

FLYING HIGH WITH LEGENDARY AVIATOR

Czech Orchestra to Celebrate Local Hero



Rubin Kodheli (US), Dennis Russell Davies (US AT), Laurie Anderson (US), Filharmonie Brno (CZ)

By Patrick Neas

In July 1937, aviator Amelia Earhart, born and raised in Atchison, Kansas, attempted to become the first woman to fly around the world. Among Earhart's many accomplishments, circumnavigating the globe was not to be one of them. She and navigator Fred Noonan disappeared over the central Pacific Ocean during the last leg of their epic journey. Eighty years after she was declared dead, Earhart continues to capture the public's imagination, perhaps now more than ever.

The Harriman-Jewell Series will celebrate the life and legend of this American hero when it presents Laurie Anderson's "Song for Amelia Earhart" with the Filharmonie Brno conducted by Dennis Russell Davies Feb. 18 at Helzberg Hall. Anderson herself will narrate and play violin.

"It's a fascinating project," said Clark Morris, executive and artistic director of the Harriman-Jewell Series. "'Songs for Amelia Earhart' with Laurie Anderson hits home for us because she's from this region. When you think of groundbreaking Americans, explorers and adventurers, certainly Amelia comes to mind. I think it's an appropriate project for us to present in Kansas City."

During the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918, Earhart was a nursing volunteer at a military hospital and heard pilots share their stories of adventure. In 1920, after expressing an interest in aviation to her father, the next day he bought her a \$10 ticket for a 10-minute flight. She was hooked. Earhart worked various jobs to raise money for flight lessons, and soon she cropped her hair, bought an aviation suit and a biplane she nicknamed

"The Canary." By 1928, she was a passenger with a pilot and co-pilot on a trans-Atlantic flight.

"I was just baggage, like a sack of potatoes," Earhart said in an interview. "Maybe someday I'll try it alone."

And indeed she did. In 1932, she made a transatlantic solo flight, marking her name indelibly in the history books.

"The piece involves journal entries that Amelia made and takes quotes from telegrams that she sent her husband," Morris said. "It imagines some of the conversations she would have had about trying to be the first woman to do a flight around the world."

Anderson is the perfect person to compose a work about Earhart. Anderson is an iconic figure in her own right. She is a performance artist, sculptor, violinist and composer. One of her first successes was the album "Big Science," which contained the single "O Superman" that reached number two on the U.K. charts.

"We've never presented Laurie Anderson before," Morris said. "She's also known as a groundbreaking artist and risk-taker."

This is also the first time the Series is presenting Filharmonie Brno, one of the finest orchestras in the Czech Republic. Dennis Russell Davies is one of America's most acclaimed conductors, noted especially for his performances of contemporary works.

Appropriately enough, two works by Czech composers are on the program: Dvořák's "Othello" Overture and Thunderbolt P47" by Bohuslav Martinů, a work inspired by a World War II American fighter plane.

"I'm anxious to hear it," Morris said. "I love that they've paired that work with the Laurie Anderson work, the idea of aviation and flight being the theme of both pieces."



PHOTO BY ANDREAS H. BITTESNICH

Laurie Anderson

Filharmonie Brno has previously performed this program in Europe to great success. In fact, its run in the Czech Republic was so popular that more performances had to be added. The little girl from Atchison is admired and celebrated not only in America but around the world.

"Amelia Earhart had an incredible spirit of adventure and challenged gender roles," Morris said. "Do we appreciate that more today? I hope so. Now we see female teenagers who sail around the world or do amazing feats. Amelia helped us see that a spirit of adventure and wanting to take on a challenge doesn't belong to just one gender."

Filharmonie Brno conducted by Dennis Russell Davies with special guest Laurie Anderson. 7 p.m. Feb. 18. Helzberg Hall, Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts.

For tickets and a complete listing of all concerts, go to hjseries.org.



Filharmonie Brno, one of the finest orchestras in the Czech Republic.