



May 5, 2010 at 9:00 on PBS
Emanuel Ax, Yo-Yo Ma, Itzhak Perlman @ the Penthouse

The 2009/10 concert season marks the 200th anniversary of the births of both Felix Mendelssohn and Robert Schumann. Musicians everywhere have been commemorating those anniversaries all season long. Our next Live From Lincoln Center, on Wednesday evening May 5, will join the world-wide celebration with a very special program originating in Lincoln Center's unique Kaplan Penthouse. More about the program and performers in a moment.

Some 70 years ago RCA Victor Records brought together three of its reigning instrumental masters for the purpose of recording some of the cornerstones of the Trio literature for piano, violin and cello. They were violinist Jascha Heifetz, pianist Artur Rubinstein, and cellist Emanuel Feuermann. So important was that pairing that a feature article about their collaboration appeared in what was then the leading weekly publication in the country, Life Magazine. The writer dubbed the Heifetz-Rubinstein-Feuermann combination "The Million Dollar Trio", and the resultant recordings are regarded as classics to this day. And another spectacular threesome played together in the White House during the Presidency of John F Kennedy: violinist Isaac Stern; cellist Pablo Casals; and pianist Mieczyslaw Horszowski.

If one were to try to emulate those combinations with artists of today, the choices inevitably would be Itzhak Perlman, violin; Emanuel Ax, piano; and Yo-Yo Ma, cello. And it is precisely those three who will form our Trio on May 5! The three of them are old friends who enjoy each others company socially as well as musically. And they have chosen a fascinating program of music by Mendelssohn and Schumann: one of Mendelssohn's two Trios, plus a movement from the other one; and a varied selection of works by Schumann.

Our three players have chosen Mendelssohn's C Minor Trio, Opus 66, as the main work on their program. It will be supplemented with the Andante movement from the composer's other, and better known Trio, the one in D Minor. And Schumann will be represented by a selection of pieces from his Fantasiestücke Opp. 12 and 73 and Stücke im Volkston Op.102.

That Mendelssohn and Schumann were exact contemporaries meant that each knew the music of the other. And Schumann was not only a brilliantly gifted and original composer, he was also one of the great music journalists and critics of his time. Of Mendelssohn's C Minor Trio he wrote: "It is the master trio of today, as in their day were those of Beethoven in B Flat and D; as was that of Franz Schubert's in E Flat. Indeed a lovely composition which years from now will still delight grand- and great-grandchildren....Mendelssohn has raised himself so high that we can indeed say he is the Mozart of the 19th century....I need hardly mention that this trio is not written for the piano player alone; that the two others also must do their part and may count on delight and thanks."

The Andante from Mendelssohn's D Minor Trio explores rather darker venues than those we normally associate with this composer. It opens and closes with a warm-hearted melody, but in between come some unexpected minor key byways. And, as mentioned above, Schumann's three fanciful collections will be represented by intriguing settings for violin and piano, cello and piano, and piano solo.

Altogether a very special event awaits us on Wednesday evening, May 5, Live From Lincoln Center, with Itzhak Perlman, Emanuel Ax and Yo-Yo Ma. I close with the usual reminder to check the schedule of your local PBS station for the exact date and time of the telecast in your area.

Enjoy!

MARTIN BOOKSPAN