

Belgrade Philharmonic
Season 2021/22
We Have Really Missed You

Friday, April 15, 2022

Antonio Mendez
Alice Sara Ott, piano

Maurice Ravel
Alborada del gracioso

Duration: around 9 minutes

Maurice Ravel
Concerto in D major (for the left hand)

Duration: around 19 minutes

Sergei Prokofiev
Romeo and Juliet (selection from the suites Nos. 1, 2 and 3)

Montagues and Capulets
Juliet the Young Girl
Scene
Madrigal
Minuet
Masks
Romeo & Juliet (Balcony Scene and Love Scene)
Morning Dance
Romeo at the Fountain
Death of Tybalt
Friar Laurence
Dance of the Five Couples
Romeo at the Grave of Juliet
The Death of Juliet

Duration: around 50 minutes

Bedřich Smetana (1824-1884) composed a set of six symphonic poems between 1874 and 1879 united under the title *Má vlast* (*My Fatherland*). This collection is mostly treated as a single work of six movements, with the exception of the popular *Vltava* (*The Moldau*), which is usually performed and recorded as a separate composition. The individual compositions had their separate premieres in Prague between 1875 and 1880 and the collection of symphonic poems was first performed in its entirety, also in the Czech capital, on November 5, 1882.

In creating *My Fatherland*, Smetana combined the form of a symphonic poem modeled on Franz Liszt, with the ideals of national music that marked late Romanticism. Each of the six poems depicts one aspect of the natural beauty, history, or legends of Bohemia.

The second symphonic poem in the cycle, *Vltava*, was written in 1874 and performed in 1875. In it the author uses tone painting in order to evoke the sounds of this great river. The composition describes the river's course, starting from the Cold and Warm Vltava, to the unification of both streams into a single current, the Vltava, which passes through the different landscapes of Bohemia.

The oeuvre of **Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky** (1840-1893) contains only one orchestral work for violin, in addition to three concertos for piano and a Rococo variation for cello. Encouraged by the visit of his student and friend, violinist Iosif Kotek, during a vacation in the Swiss resort of Clarens on Lake Geneva, Tchaikovsky wrote the Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in D major, Op. 35 in less than a month and dedicated it to this artist. Somewhat later, realizing that Kotek's career was not impressive enough, he changed his dedication, this time to Leopold Auer, a renowned St. Petersburg violinist and pedagogue from whose class Heifetz and Milstein later emerged. However, Auer considered this work unplayable and the young Adolf Brodsky gladly accepted the final dedication, deeply believing in the success of the work. Auer later regretted his missed opportunity and performed the concert with pleasure. Almost three years after it was written, this work was premiered by the Vienna Philharmonic in 1881, under the baton of one of the most famous conductors of his time, Hans Richter and with Brodsky as soloist. Unfortunately, despite the good impression that the violinist left on the audience, its success was merely partial. Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick characterized the composition as long, pretentious, and even occasionally vulgar.

The first movement opens with a theme that would not appear in the further course of the music. Tchaikovsky applied a similar procedure for the beginning of the first movement of his Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in B minor. The movement's wide dimensions provided an opportunity for the composer to write a virtuoso solo section and a skillfully treated orchestral part. The transitions between the movements are composed like harmonic bridges. The melody of the second movement, *Canzonetta*, is full of lyrics and melancholy, in the spirit of the vocal tradition of Russian music folklore. The finale is a brilliant embroidery of a solo instrument in the spirit of a Cossack dance, which returns twice to the light tempo of the second movement. Reminiscences are short-lived with a quick return to the initial virtuosity.

A great friend and younger colleague of Johannes Brahms, **Antonín Dvořák** (1841-1904) spent much of his career in the United States, where his most significant works were written

- the Symphony *From the New World*, the String Quartet in F major, Op. 96 (*American Quartet*) and Second Concerto for Cello and Orchestra. A decade earlier, during the 1880s, Dvořák's career, which had developed only in his homeland, was on the rise. He was then considered as the leading Czech composer of his generation and began his international career. After Brahms' Seventh Symphony in D minor, in 1889, Dvořák began work on his Symphony No. 8 in G major, Op. 88 (originally considered the Fourth, because it was the fourth in a row), which was the culmination of his Czech period of work - the last work before leaving for New York. It is in the atmosphere in the joyful manner of Brahms' Second Symphony, as opposed to some of his other symphonies, such as the Seventh and Ninth. The eighth symphony was premiered by the composer at the Prague *Rudolfinum* in 1890, while its London premiere followed a few months later. Both performances brought undivided opinions of the audience and critics about their extraordinary success. The arrangement of the movements in the sonata cycle of this symphony points to the Fourth Symphony of Johannes Brahms, while some of the composer's works reach back to the past. The first movement in a strict sonata form with a pastoral first theme and a choral transition from one theme to another is in Beethoven's strong tradition, just like the posthumous march in the second movement, the scherzo with the trio in the third movement in waltz and trumpet fanfare beginning the finale. It returns to the major key after the internal minor movements (with endings in major) using a variation technique with thematic materials of the first (pastoral theme) and second movement. The length of each variation depends on the nature of the development material; even the fanfare signal is varied, and in the end the variation treatment of the initial theme of the first movement completes the form of the symphony.

Asja Radonjić, M. Sc.