

LIVE
FROM LINCOLN CENTER



September 21, 2011 at 7:30 on PBS
New York Philharmonic Opening Night

The Russian-American composer, Vladimir Dukelsky, led a double life. Under his birth name, Dukelsky, he composed music for the concert hall that was championed by Serge Koussevitzky in Paris, Boston and New York. Under his Americanized name, Vernon Duke, he composed some of the great works in the American Songbook, including "April in Paris" and its counterpart, "Autumn in New York".

Autumn in New York means many different things in today's world, among them children returning to school, the wind-down of the baseball season, and the start of a new season for the New York Philharmonic. This year that event will be marked on Wednesday evening, September 21, inaugurating Alan Gilbert's third season as the orchestra's Music Director. And as usual Live From Lincoln Center will be in Avery Fisher Hall with its cameras and microphones to bring the festivities right into your own homes.

Maestro Gilbert has assembled a "barn-burner" of a program, beginning with Samuel Barber's *School for Scandal* Overture and ending with the Intermezzo, Dance of the Seven Veils and Final Scene from Richard Strauss's *Salome*. In between we'll have more Barber: the dramatic scene for soprano and orchestra "Andromache's Farewell" and music from Wagner's opera *Tannhäuser*: the Overture and soprano aria, "Dich teure Halle". Guest artist of the evening is the lustrous American soprano, Deborah Voigt, fresh from her triumph this summer at the Glimmerglass Opera Company in the title role in Irving Berlin's *Annie Get Your Gun*.

Samuel Barber was still a composition student at Philadelphia's Curtis Institute when he composed his *School for Scandal* overture in 1931 at the age of 21. Inspired by the 18th century comedy-of-manners play by Sheridan, Barber's overture bubbles over with extroverted good spirits. It was his first work scored for orchestra and brought Barber to instant international attention. Some thirty years elapsed between the composition of the *School for Scandal* Overture and "Andromache's Farewell". In the interim Barber had become one of America's most respected composers, with two symphonies, a brilliant Violin Concerto, the Adagio for Strings (from his First String Quartet) and the opera *Vanessa* to his credit. "Andromache's Farewell" was the result of a commission from the New York Philharmonic. The text is an English translation of an episode from Euripides' *The Trojan Women* in which Andromache, widow of the Trojan hero, Hector, bids farewell to her young son who is about to be killed by the conquering Greeks.

Tannhäuser was Wagner's fifth opera. Its overture makes reference to themes which later serve to identify characters or situations. The basic story deals with the hero, Tannhäuser, and his conflict between abandoned, devil-may-care sensual love (in the form of Venus), and earthly, more controlled love personified by Elisabeth. As in Wagner's opera-to-come, *Die Meistersinger*, there is a song contest. "Dich teure Halle" (These cherished Halls) is sung by Elisabeth as she enters the Hall in the Wartburg where the contest is to take place.

If Wagner's *Tannhäuser* upset the moral fibre of some of the characters in its story, Strauss's *Salome* of 1905 positively outraged its early audiences. Based on a German translation of the play by Oscar Wilde the opera, in its early years, was banned in London, New York and (not surprisingly, given the attitude of the time) Boston. One of the reasons Mahler ran afoul of the authorities at the Vienna State Opera during the time early in the 20th century when he was its Music Director was his wish, emphatically denied, to mount a production of *Salome*.

What was it that so upset its early critics? Could it have been the fact that the title character, a teen-aged and presumably virgin young lady, is possessed of a wild passion for the imprisoned John the Baptist? Or the fact that she indulges in an uninhibited dance during which she sheds, one by one, the seven veils that cover her body leaving her totally naked? Or that she demands the head of John (Jochanaan) on a silver platter in response to Herod's promise to grant her any wish she desires? Or, wish granted, that she kisses the lips of the severed head when it is presented to her? Whatever! In any case, Strauss's *Salome* has long since emerged from the shadows of scandal and is one of the cornerstones of operatic repertory.

Our soprano soloist, Deborah Voigt, is probably today's reigning dramatic soprano for the operas of Wagner and Strauss---and here we have her performing music by the two composers who are her greatest operatic strength. A gala evening indeed awaits us on Live From Lincoln Center on the evening of September 21. As usual I leave you with the suggestion that you check the schedule of your local PBS station for the exact date and time of the transmission in your area.

Enjoy!

MARTIN BOOKSPAN