



SUNDAY CLASSICS
INTERNATIONAL ORCHESTRA SEASON
2023-2024

Czech National Symphony Orchestra

Sunday 26 May | 3pm

DELIUS - The Walk to the Paradise Garden (8')

BEETHOVEN - Piano Concerto No. 5 (38')

----- Interval -----

SMETANA - Bartered Bride Overture (7')

DVORAK - Symphony No. 7 (35')

Conductor:

Steven Mercurio

Soloist:

Mark Bebbington (piano)

Frederick Delius (1862-1934) The Walk to the Paradise Garden – Intermezzo from A Village Romeo and Juliet (1906) [c.10 minutes]

Delius provided his own libretto for his opera A Village Romeo and Juliet, basing it on a short story Romeo und Julia auf dem dorfe by the Swiss author Gottfried Keller. The young lovers on this occasion are Sali and Vreli, whose families are locked in a dispute about land. In the penultimate scene of the opera, they spend time together at a fair in a distant town but realize that they will never be able to live together and so drift down the river towards the local inn, The Paradise Garden, slowly drowning together as the boat's hull has been punctured.

The opera was originally composed in 1900-01, but Delius revised it in 1906 in preparation for a production in Germany, adding this orchestral interlude. This has become the most famous section of the opera, the only part that is still regularly performed.

The music suitably portrays the tenderness of the two young lovers, as well as their ecstasy, as they drift down the slowly moving river. Delius's love of

Wagnerian chromatic writing takes us from a quiet E flat major, via C major towards closure in B major, the same key-signature that closes Isolde's Liebestod (Love-Death) at the end of Wagner's Tristan und Isolde.

After a rare performance of Delius's complete opera at Wexford in 2012 a reviewer suggested that we can't truly appreciate the significance of The Walk to the Paradise Garden outside the context of the full drama. However, well over 95% of music lovers have treasured this atmospheric symphonic poem with no (or minimal) understanding of the background story. We can hear gentle sighs, quiet birdsong, and a calming lullaby amongst the moments of passion; this poetic music does not necessarily need a theatrical context for appreciation.

Timothy Dowling, December 2018

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) Piano Concerto No. 5 in E flat major, Opus 73 (1809)

[c.40 minutes]

1. *Allegro*
2. *Adagio un poco mosso*
3. *Rondo - Allegro*

What's in a name?

Names undoubtedly help with categorizing music in our consciousness – the named symphonies of Haydn are more frequently performed than many of the symphonies only catalogued by numbers, despite matching musical qualities. And indeed, despite the possible dubious origin or appropriateness of the acquired name, ignoring or changing the popular title is simply time wasted. Thus, disputing the validity of 'Emperor' as a title for Beethoven's Fifth Piano Concerto is probably a lost cause. The London based publisher Johann Baptist Cramer (1771-1858) is credited with providing the famous epithet and it has certainly been widely adopted in most places, although not everywhere. Beethoven would surely have been surprised at the title, given his famous destruction of the title page of his 'Eroica' Symphony in 1804 when he heard that Napoleon (the original dedicatee) had declared himself 'Emperor'. Beethoven's withering comment on Napoleon's self-aggrandizement was:

'Is he then, too, nothing more than an ordinary human being? Now he, too, will trample on all the rights of man and indulge only his ambition. He will exalt himself above all others, become a tyrant!'

The 'Emperor' title for this work, however, does suggest the grandeur, nobility and epic scale of the Concerto, appropriately raising it to the loftiest heights in the concerto repertoire. 'Emperor' immediately conveys the character and personality of the Fifth Piano Concerto and its dominant role in Beethoven's own pantheon of seven published concertos. The Violin Concerto and the Fourth Piano Concerto might match it in breadth and poetry, but the Fifth's confident, assertive quality sets it apart, signifying its special status as Beethoven approached the closing years of his 'heroic' decade. And so, whilst

Beethoven may have balked at the title, it does aptly reflect the true qualities of the work in a single word.

What's in a dedication?

It might easily instead have been called 'The Archduke', as it is just one of many important compositions dedicated to Archduke Rudolf of Austria. The 'Archduke' title was later adopted for the last and greatest of his piano trios, Opus 97, composed just a few years later in 1812.

Rudolf was the youngest son of the Emperor Leopold II and Maria Louisa of Spain. Born in 1788 the 15-year-old first came to Beethoven in 1803 to embark on piano lessons; later he became Beethoven's only composition pupil. The 33-year-old Beethoven may have reflected on how he, in 1787 as a 16-year-old, had first come to Vienna and played before the 31-year-old Mozart with the hope of possible lessons (not to be fulfilled).

Rudolf's prowess as a pianist is demonstrated by the major compositions dedicated to him, including the Fourth and Fifth Piano Concertos, the Piano Sonatas Opus 81a (*Les Adieux*), Opus 106 (*Hammerklavier*) and Opus 111 in C minor. There is also the aforementioned Piano Trio, Opus 97 and what Beethoven himself considered to be his greatest masterpiece, the *Missa Solemnis*, Opus 123, which was originally intended for Rudolf's enthronement as Archbishop of Olomouc in 1820.

The work in this list of masterpieces that was contemporary with the Fifth Piano Concerto is the Piano Sonata in E flat major, *Les Adieux* and its title reflects contemporary events. The 'farewell' refers to Beethoven's feelings at Rudolf's enforced departure from Vienna as French troops bombarded

and then occupied the city in May 1809. The following *Andante espressivo* (*The Absence*) depicts Beethoven's sad feelings during Rudolf's absence; he delayed completing the Sonata until he could celebrate Rudolf's return with his *Vivacissimamente* finale, where the piano-writing bears striking resemblance to the finale of the Fifth Piano Concerto. This Piano Sonata is significant because it is the only one of his 32 sonatas composed as a specific programme work.

It may be surprising to know that the Fifth Concerto was also conceived during this particularly anxious time for the composer. We might hear military-like fanfares in some of the thematic material and especially the role of the timpani. However, the Concerto never reflects the crushing defeat experienced by the Austrians during this conflict. We are reminded of the effervescent optimism of Beethoven's Second Symphony composed alongside the *Heiligenstadt Testament*, that tragic letter written to his brothers, laying bare his personal struggles with suicidal feelings in October 1802. Eventually the *Eroica* Symphony emerged from that dark period, heralding the start of his 'heroic' decade.

Beethoven was also undoubtedly affected by the death of his physician Johann Schmidt in February 1809 – Schmidt had faithfully treated Beethoven since 1801, supporting him through the early days of his hearing difficulties.

A musical era also came to an end with the death of Josef Haydn on 31st May 1809 – Beethoven had movingly made his peace with his former teacher when Haydn appeared in public for the last time at a performance of *The Creation* in 1808.

In the anxious summer of 1809 Beethoven poured his more painful feelings into the slow movement of his String Quartet, *The Harp*, Opus 74, composed immediately after the Fifth Piano Concerto: Beethoven spoke about his personal circumstances at the time: 'We have no money left in Vienna and we need twice as much as before – this damned war!... I worked solidly for the last few weeks, which seemed to be more for death than for immortality.'

What's in a key?

The Piano Sonata *Les Adieux* and the *Eroica* Symphony are linked with the Fifth Concerto by the choice of key, namely E flat major. The String Quartet, *The Harp*, shares the same key signature; we could also cite the second of the two Opus 70 Piano Trios (composed the previous year and which Beethoven had intended to dedicate to Rudolf). There is a special warmth in compositions in the key of E flat major and the Concerto's opening chord conjures up the similar atmosphere conveyed at the start of Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 22, Symphony No. 39 and *The Magic Flute* Overture, as well as Haydn's Symphony No. 99. In each case the opening chord immediately exudes confidence and security – fifteen years later, Beethoven similarly would open the first of his five late string quartets with the bold assertion of E flat major.

The *Eroica* opened the floodgates for Beethoven's most intense years of orchestral composition, years that produced Symphonies Nos. 3 to 6, Piano Concertos Nos. 4 and 5, the Triple Concerto, Violin Concerto, the Mass in C major and the original version of his opera *Fidelio* (first published as *Leonora*), as well as some of his best loved overtures. There was also a substantial succession of works for solo piano and chamber ensemble. By 1809 the rate of

production was starting to slow down and fewer works date from this particular year. It is only apt that Beethoven should have opened and closed the main production period of his 'heroic' decade with confident works in the key of E flat major.

Beethoven had last appeared as a soloist in a public orchestral concert in December 1808 when he performed the Fourth Piano Concerto and the Choral Fantasy. With his increasing hearing difficulties, he was aware that he could no longer perform in public: he never performed the Fifth Piano Concerto and it was consequently his final work in concerto-form. He continued to compose in all his other preferred forms – symphony, solo piano sonata and string quartet – but he reached the end of the concerto-line with this Concerto. There was a delay of two years before the work was finally performed in Leipzig on 28th November 1811 with Friedrich Schneider as soloist. Beethoven's pupil Carl Czerny performed the work in Vienna shortly afterwards.

Beethoven had always taken a keen interest in Mozart's keyboard concertos and after his Third Piano Concerto in 1800 he developed his own particular structural template and only slightly modified this over the next few years with his Triple Concerto, Fourth Piano Concerto and Violin Concerto. In all these mature concertos, the main weight of the composition resides in the long first movements, usually at least half the length of the total concerto – the first movement of the Fifth Piano Concerto (at around twenty minutes) is longer than any opening movement of his nine symphonies (even when exposition repeats are observed). A shorter slow movement in all four concertos is then linked directly with the more playful finale.

Like the Fourth Concerto the solo pianist features in the opening bars, but on this occasion with very different effect; instead of the inward, poetic musings that quietly launch the Fourth Concerto, the soloist plays the virtuoso role, as if improvising along the lines that opened the Choral Fantasia. Eventually, the soloist gives way to a more traditional, prolonged orchestral exposition.

Beethoven's themes are always ripe for symphonic development even though when first presented they might appear to sound complete in themselves.

Thus, the very first orchestral theme contains three separate elements that will take on crucial roles in the forthcoming development section.

Another Beethovenian finger-print is his ability to transform his thematic material, so that it takes on completely different guises – the secondary theme is thus first presented *pianissimo* with *staccato* strings in the minor key, before being transfigured as horns present the same basic material *legato* (smoothly) and in the major key; later in the movement the same theme reappears *forte* with full orchestral forces, so that it takes on a more aggressive character. Similarly, when the pianist first plays again after the long orchestral exposition, the main opening theme is presented in a new poetic guise, marked 'dolce'.

Towards the end of this vast movement, the orchestra seemingly prepares the way for the traditional solo cadenza, but Beethoven leaves a specific instruction that this is not to be improvised, but performed as written and linked directly with what follows – the pair of horns entering with their *legato* version of the secondary theme, leading us into the coda section of this epic movement.

Bedřich Smetana (1824-1884) Overture to The Bartered Bride (Prodaná Nevěsta) (1863)

In most of the other great E flat major compositions, Beethoven turned to the darker, close cousin key of C minor for internal movements – the funeral march in the *Eroica* and the central Absence in the Sonata, *Les Adieux* – but in this Concerto he seeks a very different and other-worldly effect with the seemingly distant key of B major (although it is more closely related when heard enharmonically as C flat major, only a major third below the home key). Beethoven had used the same key relationship in his two earlier C major Concertos, the Piano Concerto, Opus 15 and the Triple Concerto, Opus 56. As with the Triple Concerto, the rapt effect is further enhanced by the use of muted strings. Beethoven produces one of his most affecting transformations, as he subtly prepares us for the Finale, with its energetic theme being quietly anticipated by the solo pianist whilst taking us gently back to the Concerto's home key. Schumann must have had these evocative bars in mind when he needed to make the same harmonic transition, leading into the *Finale* of his A minor Concerto some thirty years later.

The Rondo Finale is unmatched for rhythmic strength and uplift; returning to it is always a joy between the various episodes. The 6/8 rhythm looks forward to the opening movement of his Seventh Symphony, composed three years later in a final, late flowering of his 'heroic' decade, and likewise deserves Wagner's famous epithet 'apotheosis of the dance'. Just as we are heading into the home straight, Beethoven offers a final surprise: a quietly beating drum encourages the soloist to fade towards silence and stillness before a *fortissimo* flourish concludes the joyous journey.

One of Britain's most elusive and flamboyant butterflies has aptly earned the title 'The Purple

Emperor' and it remains the ultimate destination for many British butterfly enthusiasts. It is more debatable whether any politician or ruler deserves the same form of recognition: Beethoven certainly would have rejected the notion. During the Napoleonic Wars he once commented that if he had known as much about the craft of war as he knew of music, he would have defeated Napoleon. Despite the difficult circumstances at the time of composition, the Fifth Piano Concerto's popularly acquired title appropriately celebrates the triumphant qualities that permeate Beethoven's final composition in concerto-form.

Timothy Dowling, February 2018

Smetana's Bartered Bride is the second of his eight completed operas. He started gathering musical material for it whilst still at work on his first opera, *The Brandenburger in Bohemia*, in 1862; indeed, the overture was first heard in a piano version in December 1863, although the rest of the opera was not completed until 1866.

The lively overture contains three themes that will feature later in the opera, but not surprisingly there is no suggestion of the story-line to come, as this had not yet been developed at the time of composing. But the joyous character of the opera is laid out in spades – and within the opening bars, just like Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*, we are

instantly transported to a busy world where we know that all will be well despite any chaos and confusion along the journey.

Hopefully, listening to this life-affirming overture might encourage listeners to hear the rest of the opera, as well as two of his other comic operas, *The Two Widows* (1874) and *The Kiss* (1876) as well as his tragic masterpiece *Dalibor* (1868).

Timothy Dowling, August 2019

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

Symphony No. 7 in D minor, Opus 70 (1885)

[c.40 minutes]

1. *Allegro maestoso*

2. *Poco Adagio*

3. *Scherzo: Vivace - Poco meno mosso*

4. *Allegro*

Dvořák was pleased to receive a commission to compose a symphony marking the invitation to join the London Philharmonic Society in June 1884, but he delayed starting work on the composition until the winter months, with the first movement being sketched over five days in mid-December 1884.

His ambitions for the new Symphony were clearly high and, whilst working on the *Poco Adagio* he wrote to his friend Antonín Rus on 22nd December: "I am now busy with the new Symphony and wherever I go I have no thought for anything but my work, which must be such as to move the world – well, God grant that it shall be so!"

He completed the sketch of the slow movement on New Year's Eve 1884 and the *Scherzo* by 9th January 1885. The completed score was then dated 17th March 1885 and he conducted the first performance himself five weeks later in London on 22nd April 1885.

Through the 1870s, Dvořák had composed a number of works that placed him at the forefront of Czech musical life and this has understandably been labelled his 'Slavonic period'. These were fruitful years which saw him produce many of the works that defined his Czech roots as the main wellspring of his inspiration. Amongst other works from this time are his Serenade for Strings, String Quartet in C, String Quintet in G, Czech Suite, the Symphonic Variations for Orchestra and his first set of Slavonic Dances.

Dvořák's previous Symphony, No. 6 in D major (1880), had been strongly influenced by Brahms's Second Symphony (also in D major, 1878) and Dvořák tried to take to heart the advice that Brahms had given him that his new work should revert to his own personal characteristics, rather than follow

the Brahms model. However, Dvořák was obviously very affected by Brahms's Third Symphony and it was hard to escape the shadow that this more introspective composition cast on Dvořák in 1883. As suggested in his letter to Rus, Dvořák wanted to be taken more seriously as a composer and he was consciously trying to produce more substantial works with this in mind.

In December 1882 Dvořák's mother had died and his F minor Piano Trio, composed in January 1883, reflects the grief that he felt at that time. He was no stranger to grief, after losing his first three children in infancy during the 1870s and his *Stabat Mater* was composed under the shadow of those losses. Dvořák would undoubtedly also have been affected by the death of his older contemporary, Bedřich Smetana, recognised as the father of Czech music, on 12th May 1884. The Seventh Symphony, started at the end of 1884, was composed in the same restless spirit as the F minor Piano Trio and can lay claim to be Dvořák's most serious orchestral composition.

Its predominantly dark colouring is only briefly broken by shafts of light – the first example coming as solo horn provides consoling warmth early on in the first movement. Otherwise, the opening *Allegro maestoso* is notable for its restless and tragic spirit, unusually concentrated in formal structure. There is no exposition repeat (and indeed the Seventh is unusual amongst pre-20th century symphonies in having no repeat marks throughout the whole work). The movement builds inexorably towards a triple *fortissimo* climax before unexpectedly dying away with a triple *pianissimo* conclusion.

Following this tense drama, the opening of the *Poco Adagio* comes as balm to the soul with woodwind singing a chorale-like hymn of touching simplicity in

the relative key of F major. After this chorale an expressive falling seventh from violins and cellos provides a deep sigh in response and briefly suggests Dvořák's earlier fascination with the yearning world of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. As with the *Allegro maestoso*, the movement works towards a *fortissimo* climax, before woodwind take us back to the quiet innocence of the opening. In the composing sketches for this movement Dvořák wrote a footnote: 'From the sad years'; this can only refer to the tragic losses that he and his wife suffered in the mid-1870s and the death of his mother in December 1882. Surely, the *Poco Adagio* suggests that he has now come to terms with his grief and so been able to produce one of his most exalted spells of warm lyricism. The movement was originally marked 'Andante' in the composition sketches, December 1884; this indicates that the tempo should not be allowed to drag too much.

The *Scherzo* brings us down to earth with an attractive dance, an example of a *Furiant*, as used in the first and last of the eight Slavonic Dances, Opus 46, and later used in his glorious Piano Quintet in A major in 1887. As one of the characteristic features of the *Furiant*, two contrasting themes are pitted against one another, suggesting a possible clash of rhythms (perky violins against more lyrical cellos), but producing an unforgettably balanced combination in the process. The melodic strength of the themes ensures that this is the movement that sticks in the memory long after the Symphony has finished.

The two central movements are interludes in the tragic drama, as made clear with the start of the *Allegro* finale, taking us straight back to the mood of the opening *Allegro maestoso*. Forward momentum is the defining feature of this movement, with its driving rhythms constantly keeping the argument on its predestined course to its conclusion. The battle between major and minor modes also characterises this Symphony as a whole, but nowhere more so than in the final movement: we are kept on the edge of our seats right up until the final bars as to whether the Symphony will end in tragedy or triumph, or indeed a combination of both.

Musicologists, musicians and music lovers will argue forever about the relative merits of the last three Dvořák symphonies, each claiming one of these as 'the greatest'. In simplistic terms those who most appreciate the Austro-German tradition will argue for the Seventh, whilst those favouring a Slavonic approach will more appreciate the warmth of the Eighth; the Ninth has naturally achieved worldwide popularity with his Czech-inspired tribute to American music and its subsequent adoption by American composers and musicians.

All three symphonies display the multi-faceted genius of Antonín Dvořák, able to produce such different masterpieces, whilst each remains quintessentially characteristic of his generous personality. They are united in their freshness and lyricism and all three contain elements of birdsong (especially the Eighth), reminding us of the composer's lifelong devotion to his feathered friends. As Dvořák worked through the winter of 1884-85 we can perhaps hear echoes of the birdsong that so inspired him at his country retreat at Vysoká, in the many phrases on flute, oboe and clarinet throughout the Seventh Symphony, but particularly in the final stages of the opening *Allegro maestoso* and the central section of the *Scherzo*. The birds may not yet have been singing when he embarked on the composing process in December 1884, but, as an experienced bird lover, he would be waiting expectantly for the burgeoning spring chorus as he continued with his work in early 1885.

Brahms remained a loyal friend to Dvořák, constantly supporting and promoting his younger contemporary. Dvořák's Sixth Symphony demonstrated his appreciation of Brahms's sunny Second Symphony and, in some respects, Dvořák's Seventh echoes the tragic spirit of Brahms's Third Symphony, composed the previous year in 1883. However, Dvořák ultimately remains true to his own personal vision and the Seventh Symphony's dramatic scenario blazes with his unique blend of warm lyricism and rhythmic energy.

Timothy Dowling, January 2018

STEVEN MERCURIO

conductor

Maestro Steven Mercurio, an internationally acclaimed conductor and composer and currently Music Director of the Czech National Symphony Orchestra, served as Music Director of the Spoleto Festival for five years and Principal Conductor for the Opera Company of Philadelphia. A sought-after collaborator on many award-winning recordings, arrangements and film projects, he received his master's degree from the Juilliard School.

He has conducted more than sixty operas for the stage in seven different languages. His engagements have taken him to many of the world's best loved opera houses, including the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma; Teatro Bellini, Catania; Teatro Filarmonico, Verona; Teatro Reggion, Torino; Teatro Verdi, Trieste; Teatro Massimo, Palermo; Theatre de la Monnaie in Brussels, Bonn Opera, the English National Opera, as well as the American opera companies of San Francisco, Washington, Philadelphia, Seattle, Detroit, Opera Pacific, Florida Grand, Pittsburgh, Dallas and Cincinnati. In addition to Maestro Mercurio's operatic performances, his symphonic commitments have taken him across the globe; he has appeared throughout Europe and the United Kingdom, Australia, the Far East and the United States.

Maestro Mercurio has conducted various operatic and symphonic television broadcasts, including the internationally acclaimed Christmas in Vienna series featuring the celebrated Three Tenors (Carreras, Domingo, Pavarotti). Major telecasts have also included Maestro Mercurio conducting the RAI's production of Christmas from the Church of San Francesco in Assisi, La Bohème in Cagliari,

performances of Berlioz's Requiem, Scriabin's Prometheus, Mahler's Second Symphony, an evening of music by Chick Corea and Mozart, along with Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 with his own Czech National Symphony Orchestra for ARTE to mark the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birth.

Maestro Mercurio's recording of Strauss's Metamorphosen and the latter's tone poem Death and Transfiguration with the Czech National Symphony Orchestra was recently released on the Audiophile Recordings label. As a composer, Maestro Mercurio's oeuvre includes songs, chamber works and pieces for large orchestra. His wide-ranging orchestral work For Lost Loved Ones was given its world premiere by Zubin Mehta and the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. Mercurio's Overture was performed in its world premiere by the Oslo Philharmonic at a concert for Médecins Sans Frontières honouring the Nobel Peace Prize-winners, broadcast live on television. Maestro Mercurio's symphony A Grateful Tail is based on American playwright Eugene O'Neill's Last Will and Testament of Silverdene Emblem O'Neill; the work was premiered in Prague in 2013.

Maestro Mercurio is an acclaimed and sought-after arranger and collaborator and has created arrangements for a wide range of performers across multiple genres including Sting and Chick Corea. Most recently, he served as arranger, conductor and producer for Andrea Bocelli's best-selling recording Believe. In 2022, he produced, arranged and conducted superstar crossover cellist Hauser's new recording for Sony Masterworks, The Player.



MARK BEBBINGTON

piano

Mark Bebbington is fast gaining a reputation as one of the UK's most strikingly individual pianists. ("Bebbington is without doubt one of Britain's finest pianists" – Michel Fleury in *Classica*). He is internationally recognised as a leading interpreter of British piano music, and has more than thirty admired recordings to his name.

Mark has recorded extensively for the Somm label to international critical acclaim, with no fewer than nine of his recent CDs awarded 5* by BBC Music Magazine. A 2018 release of concertos by Grieg and Delius with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra became 'CD of the Week' in *The Times* and *Mail on Sunday*. Mark's recordings for the Resonus label have also attracted huge praise, with his recent 'Poulenc: Volume 1' with the RPO being nominated for a Gramophone Award. His most recent recording — *A Bad Night In Los Angeles* featuring music by the contemporary British composer Robert Matthew-Walker for Somm — has been highly praised. His 2022 recording of music by Vaughan Williams, alongside the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra for Resonus Classics, has attracted some of the best reviews yet: an 'Unmissable Classical Album' (Gramophone).

Mark has toured extensively throughout Central and Northern Europe, the Middle East, Far East and North America, and has performed at major UK venues with the London Philharmonic, Philharmonia and Royal Philharmonic orchestras, the London Mozart Players, Orchestra of the Swan and BBC Concert Orchestra. As a recitalist, he makes regular appearances at major UK and international festivals.

In recent seasons, Mark has made his highly successful Carnegie Hall debut with the American Symphony Orchestra, twice toured Israel with the Israel Camerata Jerusalem, performed with the Buffalo Philharmonic and toured the UK with the Flanders Symphony, Janacek Philharmonic and Czech National Symphony orchestras. He has featured both as soloist and recitalist on BBC Television and Radio and also on major European Television and Radio networks. Recent and forthcoming performances include Mozart's Piano Concerto No.23 in the US with Orchestra Lumos (cond. Michael Stern), tours with the Czech National Symphony Orchestra and a return to Wigmore Hall.

Mark studied at the Royal College of Music where he was a recipient of numerous international awards and prizes, including a Leverhulme Scholarship, a Winston Churchill Fellowship and the Ivan Sutton Recording Prize – the latter awarded to the one outstanding graduate of the combined London Music Colleges. He later studied in Italy with the legendary Aldo Ciccolini.

Mark's programming demonstrates a commitment to the music of our time and he regularly includes contemporary composers as diverse as Takemitsu, Julian Anderson, John McCabe, David Matthews, Pierre Boulez and Elliot Carter in his recital series.

www.markbebbington.co.uk



CZECH NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA



Over the past 30 years the Czech National Symphony Orchestra has grown to become one of the leading Czech ensembles, currently ranking among the most highly sought-after orchestras in Europe. Its glowing reputation can be attributed to the members' versatility, performing a wide range of genres, spanning classical works, film music and jazz, as well as musicals, which attract large domestic and international audiences.

Notable conductors, composers and film directors who have been collaborating with the orchestra or who worked with them at concerts and in the CNSO Studio in Prague include Lalo Schifrin, Pino Donaggio, Giuliano Taviani, Danny Elfman, Hans Zimmer, James Newton Howard, Quentin Tarantino, Vince Mendoza, Giuseppe Tornatore, Carl Davis, Steven Mercurio, Marcello Rota, Vladimir Cosma, Christian Lindberg and Chick Corea.

We should also mention the valuable and long-standing collaboration the orchestra enjoyed with the legendary Ennio Morricone (1928-2020), involving studio recordings and a series of concerts performed on numerous European tours.

In the studio the orchestra has recorded a wealth of wonderful music, including a Christmas album with

acclaimed tenors Plácido Domingo and Vittorio Grigolo, as well as music for Tarantino's *Western The Hateful Eight*. On the strength of the aforementioned concert collaboration, the composer Ennio Morricone also booked the Czech National Symphony Orchestra for a recording, and they subsequently created a truly exceptional soundtrack together at London's famous Abbey Road studio. Morricone's music went on to pick up a number of awards, among them a Golden Globe, a BAFTA and an Oscar.

In recent years, artists to have performed on several occasions with the orchestra include Andrea Bocelli, Rolando Villazón, José Carreras, Plácido Domingo, Jonas Kaufmann, as well as Piotr Beczala, while in the field of pop music collaborations have included top names such as Sting, George Michael, Natalie Cole, Dianne Reeves, Angélique Kidjo, Denise Donatelli and Ute Lemper, along with instrumentalists James Morrison, Branford & Wynton Marsalis, Bobby Shew, Joe Lovano, John Abercrombie, John Patitucci, Dave Weckl, Chick Corea and many more.

Since 2005, the CNSO has organized the Prague Proms International Music Festival, and it is also its resident ensemble. In 2012, the Prague Proms o. p. s. agency took over the organization of the festival

directly. In addition to its subscription series the orchestra also travels abroad on international tours. Alongside almost all countries in Europe, the CNSO has performed in places as far flung as the United States, Japan, Australia, South Korea, China, Dubai, Oman, Canada and Mexico.

In the spring of 2016, the orchestra travelled on a tour of the United States, where (after a successful concert at the 2015 Prague Proms festival) it performed a spectacular show *Disney Fantasia: Live in Concert*.

2017 saw the orchestra head off on a month-long European tour with film composers Ennio Morricone and James Newton Howard.

2018 brought an interesting opportunity for the orchestra to tour Europe with the acclaimed musical *La La Land*, and notably, as part of the *Symphonic Cinema* project, they toured the UK for nearly two months, performing a programme of box-office Hollywood evergreens, conducted by Ben Palmer.

In 2019 the orchestra set off on a promising extended tour of the United States, however, at the beginning of 2020, it was forced to scale back its concert activities due to the global pandemic. Nevertheless, the ensemble responded quickly to the changing landscape by arranging its live performances online. The orchestra is currently launching its new internet platform *NetConcert*.

The CNSO's activities on the concert platform have now resumed their standard tempo. After accompanying Plácido Domingo at his performance in the Czech Republic during the summer of 2021, it accepted a collaboration with the world-famous writer and composer Dan Brown, performing his *Wild Symphony in Prague*.

The orchestra is currently based at the above-mentioned recording Studio No. 1, otherwise known as the "Gallery", where it has earned several gold CDs for the sale of more than 30,000 media, also the Gustav Mahler Prize for the interpretation of the composer's works and, in particular, prestigious contracts with IMG Artists in London and APM in New York.

A long-term recording project in cooperation with the Japanese publishing house JVC Victor Entertainment stands out as yet another significant achievement, so far resulting in fifty CDs and 8 DVDs.

The notional pinnacle for the CNSO was the Grammy Award it won in April 2022 in the category "Best Arrangement, Instruments and Vocals". The award was given for the composition *To The Edge of Longing* from Vince Mendoza's record *Freedom Over Everything*. Vince Mendoza was nominated twice for two different tracks from this album, which was recorded together with the Czech National Symphony Orchestra in the CNSO's Studio No. 1. Moreover, the orchestra's director Jan Hasenöhrl was also the initiator of the project and the record's producer.

Trumpet player Jan Hasenöhrl launched the Czech National Symphony Orchestra in 1993 together with legendary conductor Zdeněk Košler; the ensemble then enjoyed ten wonderful years under the direction of American conductor Paul Freeman (1996–2006).

From 2007 the orchestra was led by chief conductor Libor Pešek. This partnership was exceptional, whether they were working together in concert during their subscription series or on the five hugely successful tours around Great Britain. These concerts have earned the CNSO an enviable reputation with British audiences, and the orchestra regularly returns to the country.

One particularly noteworthy, historic achievement was the recording marathon undertaken between 2007 and 2017 when, led by Libor Pešek, the CNSO made a complete recording of Gustav Mahler's symphonies.

In the spring of 2019, following the departure of Libor Pešek, the post of conductor was assumed by American artist Steven Mercurio. This outstanding musician, a pupil of Leonard Bernstein, has been working with the orchestra for several years now, a collaboration that continues to deliver a number of exceptional projects.

ORCHESTRA LIST

VIOLIN 1

Heike Janicke
VIOLIN 1
Alexej Rosik
Martin Tupy
David Sroubek
Marzena Wysocka
Dmitrij Vecer
Meagan Slattery
Zdenek Ferenc
Jan Komisak
Tea Godec
Eduardo Garcia
Richard Valasek

VIOLIN 2

Zdenek Jirousek
Andrea Astrabova
Monika Grafova
Iva Prihonska
Igor Kačírek
Daniel Nagy
Martin Zyka
Hugo Hezel
David Vorac

VIOLA

Frantisek Jelinek
Zuzana Korenova
Miroslav Novotny
Blanka Karnetova
Zamora Hernandez
Irena Stranska

CELLO

Milos Jahoda
Martin Havelik
Olga Bilkova
Viktor Vondracek
Daniel Baran
David Kefer

DOUBLE BASS

Silvia Gerykova
Rastislav Sokol
Jaromir Gardon
Barbora Kovarova
Ondrej Marek

FLUTE

Michal Vojacek
Marie Janickova
Jozef Cibula Jr.

OBOE

Radek Mattus
Boldbaatar Tserennadmid
Dorota Jurikova

CLARINET

Lubomir Legemza
Dusan Mihely

BASSOON

Stepan Vicenec
Miroslav Cernohlavek

HORN

Ales Janousek
Pavel Chomoucky
Filip Spingl
Michala Sablikova

TRUMPET

Jan Hasenohrl
Jan Hykrda
Roman Kubat

TROMBONE

Michal Jasko
Jaroslav Venzara
Zdenek Thuma

TUBA

Jakub Manak

TIMPANI

Oleg Sokolov

PERCUSSION

Milan Dotlacil
Ema Komarkova

HARP

Mariana Jouzova

GUITAR

Lukas Chejn

ORCHESTRA STAFF

Lubomir Legemza Jr.
Petr Homola

IMG ARTISTS

Head of UK Touring
Mary Harrison

UK Tours Manager
Fiona Todd

UK Tours & Special Projects
Manager
Julia Smith

UK Touring Consultant
Andrew Jamieson

On-tour Management
Helen Fitzgerald
Alan Curtis

Mozart

Flanders Symphony Orchestra

Mozart Don Giovanni Overture
Beethoven Symphony No. 8
Mozart Requiem

Kristiina Poska Conductor
Soloists

Yena Choi

Kadi Jürgens

Denzil Delaere

Christian Immler

Sheffield Philharmonic Chorus

26 JUNE | 3pm

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