

*“With Semyon Bychkov at its head and Simon Rattle as principal guest conductor, the Czech Philharmonic is assured of being in the international spotlight it deserves.”*

Richard Fairman, The Financial Times, 28 February 2024

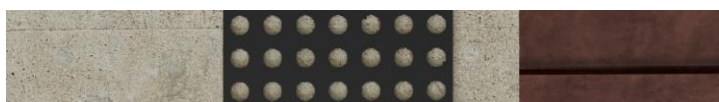
On 4 January 1896, the 129-year-old Czech Philharmonic gave its first concert in the famed Rudolfinum Hall in the heart of Prague. Conducted by Antonín Dvořák, the programme featured the world premiere of his Biblical Songs Nos. 1–5. Renowned for its definitive interpretations of the Czech repertoire, the orchestra also has a special relationship to the music of Brahms and Tchaikovsky – both friends of Dvořák – and to Mahler who in 1908 conducted the world premiere of his Symphony No. 7 with the Czech Philharmonic.

As festivals, orchestras and presenters across the Czech Republic and Europe mark 2024 as Year of Czech Music with performances of rarely played Czech repertoire together with popular favourites, conductor Charles Dutotit and the Czech Philharmonic open the 129th season with two performances of Dvořák’s Piano Concerto paired with Berlioz’s *Symphonie fantastique*. The soloist, Daniil Trifinov, is one of three soloists who will join the orchestra in New York in December 2024 as part of the Czech Week at Carnegie Hall. The orchestra will bring three programmes to New York which, in addition to the Piano Concerto, will feature Dvořák’s Cello Concerto with Yo-Yo Ma, and the Violin Concerto with Gil Shaham. The concertos will be paired with Mahler’s Symphony No. 5, three poems from Smetana’s *Má vlast* and Janáček’s *Glagolitic Mass* for which they will be joined by the Prague Philharmonic Choir.

During 2024’s Year of Czech Music, Jakub Hrůša, the Czech Philharmonic’s Principal Guest Conductor, will lead the orchestra in less familiar works by Pavel Zemek Novák, Vladimír Sommer, Josef Suk, and Luboš Fišer. Hrůša will also tour with the Czech Philharmonic to summer festivals including Elbphilharmonie Summer, Lucerne Festival, Rheingau Musik Festival, and the BBC Proms. Sir Simon Rattle, recently named Principal Guest Conductor of the Czech Philharmonic, will conduct Dvořák’s *Slavonic Dances* and Janáček’s *Glagolitic Mass* as well as performances of Kurt Weill’s opera *The Seven Deadly Sins*. Returning to the orchestra during the 2024/2025 season are Tomáš Netopil, Giovanni Antonini, Ingo Metzmacher, Alain Altinoglu, and James Gaffigan, while Nathalie Stutzmann, Alan Gilbert, and Lukáš Vasilek will be making their debuts with the orchestra.

Over recent seasons, the focus of Semyon Bychkov’s work with the orchestra has turned to Mahler and a new complete symphonic cycle for PENTATONE. The first two discs in the cycle, Mahler’s Symphony No. 4 and No. 5 were released in 2022, followed in 2023 by Symphonies No. 2 “Resurrection” and No. 1. Semyon Bychkov will follow up on his recent performance of Mahler’s Third Symphony with the Fifth and Eighth in our 2024/2025 season. Fifty years after the death of Dmitri Shostakovich, Bychkov will feature Shostakovich’s Cello Concerto and Symphony No. 5 on tour to Vienna, Amsterdam, London, Paris, and Bruges. Other major works conducted by Bychkov this season include Brahms Symphony No. 2, Schubert Symphony No. 2, Bach Mass in B minor, and Beethoven Symphony No. 2. Mahler, who gave the world premiere of his Symphony No. 7 with the Czech Philharmonic in 1908, was not the first composer of renown to conduct the Czech Philharmonic. Edward Grieg conducted the orchestra in 1906; Stravinsky performed his *Capriccio* for Piano and Orchestra under Václav Talich in 1930; Leonard Bernstein conducted the European premiere of Aaron Copland’s Symphony No. 3 at the Prague Spring in 1947; Arthur Honegger conducted a concert of his own music in 1949; Darius Milhaud gave the premiere of his *Music for Prague* at the Prague Spring Festival in 1966; and, in 1996, Krzysztof Penderecki conducted the premiere of his *Concerto for Clarinet and Chamber Orchestra*.

Their names are joined by the many luminaries who have collaborated with the orchestra over the years: Martha Argerich, Claudio Arrau, Evgeny Kissin, Erich Kleiber, Leonid Kogan, Erich Leinsdorf, Lovro von Matačić, Ivan Moravec, Yevgeny Mravinsky, David Oistrakh, Antonio Pedrotti, Sviatoslav Richter, Mstislav Rostropovich, Gennady Roszhdestvensky, Wolfgang Sawallisch, Wolfgang Schneiderhan, Georg Szell, Henryk Szeryng, Bruno Walter, and Alexander Zemlinsky. The Czech Philharmonic’s extraordinary and proud history reflects both its location at the very heart of Europe and Czech Republic’s turbulent political history, for which Smetana’s *Má vlast* (My Country) is a potent symbol. The orchestra gave its first full rendition of *Má vlast* in 1901; in 1925 under Chief Conductor Václav Talich, *Má vlast* was the orchestra’s first live broadcast and, five years later, it was the first work that the orchestra committed to disc. During the Nazi occupation, when Goebbels demanded that the orchestra perform in Berlin and Dresden, Talich programmed *Má vlast* as an act of defiance, while in 1945 Rafael Kubelík conducted the work as a concert of thanks for the newly liberated Czechoslovakia. In 1990, *Má vlast* was Kubelík’s choice to mark Czechoslovakia’s first free elections, a historic event which was recognised 30 years later when Bychkov chose the occasion of the first Velvet Revolution concert to perform the complete cycle at the Rudolfinum. The orchestra marked the 200th anniversary of Smetana’s birth with the release of *Má vlast* conducted by Bychkov.



An early champion of Martinů's music, the Czech Philharmonic premiered his Czech Rhapsody in 1919 and its detailed inventory of Czech music undertaken by Václav Talich included the world premieres of Martinů's Half-Time (1924), Janáček's Sinfonietta (1926) and the Prague premiere of Janáček's Taras Bulba (1924). Rafael Kubelík was also an advocate of Martinů's music and premiered his Field Mass (1946) and Symphony No. 5 (1947), while Karel Ančerl conducted the premiere of Martinů's Symphony No. 6 Fantaisies symphoniques (1956). Martinů's Rhapsody Concerto performed by Antoine Tamestit will be included in 2024's Velvet Revolution Concert. Throughout the Czech Philharmonic's history, two features have remained at its core: its championing of Czech composers and its belief in music's power to change lives. Defined from its inauguration as an organisation for the enhancement of musical art in Prague, and a pension organisation for the members of the National Theatre Orchestra in Prague, its widows and orphans, the proceeds from the four concerts that it performed each year helped to support members of the orchestra who could no longer play and the immediate family of deceased musicians. As early as the 1920's, Václav Talich (Chief Conductor 1919 – 1941) pioneered concerts for workers, young people and other voluntary organisations including the Red Cross, the Czechoslovak Sokol and the Union of Slavic Women, and in 1923 gave three benefit concerts for Russian, Austrian, and German players including members of the Vienna and Berlin Philharmonic Orchestras. The philosophy is equally vibrant today. Alongside the Czech Philharmonic Youth Orchestra, Orchestral Academy, and Jiří Bělohlávek Prize for young musicians, a comprehensive education strategy engages with more than 400 schools. An inspirational music and song programme led by singer Ida Kedarová for the extensive Romany communities within the Czech Republic and Slovakia has helped many socially excluded families to find a voice. As part of the Carnegie Hall residency in December 2024, four members of the Czech Philharmonic's Orchestral Academy will travel to New York where they will join forces with four young musicians from the Carnegie Hall and four students from the Royal Academy of Music. The initiative is supported by the Semyon Bychkov Educational Enhancement Fund.

*"I have commented on several occasions on the beauty, solidity and special personality of the sound of this magnificent orchestra."*

Rafael Ortega Basagoiti, Scherzo, October 2024

