

THE NEW YORK POPS

SKITCH HENDERSON FOUNDER AND MUSIC DIRECTOR

Notes on the Program

by Skitch Henderson

Friday, November 19, 2004, 8:00PM, Carnegie Hall
Gershwin and Ravel: Pupil and Master

Through the years much has been written about the relationship of Gershwin and Ravel. Gershwin's desire to ascend to a more academic status as a composer led him to Paris in 1928 to study with Ravel, whom he greatly admired. As fate would have it, the pupil proved to be a great influence over the master. Ravel's piano concertos almost directly relate to the melodic and syncopated style of Gershwin.

Thus tonight, the meeting of two totally separate musical minds. We open with *Ma mère l'oye*, a suite in five separate parts, ostensibly dedicated to children but because of the success of *Beauty and the Beast* on Broadway, I've always longed to do this suite.

Gershwin composed the Concerto in F in 1925. My life with this piano concerto has been divided by interpretations as diverse as Oscar Levant, Julius Katchen, and tonight, with a young woman that brings a very fresh approach to this literature, Di Wu. It is divided into three sections by a totally academic structure. It has virtuoso writing for the piano, but also presents formidable Gershwin styling for the orchestra. Oscar Levant always told me that the publishers, if I may quote him directly, "screwed up the finale, especially the last eight bars." I remember a performance on television when he turned to me as we finished with a censored expletive about how stupid, that this had never been fixed. It leans on the skill of orchestration that Gershwin must have acquired from Ravel, but the melodic content brings us right back to Manhattan.

I'm a great fan of the United States Coast Guard Band and they are giving us a new look at the *Cuban Overture* of Gershwin's, which also had a very checkered career, including name-changes three times before it was published. I suppose everybody knows the *Boléro*. It sometimes brings less-than smiles from the orchestra and especially the percussion, but tonight everything is different. The golden sounds of the huge woodwind and brass ensemble, made possible by the combination of the Coast Guard Band and our orchestra, are a rare experience. It may bulge the walls a little with its volume, but it will certainly send you smiling into the night.

Viva Ravel! Viva Gershwin! Viva the master! Viva the pupil! (or vice versa).

