

LIVE FROM LINCOLN CENTER

December 19, 2001, 8:00 p.m. on PBS

The New York Philharmonic and Jazz @ Lincoln Center:

NUTCRACKER SWING

Over the years the Holiday season has given birth to a number of musical traditions in New York: Tchaikovsky's "The Nutcracker" at the New York City Ballet, the annual Christmas show at Radio City Music Hall; Handel's "Messiah" in innumerable performances by a variety of choral and orchestra institutions. With not quite the history of these activities is another musical manifestation that has recently added its own unique flavor to December in New York: a joint concert by the New York Philharmonic and the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra. This year's presentation will take place in Avery Fisher Hall on Wednesday evening, December 19; our cameras and microphones will be there to bring you all the festivities in this "Nutcracker Swing" event as our next Live From Lincoln Center presentation.

Among the many works composed by Wynton Marsalis, the indefatigable Director of the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, is a suite for symphony orchestra, jazz orchestra, and chorus titled "All Rise." This suite was commissioned by Kurt Masur and the New York Philharmonic in 1999 and was premiered by these two ensembles on December 29 of that year. There are four purely instrumental sections in the suite and these will comprise the first half of our program.

Writing about "All Rise" Mr. Marsalis has said: "The 20th has been the century of communication. The 21st will be the century of integration. Now there's more talk than ever about the global community. The search is on and when we finally find each other, the head of recognition will cause souls to rise. We will be truly at home in the world. 'All Rise' celebrates togetherness and ascendance. It has dance movements, introspective sections, and other portions that aim to demonstrate basic units of music, like the blues, that speak of a common human heritage."

The first of the four sections we'll hear begins with a gentle, dreamy opening by the symphony orchestra. The jazz orchestra then takes over, first with a highly dramatic rhythmic drive and then with a reflective, saxophone-tinged interlude. This movement is called "Go Slow (But Don't Stop)". Marsalis writes of this movement, "From the cradle to the grave, everyone loves love, gettin' it, and givin' it. They been tryin' to stop it for years, but it just keeps going."

Next comes a movement for strings alone. "Wild Strumming of Fiddle" is its title and I can think of no more perfect description of its content. It gets really wild near the end, culminating in an exhausted musical exhale. Marsalis says of this movement: "We discover that we can do things, and get carried away. We can't make up our mind and stick to one thing. We want it all. Then we get confused,

and think that it's all about us.”

“El ‘Gran’ Baile de la Reina” comes next, a royal dance with a middle section at once provocative and sinuous that affords the instrumentalists lots of solo opportunities. Of this movement Marsalis comments, “We love to have a good time with each other. And dancing is the purest expression of our physical selves. At least the purest you can conduct in public.” It builds to a frenetic climax and then ends in a whisper.

The last of the sections we’ll hear is titled “Expressbrown Local”. Of this movement Marsalis writes, “Everybody loves trains. And with its chugging, pulling, shaking, shuffling, and galloping, the train will always be the ultimate dancing machine. Whether it's the Japanese bullet train, the subway, or the ol' ‘Rio Grande Galloping Goose,’ a train is trying to get somewhere, and that's all.” Again there are brilliant solos-for the trumpet and saxophone especially. It ends with a rousing brass peroration.

After the intermission comes an encore presentation of one of the most inventive of the New York Philharmonic-Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra collaborations: alternating performances by the Philharmonic and the Jazz Orchestra of sections from Tchaikovsky’s ballet, “The Nutcracker.” The versions played by the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra are those made by Duke Ellington and one of his principal arrangers, Billy Strayhorn. First, naturally, comes the Overture. The Ellington-Strayhorn version ends in a driving big band sound.

Tchaikovsky’s “Dance of the Reed Flutes” played by the New York Philharmonic is transformed in the Ellington-Strayhorn adaptation to “Toot Toot Tootie Toot” and features four of the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra’s tooters on toy pipes. Tchaikovsky’s March becomes “Peanut Brittle Brigade” with trumpet, saxophone, piano, and clarinet solos, ending in a downwardly cascading saxophone solo.

One of Tchaikovsky’s most imaginative touches in “The Nutcracker” is his scoring of the “Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy” for celeste solo. Transformed by Ellington and Strayhorn it becomes “Sugar Rum Cherry” and opens with a drum figure which then leads to saxophones, trumpets, and trombone. The ending is quiet, in the nature of a farewell.

Among other accomplishments, Tchaikovsky was a composer of great waltzes. The most famous of them is the “Waltz of the Flowers” from “The Nutcracker.” Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn made of this waltz a jumping, propulsive music that they titled “Dance of the Floreadores.” Trumpets and trombones are front and center here. And the Russian Dance, or “Trepak,” becomes “The Vodka Vouty” or, alternately, as another version has it, “The Volga Vouty.” Whatever you call it, the movement ends the suite in a riot of color and excitement.

So there you have it-the New York Philharmonic playing under guest conductor Leonard Slatkin and the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis, together again for a joint concert on Wednesday evening, December 19-our next Live From Lincoln Center presentation. I leave you with the usual message to check your local station guide for the exact time and day of broadcast in your area. See you then!