

## SEMYON BYCHKOV

### Chief Conductor and Music Director

*"In Mahler's massive Symphony No. 2, Mr. Bychkov worked something close to magic, completing slight rhythmic and sonic shifts that conveyed exponential changes in mood without losing focus or suggesting fussiness. The huge string choirs varied their sound bracingly, from dense earthiness to gossamer. And the brasses produced a warm, coppery hue... Often, this music flags under its own weight, leaving audiences impatient for the choral finale and its cries of immortal life. Not this time. If anything, those elegiac spasms seemed to arrive too soon."*

Wall Street Journal

In the 2023/2024 season, Semyon Bychkov's programmes centred on Dvořák's last three symphonies, the concertos for piano, violin and cello, and three overtures: In Nature's Realm, Carnival Overture, and Othello. In addition to conducting at Prague's Rudolfinum, Bychkov and the Czech Philharmonic took the all Dvořák programmes to Korea and across Japan with three concerts at Tokyo's famed Suntory Hall. Later, in spring, an extensive European tour took the programmes to Spain, Austria, Germany, Belgium, and France and, at the end of year, the Year of Czech Music 2024 will culminate with three concerts at Carnegie Hall in New York. As well as featuring Dvořák's concertos for piano, violin and cello, the programmes will include three poems from Smetana's *Má vlast*, Mahler's Symphony No. 5 and Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass* for which the orchestra will be joined by the Prague Philharmonic Choir.

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 completion of The Tchaikovsky Project – the release of a 7-CD box set devoted to Tchaikovsky's symphonic repertoire – and a series of international residencies. In his first season with the Czech Philharmonic, Bychkov also instigated the commissioning of 14 new works which have subsequently been premiered by the Czech Philharmonic and performed by orchestras across Europe and in the United States.

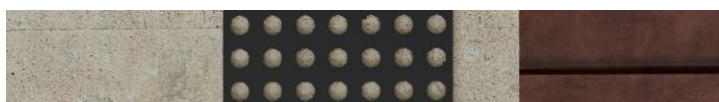
As well as the focus on Dvořák's music, Bychkov and the Czech Philharmonic are exploring the symphonies of Mahler as part of PENTATONE's ongoing complete Mahler cycle. The first symphonies in the cycle – Symphony No. 4 and Symphony No. 5 were released in 2022, followed in 2023 by Symphony No. 1 and Symphony No. 2 "Resurrection". Last season's highlights included performances of Mahler's Third Symphony in Prague and Baden-Baden, and during the 2024/2025 season, Bychkov will conduct Mahler's Symphony No. 5 with the orchestra in Prague, New York, and Toronto, and Symphony No. 8 in Prague.

While especially recognised for his interpretations of the core repertoire, Bychkov has built strong and lasting relationships 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, Thierry Escaich, and Thomas Larcher whose works he has premiered with the Czech Philharmonic, as well as with the Concertgebouworkest, the Vienna, Berlin, New York and Munich Philharmonic Orchestras, Cleveland Orchestra, and the BBC Symphony Orchestra.

In common with the Czech Philharmonic, Bychkov has one foot firmly in the culture of the East and one 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-1980s. Singled out at the age of five for an extraordinarily privileged musical education, 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 won the influential Rachmaninoff Conducting Competition. Bychkov left the former Soviet Union when he was denied the prize of conducting the Leningrad Philharmonic.

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 in 1998, 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. 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. In Vienna, he has conducted new productions of Strauss' *Daphne*, Wagner's *Lohengrin* and *Parsifal*, and Mussorgsky's *Khovanshchina*, as well as revivals of Strauss' *Elektra* and Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*; 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, Strauss' *Elektra* and Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* in Madrid. He returned to Bayreuth to conduct a new production of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* in summer 2024.

Bychkov's combination of innate musicality and rigorous Russian pedagogy has ensured that his performances are highly anticipated. In the UK, the warmth of his relationships is reflected in honorary titles at the Royal Academy of Music and the BBC Symphony Orchestra – with whom he appears annually at the BBC Proms. In Europe, he tours with the Concertgebouworkest and Munich Philharmonic, as well as being a guest of the Vienna and Berlin Philharmonics, the Leipzig Gewandhaus, the Orchestre National de France, and Orchestra dell'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 has recorded extensively 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 (*Symphonies No. 3*, *Das Lied von der Erde*), Shostakovich (*Symphony Nos. 4, 7, 8, 10, 11*), Rachmaninoff (*The Bells*, *Symphonic Dances*, *Symphony No. 2*), Verdi (*Requiem*), a complete cycle of Brahms *Symphonies*, and works by Detlev Glanert and York Höller. His 1992 recording of Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* with the Orchestre de Paris 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 and the award for *Conductor of the Year* from Musical America in October 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 the 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*.

