



Semyon Bychkov

Chief Conductor and Music Director

"That this is the first instalment in a projected Mahler symphony cycle from Bychkov, a conductor with an unimpeachable feel for exquisitely proportioned, emotionally acute interpretations, bodes more than well for what is to follow. It carries itself with the invigorating sense that Bychkov 'gets' Mahler in all his contrary multitudes and is hungry for more..."

Limelight, June 2022

Celebrating both his fifth season as Chief Conductor and Music Director of the Czech Philharmonic and his 70th birthday, Semyon Bychkov will celebrate his birthday with three concerts in November pairing Beethoven's Fifth with Shostakovich's Fifth. The season opened in Prague with the official concert to mark the Czech Republic's Presidency of the EU and continued with concert performances of Dvořák's *Rusalka* as part of the Dvořák Prague International Music Festival. Later in the season, Bychkov will conduct *Rusalka* at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

Bychkov's inaugural season with the Czech Philharmonic was celebrated with an international tour that took the Orchestra from performances at home in Prague to concerts in London, New York, and Washington. The following year saw the culmination of *The Tchaikovsky Project* – the release of a 7-CD box set devoted to Tchaikovsky's symphonic repertoire and a series of international residencies. Bychkov also instigated the commissioning of 14 new works to be premièred by the Orchestra over subsequent seasons. On 28 September, the Czech Philharmonic announced the extension of Bychkov's contract until 2028.

In the past two seasons, the focus of Bychkov's work with the Czech Philharmonic has turned to the music of Gustav Mahler with performances of the symphonies at the Rudofinum, on tour and ultimately on disc. This season, the Orchestra will tour extensively featuring symphonies by Mahler at the Edinburgh International Festival, Leipzig's Gewandhaus Mahler Festival, and in Paris, Luxembourg, Graz, Vienna, Budapest and Milan. PENTATONE's complete Mahler cycle with Bychkov and the Czech Philharmonic launched in spring 2022 with Mahler's Symphony No. 4 and continues this autumn with the release of Mahler's Symphony No. 5.

Especially recognised for his interpretations of the core repertoire, Bychkov also worked closely with many extraordinary contemporary composers including Luciano Berio, Henri Dutilleux and Maurizio Kagel. More recent collaborations include those with Julian Anderson, Bryce Dessner, Detlev Glanert and Thomas Larcher whose works he has premièred with the Czech Philharmonic, and with the Vienna, Berlin, New York and Munich Philharmonic Orchestras, Concertgebouworkest and the BBC Symphony Orchestra.

In common with the Czech Philharmonic, Bychkov has one foot firmly in the culture of the East and the other in the West. Born in St Petersburg in 1952, Bychkov emigrated to the United States in 1975 and has lived in Europe since the mid-1980's. Singled out for an extraordinarily privileged musical education from the age of 5, Bychkov studied piano before winning his place at the Glinka Choir School where, aged 13, he received his first lesson in conducting. He was 17 when he was accepted at the Leningrad Conservatory to study with the legendary Ilya Musin and, within three years had won the influential Rachmaninov Conducting Competition. Denied his prize of conducting the Leningrad Philharmonic, Bychkov left the former Soviet Union.

By the time Bychkov returned to St Petersburg in 1989 as the Philharmonic's Principal Guest Conductor, he had enjoyed success in the US as Music Director of the Grand Rapids Symphony Orchestra and the Buffalo Philharmonic. His international career, which began in France with Opéra de Lyon and at the Aix-en-Provence Festival, took off with a series of high-profile cancellations which resulted in invitations to conduct the New York and Berlin Philharmonic Orchestras and the Concertgebouworkest. In 1989, he was named Music Director of the Orchestre de Paris; in 1997, Chief Conductor of the



WDR Symphony Orchestra Cologne; and the following year, Chief Conductor of the Dresden Semperoper.

Bychkov's symphonic and operatic repertoire is wide-ranging. He conducts in all the major opera houses including La Scala, Opéra national de Paris, Dresden Semperoper, Wiener Staatsoper, New York's Metropolitan Opera, the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden and Teatro Real, Madrid. While Principal Guest Conductor of Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, his productions of Janáček's *Jenůfa*, Schubert's *Fierrabras*, Puccini's *La bohème*, Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* and Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* each won the prestigious *Premio Abbiati*. New productions in Vienna have included Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Daphne*, Wagner's *Lohengrin* and *Parsifal*, and Mussorgsky's *Khovanshchina*; while in London, he made his operatic debut with a new production of Strauss' *Elektra*, and subsequently conducted new productions of Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, Strauss' *Die Frau ohne Schatten* and Wagner's *Tannhäuser*. Recent productions include Wagner's *Parsifal* at the Bayreuth Festival and Strauss's *Elektra* at the Wiener Staatsoper. This season in addition to Dvořák's *Rusalka* in London, he will conduct Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* at Teatro Real in Madrid.

On the concert platform, the combination of innate musicality and rigorous Russian pedagogy has ensured that Bychkov's performances are highly anticipated. In the UK, in addition to regular performances with the London Symphony Orchestra, his honorary titles at the Royal Academy of Music and the BBC Symphony Orchestra - with whom he appears annually at the BBC Proms - reflect the warmth of the relationships. In Europe, he tours with the Concertgebouworkest and Munich Philharmonic, as well as being a frequent guest of the Vienna and Berlin Philharmonics, the Leipzig Gewandhaus, the Orchestre National de France and the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia; in the US, he can be heard with the New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony, Los Angeles Symphony, Philadelphia and Cleveland Orchestras.

Bychkov made extensive recordings for Philips with the Berlin Philharmonic, Bavarian Radio, Concertgebouworkest, Philharmonia, London Philharmonic and Orchestre de Paris. His 13-year collaboration (1997-2010) with WDR Symphony Orchestra Cologne produced a series of benchmark recordings that included works by Strauss (*Elektra*, *Daphne*, *Ein Heldenleben*, *Metamorphosen*, *Alpensinfonie*, *Till Eulenspiegel*), Mahler (Symphony No. 3, *Das Lied von der Erde*), Shostakovich (Symphony Nos. 4, 7, 8, 10, 11), Rachmaninov (*The Bells*, *Symphonic Dances*, Symphony No. 2), Verdi (*Requiem*), a complete cycle of Brahms Symphonies, and works by Detlev Glanert and York Höller. His recording of Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* was recommended by BBC's Radio 3's Building a Library (2020); Wagner's *Lohengrin* was BBC Music Magazine's Record of the Year (2010); and Schmidt's Symphony No. 2 with the Vienna Philharmonic was BBC Music Magazine's Record of the Month (2018). Of *The Tchaikovsky Project* released in 2019, BBC Music Magazine wrote, "*The most beautiful orchestra playing imaginable can be heard on Semyon Bychkov's 2017 recording with the Czech Philharmonic, in which Decca's state-of-the art recording captures every detail.*"

In 2015, Semyon Bychkov was named Conductor of the Year by the International Opera Awards. He received an Honorary Doctorate from the Royal Academy of Music in July 2022.

Bychkov was one of the first musicians to express his position on the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, since when he has spoken in support of Ukraine in Prague's Wenceslas Square; on radio and television in the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Austria, the UK and the USA; written [By Invitation](#) for The Economist; and appeared as a guest [on BBC World's HARDtalk](#).

September 2022