

LIVE FROM LINCOLN CENTER

April 29, 2004, 8:00 p.m. on PBS

Great Performers

Yo-Yo Ma & the Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra

What challenges remain for a cellist, not yet 50 years old, who has played and recorded virtually everything ever written for his instrument? Plenty, if you are Yo-Yo Ma. The breadth of Yo-Yo Ma's inquisitive mind-set has led him to embrace music in all its forms: the great traditional cello literature for the concert hall and the recital room, of course---but also primitive African chants; the perfumed melismas of the Silk Road trade routes; the music of Appalachia America; the intoxicating Tangos of Astor Piazzola. These are only the most obvious of his enthusiasms.

Yo-Yo Ma has figured prominently in the history of Live From Lincoln Center: as a recitalist, an ensemble player, and soloist with the New York Philharmonic in the Dvorak Cello Concerto. We shall visit with Yo-Yo Ma once again on our next Live From Lincoln Center presentation on Thursday evening, April 29 when he joins forces with the renowned Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra and its distinguished conductor, Ton Koopman, for performances of cello concertos by Vivaldi and Haydn.

It is Haydn's D Major Concerto that is the major focus of the evening. The work's history is a muddy one that has been clarified only in relatively recent years. For over a century the autograph score of the work was nowhere to be found, leading to speculation that perhaps it was not a work by Haydn at all. Supporters of that theory speculated that it might have been the work of one Anton Kraft, leading cellist of Haydn's orchestra at the Court of Esterhazy. Though the Concerto had long since established itself as one of the cornerstones of the repertory for cello and orchestra, a cloud had hung over its true authorship. The post-World War II years in Europe witnessed a remarkable succession of musical discoveries in churches and museums, and in 1951 a set of manuscript parts of the Concerto, in Haydn's own hand, came to light, thus affirming once and for all that the Concerto was indeed an authentic work of Haydn. It is a leisurely and expansive work full of ingratiating ideas and themes and one ideally suited for the improvisatory side of Yo-Yo Ma's musical personality.

Where concertos for solo instruments are concerned, we tend to think of Vivaldi as a composer of concertos for the violin: among the many dozens of violin concertos he composed, his Four Seasons is really a cycle of four violin concertos. But Vivaldi's position as music master at the Ospedale della Pieta, a Venetian school for orphan girls, required that he teach all instruments. The cello was apparently a favored instrument at the Ospedale, for Vivaldi composed no fewer than 27 solo cello concertos, along with many others for multiple solo cellos. And Vivaldi's voluminous output includes dozens of concertos for many

different solo instruments, including a good number for Diverse Instruments of solo instrumental ensembles.

The B Flat Concerto that Yo-Yo Ma will play is one of a set of seven commissioned by a German Count who had spent three years in Italy as a young man and who had become a fairly proficient cellist. The Concerto's slow movement is particularly beautiful and deeply felt, while the Finale is an early anticipation of the sonata-allegro form that Haydn was to perfect and codify in his concertos, sonatas and symphonies.

The concert will begin with three movements from the glorious Water Music by Handel. The story of the background of the Water Music is one of the most enchanting in all musical lore, though the authenticity of the story now seems questionable. Nevertheless, I am taking the liberty to repeat it. Samuel Pepys, in his diary under the date August 23, 1662, wrote: "To the top of the new Banqueting House over the Thames, which was a most pleasant place as any I could have got; and all the show consisted chiefly in the number of boats and barges; and two pageants, one of a King, and another of a Queen....Anon come the King and the Queen in a barge under a canopy, with 1000 boats and barges I know, for we could see no water for them, nor discern the King nor Queen. And so they landed at White Hall Bridge, and the great guns on the other side went off."

From this description we can well assume that the Thames played diverse roles in English life of the 17th and 18th centuries. It was a main commercial highway, of course, but it was also one of British royalty's favorite spots for a social gathering. Handel had been in the service of Georg Ludwig, the Elector of Hanover in Germany, and sought and received from him a leave to visit England. So delighted was Handel by his reception in England that he overstayed his leave, thus incurring the anger of the Elector. Because of the complicated intertwining of royal European bloodlines, Georg Ludwig eventually became King George I of England. The legend surrounding Handel's Water Music has it that he composed the music for a royal party on the Thames as a gesture of atonement to his former employer, now King of England.

The London Daily Courant of July 17, 1717 carried an account of a royal barge party on the Thames which read in part: "Many other barges with persons of quality attended, and so great a number of boats that the whole river in a manner was covered. A City Company's barge was employed for the music, wherein were fifty instruments of all sorts who played.... the finest symphonies composed express for this occasion by Mr. Handel, which his majesty liked so well that he caused it to be played over three times in going and returning."

The complete Water Music consists of three Suites, which Handel apparently composed for three different royal outings, in 1715, 1717, and 1736. Mr. Koopman has chosen to perform several movements from Handel's F Major

Water Music Suite of 1715.

This, then, is our Live From Lincoln Center program for Thursday evening, April 29: Handel, Vivaldi, Haydn and Yo-Yo Ma. The concert is part of the Lincoln Center Spring Gala and it promises to be a very special evening indeed. I leave you, as usual, with the suggestion that you check your local PBS station listing for the exact day and time of the broadcast in your area.

See you then!