

Rev. Sun Myung Moon, Tom Ludwig and the New York City Symphony

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In Saturday, December 6, the New York City Symphony Orchestra performed its second concert in Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall. Siting in the front, in the same hall where Rev. Moon spoke in 1972, were Rev. and Mrs. Moon; also enjoying the concert were about 100 Church members. The program was sponsored by the International Cultural Foundation, of which Rev. Moon is the founder. In the small room he rents as a home and office on the 24th floor of the gigantic Lincoln Towers apartment complex, Tom Ludwig explained the story behind the New York City Symphony's emergence.

Tom joined the Church in New York during 1970. After a time in the center, he lived outside, taking up serious study at the Juilliard School of Music. An exceptional violinist, he has held a variety of positions, including playing the fiddler on a travelling production of "Fiddler on the Roof," and the concert masterships of the Bolshoi Ballet and the National Ballet of Canada. His involvement with the City Symphony began when he joined its ranks as a violinist in 1971. He soon heard that the conductor wanted to resign, and so he volunteered. Recognizing his talent, the Symphony's board accepted him. He recalls: "I was innocent and bright and enthusiastic, so I guess they thought, 'Well, there's no harm in having him as conductor.'" When Tom took over the orchestra in 1972, he found the shadow of a once great orchestra.

The New York City Symphony Orchestra gave its first performance in 1926. Founded by the late Hon. Judge Leopold Prince and Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, the orchestra was one of the first to give free concerts in Central Park and was invited to perform at the 1939 World's Fair in New York City. In the ensuing 50 years, the orchestra, under the batons of conductors Franz Bibo, Felix Popper, and Leon Barzin, has played more than 1000 concerts to audiences totaling several million New York music lovers. It has also served as the necessary and well-remembered orchestral showcase for the early careers of many artists including: Judith Raskin, David Bar Illan, Leontyne Price, Aaron Rosand, Evelyn Lear, Thomas Stewart, Sidney Harth, Jan Peerce, Claude Frank, and Mitch Miller, to name but a few. Radio audiences have become familiar with The New York City Symphony Orchestra by way of numerous broadcasts over WNYC and the Voice of America. "When I went to my first rehearsal, I found 90 old people.

The first thing I did was call for auditions. Not having auditioned in years, they didn't know what to do. So when the day came, only ten members came. Out of those there was only one whom I thought I might be able to use, but later I changed my mind. So we had no orchestra. The next week I spoke to a lot of first-rate talented musicians whom I knew and we got a group of wind instruments together: flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, French horns, plus a cello and a double bass. We called the group the New York City Symphony Chamber Players. Beginning with that group I began to develop my conducting skills and to assemble the musicians."

The Chamber Players had their debut in December 1973 at 18 East 71st St., rehearsing in the center's kitchen. From there the group played for several CARP functions, at Norman Vincent Peale's Marble Collegiate Church, and on radio station WBAI. As 1974 developed, Tom successfully assembled a full-size symphony orchestra comprised largely of volunteer musicians. At the beginning of 1975 he took it to its professional debut in Lincoln Center at the Alice Tully Hall, where it played Beethoven's "Overture to Coriolanus" and 7th Symphony, Strauss's "Don Juan," and one of his own compositions, "Kwak," a ballet about love between a Western man and a Korean woman which is thwarted by the man's father's opposition.

The critics were mixed in their response to such an extent that they contradicted each other. For example, some liked "Kwak," others were convinced it was plagiarized but each claimed that different composers were the main influence -- Mahler, Prokofieff, or a few others.

Byron Belt declared that "Ludwig secured brilliant performances of Beethoven and Strauss · from a splendid young ensemble." In reviewing the world premiere of Ludwig's ballet "Kwak," Bill Zakariasen of The Daily News stated: "... 'Kwa' is hugely enjoyable melodically and rhythmically intoxicating, and orchestrated with a master's hand."



Tom Ludwig conducts New York City Orchestra at Lincoln Center

Just before the February 15 concert, the orchestra changed hands from its former board of directors to International Cultural Foundation. In December 1974, a combination of apathy, financial setbacks, bad health, and disunity among the board members made transfer attractive to them.

In the spring of 1975, Tom was looking for opportunities to give concerts when Mr. Takeru Kamiyama, head of the New York Church, asked if the orchestra could perform for Aidan Barry's talk in the New York Hilton. Several weeks later the Symphony again played in the Hilton for a large audience in the Grand Ballroom when Unification Church of America President Neil A. Salonen spoke on "New Hope for a New America" on May 29. Each time Dvorak's "New World Symphony" was their selection.

The Orchestra's 1975-1976 season got off to a good start when it was very well-received at the Commemorative Banquet at the Fourth International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences. Their next concert was exactly one week later at Lincoln Center. Included in the Lincoln Center program were Wagner's "Overture to Die Meistersinger," Debussy's "Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun," Stravinsky's "Firebird Suite," Tchaikovsky's Symphony Number 5, and Tom's newest composition, "Cambodia."

The thousand-member audience gave the orchestra two standing ovations, one after "Cambodia." Tom says of "Cambodia": "It is a very emotional piece, and when I introduced it to the audience I was very emotional, too. I said in no uncertain terms that I wanted to express God's heart at the fall of Cambodia -- that it was a tragedy that Cambodia fell, what we made a mistake and went against God's feelings." Of the performance, Tom says, "The audience was completely united.

I've never seen anything like it!" Again the reviews, were mixed, with most fallout, acknowledged or not, rooted in the critics' inability to come to terms with Tom's religious and political expressions centering around "Cambodia." The Times was objective, saying about one selection, "the players could pour out reasonably modulated tone over relatively long notes, and the result -- in Tully Hall especially sounded generous, rich and sensitive."

The 81 member orchestra average age 23 -- rehearses two or three times a week under Tom's guidance (Tom is also 23). Tom is assisted by Church member John Spradling in business and public relations; together they share a room which also serves as office and teaching center. Tom's spiritual interests as well as the sponsorship of the International Cultural Foundation are known to the orchestra members. Tom explains that orchestra members who are unsympathetic with Reverend Moon and his principles -- a few Communists and fundamentalists -- have felt too uncomfortable playing in the orchestra and left.

"The rest feel pretty good about it," says Tom. This fall Tom and John have done spiritual work amongst the orchestra to the extent of witnessing to 55 musicians and giving lectures to over a dozen in their room. One musician has been through a seven-day workshop; another is in 120-day training at Barrytown.

Although the musicians all work other jobs -- other concert engagements, playing at night clubs, or working in book or music stores to support themselves their attitude and capabilities are very professional and they are completely devoted to music. "There is a very high level of training characteristic of the members," says Tom. "I am confident that it is the finest young persons' orchestra in the country. The fact that we have been able to survive so long in the New York market is significant."