

**MONDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2023 7:30 PM
SANTA BARBARA, GRANADA THEATRE**

Filharmonie Brno
Dennis Russell Davies, Chief Conductor & Artistic Director

PROGRAM

Sinfonietta “La Jolla” for chamber orchestra, H 328

Bohuslav Martinů

1. Poco allegro
2. Largo – Andante moderato
3. Allegro

Maki Namekawa, piano obligato

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. 6 in D major, Op. 60

Antonín Dvořák

1. Allegro non tanto
2. Adagio
3. Scherzo (Furiant)
4. Finale: Allegro con spirito

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Sinfonietta “La Jolla” for chamber orchestra, H 328

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...

Sinfonietta La Jolla for Piano and Orchestra, H 328 of 1950 marked Bohuslav Martinů's last return to the Neoclassicist style. Neoclassicism appeared in his compositions in the 1930s (*Serenade for Chamber Orchestra*, H 199, 1930) and it again influenced his composition in the early 1940s (*Trio for Flute, Cello and Piano*, H 300, 1944). In *La Jolla* one can feel Martinů's admiration for Haydn, which he expressed a year later in his *Sinfonia concertante No. 2*, H 322 (1949), scored for the same ensemble and written in the same main key as Haydn's eponymous composition of 1792. Neoclassicist musical language is apparent also in the harmonic aspects of the composition, the thematic work, and above all the construction of planes of a non-expositional character which are often filled by mere color figurations. The simplicity and purity of expression and transparent rendering also enhance the classicist spirit of the piece. As well, however, it is impossible to ignore Martinů's experience from composing five symphonies, which he primarily draws on for thematic material. The introductory movement contains references to the main theme of the final movement of Martinů's *Fifth Symphony*, H 310, which utilizes the Moravian folk song *Bolavá hlavěnka* (My Head is Aching). After all, the source of inspiration in Czech and Moravian folk songs is also apparent in other works from Martinů's "American" period. The second movement is a typical slow middle movement, the moodiness of which is a contrast to both joyous allegro movements. In most sections the movement is scored only for the group of strings with piano; in one section the piano is replaced by the solo flute. An episode scored for strings also appears shortly before the end of the third movement.

In *La Jolla* the piano does not play the role of a solo instrument. It is seen, rather, as an obligatory piano, conceived of as an important, different color element, fully integrated into the orchestral structure. The original autograph does not bear the current title "Sinfonietta La Jolla for Piano and Orchestra", but only "for Chamber Orchestra". The piece was named after a neighborhood near the Mexican border, whose Music Society commissioned the composition.

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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 eroticism, 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. 6 in D major, Op. 60

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 rise of Antonín Dvořák to international fame began in the late 1870s, when Berlin music publisher Fritz Simrock decided to issue the Czech composer's *Moravian Duets*. Encouraged by the *Duets'* enthusiastic reception, Simrock next commissioned Dvořák to write the first of his *Slavonic Dances*, which proceeded to take Europe by storm. In November 1879, the Vienna Philharmonic performed Dvořák's *Slavonic Rhapsody No. 3*; it was most likely this concert that spurred chief conductor Hans Richter to request that Dvořák write an innovative orchestral work for the ensemble. Dvořák's *Symphony No. 6 in D major*—long known as No. 1, since it was the first of his symphonies to be published (also with Simrock)—was stunningly composed in a mere seven weeks during the fall of 1880. Although no longer as popular as his three subsequent symphonies, it may rightly be viewed as a breakthrough work for the composer.

Dvořák's *Sixth Symphony* is often referenced in connection with Brahms's *Second Symphony*, written three years earlier. One reason for this is that the two composers formed a close friendship right around the time when Dvořák wrote his work (in fact Brahms paid a visit to the Czech composer and his wife and children in Prague not long before). Not to mention that Brahms—along with leading Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick, a fervent promoter of both Brahms's and Dvořák's music—had advocated for Simrock to publish his friend. Yet the comparison seems apt for purely musical reasons as well: the opening and closing movements in both works share the same key, meter, tempo markings, orchestration, and mood.

The *Sixth Symphony* represents the synthesis and culmination of Dvořák's "Slavic" or "Slavonic" period. Steeped in the colorings of Czech folk music, which can already be heard radiating from the principal themes and momentous passages of the first movement, the composition then moves into the broad-sweeping cantilena of the nocturne Adagio and climaxes in the unbridled Scherzo of a stylized furiant, whose ebullient whirl of rhythms is calmed momentarily by a contrasting Trio. The final movement underscores the optimistic mood of the work as a whole, attesting to the composer's ingenuity in building minor motifs into a monument, which culminates in the spectacular hymnlike conclusion as a celebration of life. The premiere of the symphony took place on March 25, 1881, in Prague's Žofín concert hall.

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