

**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2023 7:30 PM
NORTHRIDGE, THE SORAYA**

Filharmonie Brno
Dennis Russell Davies, Chief Conductor & Artistic Director

PROGRAM

Thunderbolt P-47, scherzo for orchestra H 309

Bohuslav Martinů

Taras Bulba, rhapsody for orchestra

Leoš Janáček

1. The Death of Andriy
2. The Death of Ostap
3. The Prophecy and Death of Taras Bulba

Intermission

Symphony No. 9 in E minor, Op. 95

Antonín Dvořák

1. Adagio. Allegro molto
2. Largo
3. Molto vivace
4. Allegro con fuoco

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Thunderbolt P-47, scherzo for orchestra H 309

BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ

Born December 8, 1890 in Polička, Czechoslovakia (now Czech Republic)

Died August 28, 1959 in Liestal, Switzerland

In 1923, Bohuslav Martinů received a grant from the Czechoslovak minister for education to study composition with Albert Roussel in Paris. He left his homeland, which he would visit occasionally but never returned to permanently. During World War II, Martinů fled occupied France at the last moment and spent several years in the United States. After 1948, when communists took power in Czechoslovakia, Martinů lived in France, Italy and then in Switzerland, where he died. In 1979, his remains were returned to his native Polička.

In the United States, Martinů was received as an established composer. He regularly won commissions for new works, was kept busy composing and in summer taught at prestigious courses of composition. Despite these successes, he watched the developments in Europe, and particularly in his homeland, with a heavy heart. Most of his works written during the war years testify to his dark feelings. He welcomed the end of the war, therefore, with all the more satisfaction, and doubtless with a longing to return home...

The brief piece *Thunderbolt P-47* can be seen as a quirky celebration of the end of the war. "For a long time I had intended to write a short piece for orchestra", said Martinů, "but I was always preoccupied with my symphonies—I have written four during my stay in America, that is to say, one each year. That is why I welcomed the suggestion of my friend Hans Kindler with pleasure for composing a short work. I had thought of writing some dances or scherzo and I chose the latter form. At the time we were with my wife [Charlotte] at South Orleans on Cape Cod where I had just finished my Fourth Symphony which was just recently premiered by the Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy on November 30 [1945]. I preserved the usual scherzo form with the trio and *da capo* and in September 1945 between swimming, fishing, and composing, I completed this work which I call *Thunderbolt—P-47*. The title was added after the completion of the music, for there is nothing descriptive in it, except for the animated movement which recalls the speed of the fighter planes which were continually flying over our heads at South Orleans and my private tribute to this type of plane which was of such assistance in ending this terrible war. The composition is dedicated to Hans Kindler".

Kindler premiered *Thunderbolt P-47* with the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington on 19 December 1945, but Martinů was not able to attend, as he was sick with flu.

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Taras Bulba, rhapsody for orchestra

LEOŠ JANÁČEK

Born July 3, 1854 in Hukvaldy, Austrian Empire (now Czech Republic)

Died August 12, 1928 in Moravská Ostrava, Czechoslovakia (now Czech Republic)

Although in terms of age Leoš Janáček is more part of Antonín Dvořák's generation, his music is some of the most expressive to be found in the 20th century, placing this composer among musicians two generations his junior. Janáček's life and work are closely connected with the city of Brno, where he lived from childhood and where his tireless work as a composer and organizer contributed greatly to the development of Brno's cultural life.

Janáček's works for orchestra are not very extensive in number and this is especially true for the composer's late, peak period. Janáček wrote his symphonic rhapsody *Taras Bulba*, based on Gogol's novella about the Cossack chieftain, in anticipation of the end of the First World War. The choice of a Russian subject was nothing new for Janáček, and his treatment of it here is likewise characteristic. The dramatic action of each of the work's three parts

culminates in the death of one of the Bulbas, a death whereby something is repaid or redeemed. In the first episode, Janáček's erotism, with its characteristically forceful accent of morality and fate, makes itself felt. From the moment of Andriy's first meeting with a beautiful Polish girl in the cathedral of Kiev, the erotic becomes a power to which everything else must submit and so the chieftain is left with no choice but to kill his own son, who betrayed his country because he could not betray his love.

The second movement is about nostalgia and anxiety: as Taras Bulba's first-born son, Ostap, dies in agony on the square in Warsaw, he is delivered from his terrible feeling of abandonment by the voice of his valiant father. The latter, in turn, is transformed from a rugged warrior into an almost prophetic leader in the final scene, which depicts his own death. Captured and tied to the stake, he continues to shout commands to his Cossacks, an embodiment of strength and invincibility. Janáček saved what is perhaps the loveliest of all his melodies for this moment. Repeated and spun round by the violins, it appears in the midst of the festive pealing and chorus-like magnificence of the final apotheosis as an immortal message of humanity.

It was first performed on 9 October 1921 by the orchestra of the National Theatre in Brno under the direction of František Neumann.

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Symphony No. 9 in E minor, Op. 95

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

Born September 8 1841 in Nelahozeves, Austrian Empire (now Czech Republic)

Died May 5, 1904 in Prague, Austrian Empire (now Czech Republic)

When Dennis Russell Davies joined the Filharmonie Brno as artistic director and chief conductor in fall 2018, one of the goals he set for himself was to perform and record all nine of Antonín Dvořák's symphonies. Davies included the composer's *Symphony No. 1 in C minor*, "The Bells of Zlonice," in the program of his inaugural concert as conductor in September 2018 (the recording was issued on CD in 2020), followed shortly after by a performance of *Symphony No. 9 in E minor*, "From the New World." The next year, in November 2019, Davies conducted *Symphony No. 6 in D major* in a series of concerts for subscribers at Brno's Besední dům—the live performance of the *Sixth Symphony* was presented on CD in 2022. The studio recording of the *Ninth Symphony* was released on CD in January 2023.

Antonín Dvořák began writing symphonies at an early age, and continued to do so nearly his entire creative life. His nine works in this musical form may thus be viewed as steps along a path toward a symphonic ideal, a path thorny in places, yet always inspiring, reaching its conclusion in *Symphony No. 9 in E minor*, "From the New World," the composition that Dvořák is most famous for. He wrote the work from January 10 to May 24, 1893, during the course of a three-year stay in the United States. Its premiere, which took place December 16 of that same year in New York, in a performance conducted by Anton Seidl, was the harbinger of Dvořák's worldwide success, undiminished to this day. The first concert of the *New World Symphony* in the Old World was in London, in June 1894. Its first performance on Czech soil was in Karlovy Vary one month later, and the Prague premiere took place October 13, 1894, at the National Theater, under the direction of the composer himself.

In a sense, Dvořák's *Ninth Symphony* represents the synthesis of all he had achieved in his symphonies up to that point. Reams of paper have been consumed by observers from a multiplicity of viewpoints, describing and debating the direct or presumed influences on the composer, both musical (e.g., the use of pentatonic scales so characteristic of African American music) and nonmusical (e.g., his inspiration from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's epic poem *The Song of Hiawatha* in the second, Largo, movement). Whether the individual interpretations contradict or complement one another, on one point they all agree: in terms of both form and content, the *New World Symphony* is a work of perfection, drawing on a spirited combination of African American and (Dvořákesque) Czech elements, connecting the thematic

links between the movements in masterly fashion to produce an organized and well-balanced whole.

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