthly recitals for family and friends at various locations. “These informal concerts,” in the words of the mission statement, “are in a highly supportive arena in which students can build their confidence as they receive praise and constructive feedback from the audience, Program faculty and fellow performers.” In recent years the Program has taken on an international exchange aspect, first in Israel in partnership with the Israel Conservatory of Music in Tel Aviv, and last summer in a collaborative effort with the Shanghai Conservatory. Discussions are under way for future exchanges in Switzerland, the Republic of Korea, Japan, China and Czech Republic.

On the evening of Wednesday, January 22 some of the work of The Perlman Music Program will be on display for the entire nation, as Live From Lincoln Center brings its cameras and microphones to the Kaplan Penthouse for an intimate visit with Itzhak Perlman and some of the Program’s musicians. More than 30 students and alumni under the direction of Mr. Perlman will perform works by Vivaldi, Bach, Tchaikovsky, Bartok and Mozart. In addition, we’ll have taped segments from last summer’s session, along with other elements showcasing Perlman’s activities as a pedagogue and inspirational teacher for the new generation of musicians.

Remember, Wednesday evening, January 22 for Itzhak Perlman and The Perlman Music Program on Live From Lincoln Center. I leave you with the usual reminder to check your local PBS station for the exact day and time of the telecast in your area.

See you then!