Czech Philharmonic

The 127 year-old Czech Philharmonic gave its first concert – an all Dvořák programme conducted by the composer himself - in the famed Rudolfinum Hall on 4 January 1896. Acknowledged for its definitive interpretations of Czech composers, the Orchestra is recognised for its special relationship to the music of Brahms, Tchaikovsky and Mahler, who conducted the world première of his Symphony No. 7 with the Orchestra in 1908.

The Czech Philharmonic's extraordinary and proud history reflects both its location at the very heart of Europe and the Czech Republic's turbulent political history, for which Smetana's *Má vlast* (My Homeland) has become a potent symbol. In 1945, Chief Conductor Rafael Kubelík conducted the work as a 'concert of thanks' for the newly liberated Czechoslovakia, similarly *Má vlast* was Kubelík's choice to mark Czechoslovakia's first free elections. In November 2020, Chief Conductor and Music Director Semyon Bychkov conducted the complete cycle with the Czech Philharmonic to launch a new annual Velvet Revolution concert series and mark the 30th anniversary of this historic moment. 2022's Velvet Revolution concert will be conducted by Sir Simon Rattle, who with Magdalena Kožená, is 2022-23 Artist-in-Residence.

Throughout the Czech Philharmonic's history, two features have remained at its core: its championing of Czech composers and its belief in music's power to change lives. Václav Talich (Chief Conductor 1919-1941) pioneered concerts for workers, young people and voluntary organisations as early as the 1920's.

The philosophy continues today and is equally vibrant. Alongside the Czech Philharmonic's Youth Orchestra, Orchestral Academy and Jiří Bělohlávek Prize for young musicians, a comprehensive education strategy engages with more than 400 schools bringing all ages to the Rudolfinum – some travelling as many as four hours - to hear concerts and participate in masterclasses. An inspirational music and song programme led by singer Ida Kelarová for the extensive Romany communities within the Czech Republic and Slovakia has helped many socially excluded families to find a voice. In addition to an annual education exchange with the Royal Academy of Music in London, over lockdown the Orchestra gave seven benefit concerts which were live streamed in 4K to international audiences, raising funds for hospitals, charities, and healthcare professionals.

An early champion of the music of Martinů and Janáček, the works of Czech composers - both established and new - remain the lifeblood of the Orchestra. Instigated by Semyon Bychkov at the start of his tenure, nine Czech composers and five international composers - Detlev Glanert, Julian Anderson, Thomas Larcher, Bryce Dessner and Thierry Escaich – wrote works to be premièred by the Orchestra; additionally, in 2014, the late Jiří Bělohlávek (Chief Conductor 2012-2017) launched an annual young composers' competition.

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