



Czech Philharmonic

Performances with Semyon Bychkov Czech Repertoire

"After the death of the orchestra's chief conductor Jiří Bělohlávek, the management of the Czech Philharmonic was faced with a difficult question: whom would they choose in place of that irreplaceable person? Management and the players were in agreement: it would be Semyon Bychkov, who is enormously experienced with orchestras around the world, an acclaimed opera conductor, and above all a superb musician and a demanding professional who is a guarantee that the quality of the leading Czech orchestra will not fade. But what good would there be in high standards and professionalism without empathy, kindness, and a deeply humane approach to the orchestral players? That fact that Semyon Bychkov has these qualities in abundance will perhaps be clear even just from the interview that follows."

OperaPlus, 28 November 2017

Although the opening concert of the Czech Philharmonic's new season is still a week away, the orchestra's new Chief Conductor and Music Director Semyon Bychkov introduced himself for the first time in that position on Wednesday to a completely packed Dvořák Hall at the Rudolfinum. The concert for the 100th anniversary of the founding of Czechoslovakia was the best opportunity to show how the foreign chief conductor – a native of Russia who emigrated to the West in 1975 – will fare in the Czech repertoire for which the Czech Philharmonic is primarily known. The public's enthusiasm and the encores showed that Bychkov is equally "at home" interpreting Czech classics, which represent the core of the orchestra's repertoire. Followed the Czech national anthem, he conducted works by Bedřich Smetana, Antonín Dvořák and Bohuslav Martinů with reverence but still in his own way, and the result was remarkable...

Novinky, 4 October 2018

DVOŘÁK *Carnival Overture*

Summer Festivals – Edinburgh, San Sebastián & Santander, August 2022

From the *Carnival Overture*, the Orchestra sounded powerful and noble as well as precise and committed.

ConcertoNet, 31 August 2022

Dvořák's ebullient, glittering, life-affirming 'Carnival Overture', always a great concert-opener, received the full Czech Phil treatment, confirming yet again their status as definitive performers of Czech orchestral music. The shimmering central section with its hauntingly beautiful clarinet solo was utterly magical, while the pyrotechnics of the closing pages were as exuberantly joyous as I've heard, confirming that Bychkov's partnership with the orchestra as Music Director since 2018 continues to be a happy and fruitful one.

Edinburgh Music Review, 24 August 2022

The moment the Czech Philharmonic begins to play, you recognize that special warmth that so many central European orchestras have, plus have a particular flair for the folk strain that runs through Czech music, and a feeling for nature that can often be sunny but can quickly turn dark as well. All of this shone out in the opening *Carnival Overture*.

The Daily Telegraph, 22 August 2022

The first of its two concerts began with Dvorak's *Carnival Overture*, the conductor's precise beat urging the strings on from the start, the eight double basses making a superb contribution alongside the bass trombone and tuba, on what was a grand night for fans of crisp brass playing.

The Herald Scotland, 21 August 2022

It was a joyful, muscular, big-boned start to the two concert EIF residency from the Czech Philharmonic and its chief conductor Semyon Bychkov. And it would be hard to imagine a more authentic one, either, than its all-Czech programme... The Czech musicians could probably have played Bychkov's opener, Dvořák's *Carnival Overture*, in their sleep, but he goaded them into a jubilant, dazzling account all the same. An unforgettable, spirit-raising evening.

The Scotsman, 21 August 2022

First up was Dvořák's *Carnival Overture*, here light and frothy, more a French soufflé than a Slavic dumpling. Delicious melody oozed from the strings before being passed over to the wind, finishing with a swagger to a joyful conclusion.

The List, 21 August 2022



Saturday's began in appropriately celebratory style with Dvořák's *Carnival Overture*, as fine a statement of the relationship between Chief Conductor Semyon Bychkov and the musicians as you might wish – huge forces making an immediate impact with precision playing.

Vox Carnyx, 21 August 2022

DVOŘÁK Cello Concerto

Opening of Dvořák Prague International Music Festival – September 2020

New York, East Lansing, Ann Arbor – October-November 2018

All in all: we heard Dvořák's Cello Concerto in a brilliant interpretation from both the soloists and the orchestra.

OperaPlus, 6 September 2020

On Oct 30, one of the world's greatest conductors, Semyon Bychkov, and the Czech Philharmonic came to the Wharton Center to play music that courses through their veins — Antonin Dvořák's Cello Concerto and "New World" Symphony. The music-making was grand, delicate, precise and passionate, and it was a homecoming of sorts for Bychkov, who led the Grand Rapids symphony from 1980, when he was fresh out of school, to 1985.

Lansing City Pulse, 27 December 2018

The Cello Concerto was the most consistent and stunning performance of the night (in Ann Arbor)... From the bold opening moments of the first movement to the triumphant conclusion of the unexpectedly slow finale, this was a masterful performance by an Orchestra in prime performance.

Michigan Daily, 4 November 2018

What does it mean when on the 100th anniversary of a country's independence is national orchestra is thousands of miles from home performing for strangers? Well, one thing it suggests is that the ensemble has ambitions beyond its borders. And if that orchestra happens to be the Czech Philharmonic – whose compatriots celebrated their nation's centenary on Sunday – those aspirations are legitimate... the conductor and Orchestra did not disappoint (in Dvořák's Cello Concerto at Carnegie Hall). Mr. Bychkov has always been a detail man. Here, he supervised delicate balances between the woodwinds and brasses, ensuring that various instrumental voices could be heard without strain. And the group's ability to chart subtly a vast dynamic expanse was all the more gratifying because of the generally brawny nature of its sound. Not that elegance was lacking in either the concerto or in Dvořák's sublime Symphony No. 7, whose dance-like third movement benefited hugely from the feathery string tones Mr. Bychkov elicited... Deep feeling was conveyed solely through musical excellence and restraint.

Wall Street Journal, 31 October 2018

Mr. Bychkov was quick to establish the robust sound of this Orchestra, with fat horns and sonorous heavy brass that in turn supported a lush and rolling carpet of sounds (in Dvořák's Cello Concerto at Carnegie Hall).

Super-Conductor, 30 October 2018

With Maestro Bychkov, and an Orchestra that has Dvořák in their bones, this was a performance (Dvořák's Cello Concerto at Carnegie Hall) from all that could not be improved...

Oberon's Grove, 29 October 2018

Bychkov and the Czech players were warmly supportive throughout (of Alisa Weilerstein in Dvořák's Cello Concerto), providing a wonderfully refined introduction (in New York). The clarinets were especially impressive in the opening theme, as were the flutes in the cadenza-like section of the Adagio. The Finale was full of enthusiasm, and the melancholic slow episode, just before the close, was touchingly handled...

Classical Source, 27 October 2018

DVOŘÁK Symphony No. 7

Prague, London, New York, Washington, Costa Mesa, San Francisco – October-November 2018

Czech Philharmonic weaves Czech magic over Davies Hall. The venerable Czech Philharmonic came to Davies Symphony Hall again last night, with a simple program. In the splendid execution of the concert, however, the event became simply grand. Returning after successful appearances here in 2000 and 2003, the orchestra had its biggest night... In addition to the Philharmonic's sensational string sections (in Dvořák's Seventh Symphony) (violins and basses especially shining in the Allegro, cellos have their way in the finale), woodwinds and brass joined in the grand oceanic sweeps of the music brilliant. Many memorable orchestral solos included the horns and oboes.

San Francisco Classical Voice, 12 November 2018

Bychkov and the Czech Philharmonic show off vibrant partnership in first joint San Francisco visit. Sometimes it happens that a friend will begin a new romantic relationship. And the first time you



see them together, you immediately think, "Good Lord, they're perfect for one another." Some reaction along these lines seemed entirely appropriate during the magnificently fine concert given on Sunday... The goal, quite obviously, was to show off the artistic results of this pairing, and honestly you couldn't help being happy for everyone concerned. This sounded like a match made in heaven... In the gorgeously dark-hued account of the Seventh Symphony that occupied the second half of the program, the orchestra provided sumptuous instrumental textures – the strings, yet again, sounding plush but slightly tempestuous in the first movement – and Bychkov channeled them into a reading of marvelous urgency and refinement.

San Francisco Chronicle, 12 November 2018

Semyon Bychkov is an exceptional conductor, and he seemed to draw out effortlessly the warmth of tone and the easy charm of phrasing for which the Czech Philharmonic has long been famous... for this concert (in Costa Mesa), I observed a happy combination of keen direction, right repertoire and old instruments passed down from generations: the liquid-silver flutes, the rustic horns, the warmly articulate strings with just the right amount of vibrato and old-fashioned portamento that gave a sublime ending to the Seventh Symphony's *Poco adagio*... Two glowing encores, Dvořák's *Slavonic Dance* and Brahms' Hungarian Dance No. 5, guaranteed the unforgettable sound of the Czech Philharmonic would remain in the audience's ears and minds work weeks to come.

Classical Voice, 9 November 2018

Eight Czech double basses made a more contained and modulated sound at Duke's Hall (in London's Royal Academy of Music). Yet they were not, I take it, trying to prove anything, merely content to give Bychkov the balanced and supremely idiomatic rendering of Dvořák's Cello Concerto and Symphony No. 7 he indubitably secured. Conducting is always a mysterious art, and certainly so on this occasion, when Bychkov, with no special emphases one was aware of, contrived to make his large, lustrous forces sound deeply and meticulously satisfying in the confined space. Here the music simply stole upon one, and our closeness to the players meant the bonus of immediacy and vibrancy, never claustrophobia. The dazzling vigour of high violins at the symphony's end remains in my mind, as also the cellos' lovely but unselfconscious pointing of their big-tune rhythm at earlier stages of the finale... The concert had a political importance as a celebration of Czech-British cultural co-operation – Czech cabinet members were present and their prime minister made a speech – but this was nicely epitomised by the music itself, for both Dvořák works were premiered in London, the symphony being a Royal Philharmonic Society commission.

The Sunday Times, 4 November 2018

Czech Philharmonic showcases musical birthright... the Philharmonic has maintained its distinctive Eastern European sound, particularly in its earthy incisive strings and piquant, birdlike woodwinds. The keeper of this flame is the Philharmonic's new Russian Music Director, Semyon Bychkov, one of the finest conductors working today... Bychkov's mastery of symphonic structure and scale proved a better match for Dvořák's Seventh Symphony. With his darkly atmospheric strings and richly characterized winds, Bychkov built each movement with supple lines and a sweeping sense of musical development. Especially moving were the impassioned climax of the slow movement and the delightfully, then frighteningly, off-kilter scherzo.

The Washington Post, 30 October 2018

It is [Dvořák's Symphony No.7] a truly great Symphony... And the Czech Philharmonic plays it better than anyone. The glowing strings, warm brass, and the obvious love they have for this music are incomparable... It's not just love for the music, it's pride in the music. It is impossible to replicate anywhere else.

Oberon's Grove, 29 October 2018

This magisterial rendering confirmed that Dvořák accomplished his goal (in his Symphony No. 7). Bychkov drew out all of the score's depth, harmonic daring and structural intricacy, distinguished by a mysterious opening, an eloquent *Poco adagio*, a sparkling Scherzo, and a Finale with tremendous impetus.

Classical Source, 27 October 2018

The real test came the evening before the *Resurrection* when the Philharmonic presented the Cello Concerto and Seventh Symphony of Dvořák... Rest assured, this is still the Czech Philharmonic of warm strings, penetrating brasses and fleet-footed danciness. But it does have a slight Russian accent under Mr. Bychkov's direction. The orchestra's sound may be a bit more international these days, but its players are still the masters of their own country... Let's hope that, under Mr. Bychkov, we don't have to wait another four years to here them hear again.

The New York Times, 26 October 2018

The Rudolfinum offers intimacy and rounded acoustics, at least from my place in the parterre at a concert on 19 October. Bychkov drew at times lick phrases from the Orchestra during Dvořák's Seventh Symphony but also new eh to pull back and let the principals take the lead. Strings brought not just a rich tone but also striking conviction to the brooding opening movement... n the final movement, the orchestra generated an overall sound of both brightness and depth. Bychkov created great tension and drew incisive attacks from the strings and brass in the final stretch.

Classical Voice North America, 26 October 2018



Bychkov has the measure of this masterwork's [Dvořák's Symphony No. 7] economy and tautness, and yet the music is so outgoing and impassioned, full of wonderful ideas and Bohemian characteristics, seized upon by the Czech Phil with ardency and many a bucolic reference. If the minority clappers again interfered between movements, there is no denying the closeness between Bychkov and the Czechs (their Tchaikovsky series for Decca has started fabulously, *Pathétique* and *Manfred* so far), made manifest in so many expressive subtleties.

Classical Source, 24 October 2018

Bychkov wishes to emphasise the Czech classics, but he also wishes to promote modern music. The Orchestra played [Dvořák's Symphony No.7] with verve and lyricism, and it clearly saw eye to eye with its new Chief Conductor.

iDNES, 18 October 2018

Chief Conductor Semyon Bychkov led the orchestra without sentimentality or attempts at exaggerated lyricism. The Symphony [No. 7] proceeded without haste, but straight ahead with a nearly fateful inexorability. Already in the first movement one was again vividly reminded of how much Dvořák shares in common with Brahms... Semyon Bychkov and the Czech Philharmonic emphasised this Brahmsian aspect and played Dvořák like a first-class, single-minded Romanticist.

Aktulane, 17 October 2018

DVOŘÁK Symphony No. 8

European Tour to Vienna & London – March 2022

125th Season Opening in Prague and Vienna – September 2020

This concert went a long way to redeem faith in humanity. The Dvořák and Janáček works both thrive on that fathomless yearning sound of warmth, rawness and depth, and the Czech Philharmonic's many miracles of expressiveness and effortless ensemble played a long game with musical susceptibilities. This wasn't so much conducted as suggested by Bychkov, with a calibre of rapport that was a pleasure both to observe and hear. Even at the slightly measured tempos Bychkov favoured in Dvořák's Symphony No.8, and very much to the advantage of texture and clarity, the music's irrepressible good nature shone through, especially in the delayed expectations of the Adagio with its ravishing flute solos, while resistance to the Scherzo's waltz and the trumpet fanfares of the Finale was futile.

Classical Source, May 2022

After a rousing and heartfelt performance of the Ukrainian national anthem, the cellos launched the symphony in a suitably eloquent manner, where it became immediately apparent that here was an orchestra at the top of its game. The Bohemian composer's music is its lifeblood, yet there was no sense of routine in the playing whatsoever... The *Adagio* was suffused with warmth, while in the *Allegretto grazioso* the lilting, waltz-like themes swirled through the orchestra with a lightness of touch, transporting us to a nineteenth-century ballroom... The trumpet reveille which heralds the fourth movement was thrillingly played by Stanislav Masaryk – the strings responding with warmth and a fullness of tone, where Dvořák introduces the main theme of the *Allegro*. With braying horns and fluttering woodwinds, this final movement was bracing and exhilarating in equal measure. A glorious performance.

Seen and Heard International, 21 March 2022

There was everything life-affirming about Bychkov's joyous reading of Dvořák's eighth symphony. The orchestra's famed warmth of tone and clarity of texture glowed throughout, with the lower strings finding a delicious sonority in the romping first movement. Bychkov drew some careful phrasing in the adagio, before bringing an irresistible lilt to the waltz of the third movement and driving the wild folk dance of the finale, with fine solos from silvery flute and blasting trumpet. BBC Radio 3 will broadcast this sensational music-making on 19 April. Put it in the diary; you won't be disappointed.

The Observer, 20 March 2022

As for the orchestra, the playing was crisp and buoyant with woodwind and brass infusing virtuoso moments with intention and individual character. With burnished string tone, bubbly, oaken winds, and bright-edged brass, this was impressive and committed music-making. The sense of an orchestra playing what it knows and loves best was palpable. Elsewhere, the opening of the "Adagio" featured translucent strings to set against the movement's later stormy outbursts while the dance music was full of lightness and grace. The third movement was not the usual rustic ländler, but a full-blown Tchaikovskian waltz full of aching romance and with a dark, wistful undertone. The shaping of the accelerando running through the whirligig finale was both careful and convincing. Dvořák conducted the Czech Philharmonic's first ever concert in 1896 and clearly his music is in its DNA.

Musical America, 18 March 2022

One of the world's top five orchestras – sorry, but I locate them all in continental Europe – played on the second night of its London to an attentive and ecstatic audience at the Barbican. As for the much-criticised venue, which I've always been able to live with, playing as fine as this shows that you don't need a state-of-the-art auditorium to make the most beautiful sounds. Under the



masterly hands of Semyon Bychkov, there were depths and perspectives in defiance of the acoustics... I can't think of an interpretation quite like Bychkov's Dvořák 8 where everything was so perfect that you questioned nothing, marvelling at the flow and the colours... this Dvořák tended to the swift, seamlessly pouring forth the cornucopia of ideas with the most perfect of orchestral solos along the way – flute, horn, cor anglais, violin, trumpet. The Arts Desk, 17 March 2022

It brings a breath of warm, flower-scented air into any concert hall, and the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, under the inspired direction of Semyon Bychkov, unleashed a bottleful of this heady aroma over Wednesday's Barbican audience, letting us know that spring had finally arrived in London... The work is surely bread and butter to the orchestra, but there was no hint of the workaday in an account that was masterfully engineered in terms of texture, dynamic and speed to give all of Dvořák's lyric statements their place in the sun, while pulling everything together into a perfectly judged journey... A benchmark performance indeed. musicOMH, 17 March 2022

To hear the Czech Philharmonic play Dvořák is surely one of classical music's great pleasures... The Czech Philharmonic wind section were the stars of this performance, with a sunny flute in the opening pages and some outstanding clarinet playing in the *Adagio*. Not to be outdone, the strings offered a cushion of sound as springy as the forest floor itself, while bright trumpets energised the fanfare at the start of the finale. The elegance of the cellos' theme at the start of the first movement and the violins' graceful way with the *Intermezzo* were two of many memorable moments from the strings. Arcana, 17 March 2022

In Dvořák's Eighth Symphony, the Czech Philharmonic delighted with an interpretation reminiscent of Czech cuisine: lush, sensuous and sumptuous. Der Standard, 6 March 2022

The Czechs also showed how Bychkov drives the Orchestra to peak performance with Dvořák's Eighth Symphony and Miloslav Kabeláč's *Mystery of Time*. Kronen Zeitung, 6 March 2022

Dvořák's Eighth was pure pleasure. Bychkov showed himself to be a kind and open-hearted all-rounder, caresser of the soul and creator of dreams. The Czech Philharmonic blossomed under his expert leadership as did the hearts of the audience. Der Standard, 28 September 2020

In Dvořák's 8th Symphony, Bychkov let us hear what the term "authentic" really means. For the last two years he has been Chief Conductor of this traditional ensemble and it is an ideal partnership. Playing the music of their compatriot, he let the rough sound of the strings give way to a softer sound in the manner of Tchaikovsky, full of 'esprit' in the catchy main theme. The applause was fulsome. Kurier, 28 September 2020

Then a superior and silky interpretation of Dvořák's Symphony No. 8 was given by the Orchestra. Kronen Zeitung, 27 September 2020

Charles Mackerras once dubbed Dvořák "the greatest of all the great composers", a view that has not seen various Austro-German figures ejected from the Pantheon. But between his Brahms-influenced Seventh Symphony and his American-inflected Ninth, the Eighth gives us the purest Dvořák. In a performance as beguiling as this one, one thinks Mackerras might have had a point. Bachtrack, 25 September 2020

The Czech Philharmonic's Chief Conductor Semyon Bychkov's reading of the score was straightforward and spontaneous, he was not afraid of big emotions. His romanticising approach was also quite fitting, as we remember experiments with historically informed performances of late Romantic music. Aktuálně.cz, 25 September 2020

The ensemble used this more than well: they captivated and entranced the audience with impressive changes of mood and colour, bold and strongly built gradations, well-crafted dynamics, perfect architecture as well as interesting descants, which Semyon Bychkov managed to draw out of the orchestra safely, convincingly and at precisely the right point. It is a well-known fact that the Czech Philharmonic strings are brilliant. I particularly enjoyed not only the soft sound of the violins but also the silky and smooth violas, cellos and double basses that evening. The wind sections play an especially significant role in this symphony of Dvořák's, the flute in particular is crucial here. The flutes excelled – the conductor singled out first flutist Andrea Rysová as the very first one during the applause. Semyon Bychkov led the orchestra nicely, clearly and reliably throughout the evening, both he and the musicians truly deserved the final standing ovations. There is no doubt that the Czech Philharmonic is in good hands and we have a lot to look forward to in this season. Harmonie, 25 September 2020

Semyon Bychkov proved once again that he has great dispositions for this kind of repertoire. In his interpretation, the sound of the music was remarkably clear. He conducted Dvořák from memory with simple and comprehensible gestures, he kept an eye on well-performed phrase beginnings, dynamic arches and dimensionality of the orchestration, just like Shostakovich himself advised to the musicians interpreting his music. All orchestral groups play with precision, the wind instruments



were strong, violin solos were song-like, every return to the theme had a different mood. This was the first time Dvořák's Eight Symphony brought tears to my eyes. The audience was sincerely delighted and awarded the musicians with standing ovations.

OperaPlus, 25 September 2020

The second half of the programme was dedicated to Dvořák's Eight. Two things sprang to mind immediately in regards to the performance by Semyon Bychkov and the Czech Philharmonic: energy and creativity. The Orchestra played with exceptional drive in the fast parts of the symphony, Bychkov relied on interpretation free of pathos but with natural liveliness. It was enthralling to listen to... The Czech Philharmonic keeps proving its status of an orchestra which is approaching the level of top world ensembles.

KlasikaPlus, 24 September 2020

DVOŘÁK Symphony No. 9

Opening of Dvořák Prague International Music Festival – September 2020

Essen – February 2019

Chicago – November 2018

Prague – June 2018; October 2018

The *New World* Symphony, liberated and full-voiced, fired the imagination, Semyon Bychkov crafting a sweeping narrative. First movement exposition repeat. An 'open space' cor anglais solo in the *Largo*, poignant but free of sentimentality. A spine-tingling *Scherzo*, corners artfully negotiated, woodwind chorus in songful accord, the dance pulse acute, eight double basses raked imposingly at the back of the stage below the organ. A noble *Finale* symphonically driven – the many solos placed lyrically, the strings en masse creating a richly variegated canvas of backcloth and foreground, the brass (compensating for earlier intonation slips) redolent of Watt's Physical Energy, the closing tableau (impeccably judged) ascending to poetic, grand heights receding in a protracted *lunga corona* followed by silence... Bychkov, eyes closed, lost in humility... audience respectful. Old tunes in storybook dress and surroundings, life-enhancing whatever their foxing and faded leather.

Classical Source, 6 September 2020

Bychkov captured complex units as well as single nuances, temperament, joyful happiness and emotional depth. His own input centres around humble admiration for the composer combined with Bychkov's ability to relay his stories. The significantly slower tempo allowed the individual parts of the piece to somehow "linger in the air" (and in the listeners' minds) for a little bit longer and die away very slowly.

OperaPlus, 6 September 2020

The *New World* Symphony offered many magical moments, it sounded neither vacant nor opulent, was full of musicality with carefully planned structure, always new and changing, playful, and performed with both joy and mastery... The way in which the Philharmonic musicians, Václav Petr and Semyon Bychkov read, lived and presented the music (and this particular way only), makes full and absolute sense to repeat time-proven all-time favourites in concert.

KlasikaPlus, 5 September 2020

Semyon Bychkov is a great conductor who can satisfy the soloists and give them space but at the same time discovers new unforeseen details in a well-known symphonic piece for the audience. The interpretation of Dvořák's *New World* in Brahmsian fashion proved this with the carefully controlled dynamics, like painting a monumental image not only in the final movement but also in the contrasting playful *Scherzo* and the dreamy second movement which brings out Dvořák's feeling of homesickness.

Novinky.cz, 5 September 2020

The new Chief Conductor of the Czech Philharmonic, Semyon Bychkov, ensured that the music making [in Essen] was both passionate and dramatically alert with his calm and assured style of conducting... Bychkov concluded with Dvořák's Symphony *From the New World*, like a giant icing on a cake. With its "swing low" theme, the elegiac woodwind solo of the cor anglais like pearls on a silver platter, the velvety-soft horns stirred up the drama of the outer movements. Not American, but Bohemian through and through!

Neue Ruhr Zeitung, 4 February 2019

Working together, conductor and orchestra moved from intensity to a dreamlike quality with each section of the orchestra adding their expertise [in Dvořák's Ninth Symphony in Chicago]... A wonderful concert. Those who have the opportunity to see this orchestra on tour will be richly rewarded.

Splash Magazine, 6 November 2018

A warm-up session of sorts was held a week before the season opener, with a special concert celebrating the 100th anniversary of the founding of Czechoslovakia... Bychkov delivered a magisterial version of Dvořák's "New World" Symphony. Working without a score, he struck a balance between creating his own colors and phrasing in some sections, and basically getting out of the way in others. No one plays the woodwinds in this piece like the Czechs, and those passages



in the second movement were breathtakingly beautiful. Highlighted by the bold brass and thunder Bychkov brought to the opening and closing movements, it was a thrilling interpretation with an international flavor – still unmistakably Czech in its emotional underpinning, but broader in its horizons, with some of the fire more typical of Russian music.

Bachtrack, 12 October 2018

The highpoint of the evening was the New World Symphony by Dvořák . . . in his hands, the orchestra gave a perfect performance of this rigorously structured work. Especially deserving of mention were the outstanding solos by the English horn, flute, and clarinet players.

Novinky, 4 October 2018

The last subscription concert of the Czech Philharmonic's season was really symbolic. In a gesture of recognition, the future Chief Conductor presented a work that is more closely associated to the Orchestra than any other: Dvořák's New World Symphony. Semyon Bychkov's interpretation showed that in conducting one of the world's best-known compositions, he deferred to national traditions. This was heard first and foremost in the choice of tempi and, in his respect for the classic form. Bychkov's interpretation however was a little more dramatic and, one might say darker. On Wednesday, 20 June, Bychkov's final concentrated gesture demanded silence before he bowed to the Orchestra. The audience responded with enormous enthusiasm.

Harmonie, 22 June 2018

FIŠER Double Concerto

Washington – November 2018

Prague – December 2017

Written in 1969, Czech composer Fišer's "*Double for Orchestra*" opened the concert... a perfect encapsulation of an orchestra suspended between its past and future.

The Washington Post, 30 October 2018

This humorous [Fišer's *Double*] but short composition is cleverly and colourfully orchestrated (it even has a solo part for piano, played by the orchestra's excellent pianist Václav Mácha), and both the orchestra and its chief conductor Semyon Bychkov obviously enjoyed it...

Harmonie, 22 December 2017

JANÁČEK *Glagolitic Mass*

Prague Sounds, September 2022

Summer Festivals – Edinburgh, San Sebastián & Santander, August 2022

European Tour to Vienna & London – March 2022

Prague – February 2022

The opening of the *Glagolitic Mass* as performed by Czech Philharmonic and especially by the Prague Philharmonic was beautiful. The choir literally "flowed into the music" and the tenor group was spot on! So beautiful! Bychkov's tempos allowed articulation, as well as clarity of music and text...

KlasikaPlus, 3 September 2022

The nine successive movements highlighted the beauty of an orchestra with an exceptional overall sound and without weakness.

ConcertoNet, 31 August 2022

This extraordinary work is bursting with Janáček's quirky creativity and unmistakable compositional idiom and received a performance that permitted all the fullest expression. The iconic opening enjoyed brass chording that was rich and perfectly blended; the string sound was iridescent; the lovely characteristic Eastern European oboe sound was untampered by the lamentable homogenisation of recent years... In summary, a very fine and truly memorable performance of a great work.

Edinburgh Music Review, 24 August 2022

As a whole, the performance beautifully captured the feeling of all nature joining in ecstatic workshop.

The Daily Telegraph, 22 August 2022

The Czech orchestral players had all of that too, in an account that showed up all the uncompromising cragginess of Janáček's writing, with a wonderfully turbulent but lyrical organ solo from Daniela Valtová Kosinová.

The Scotsman, 21 August 2022



For the second half, Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass* was a colossal score, brought to arresting life by the orchestra, vocal quartet, organ soloist and the impressive force of the Edinburgh Festival Chorus, who sung the words of the mass with sensitivity and conviction. The List, 21 August 2022

If the Dvořák was pure joy, Bychkov then plugged into the life-affirming Slavic rawness of Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass* in a performance that completely honoured the level of inspiration that seized the 72-year-old composer when he fell in love with Kamila Stösslova, a married woman half his age. He imagined the Mass as taking place in a cathedral formed from the trees of a forest, in which he and Kamila would be married. Hence the urgency, the moments of intense contemplation, and the ear-blasting outbursts of pantheistic jubilation. When you think of the opera-house stagings of the Bach Passions or the Verdi and Britten Requiem settings, it's a wonder that someone hasn't got their hands on this overtly theatrical piece of liturgy. Classical Source, May 2022

The playing of the Czech Philharmonic was beyond reproach as it tackled Janáček's idiosyncratic orchestration and unique orchestral palette head on. Seen and Heard International, 21 March 2022

The visit to the Barbican last week by the Czech Philharmonic – the first international orchestra to appear there since the pandemic began – was always going to be momentous, but the war in Ukraine raised its significance to boiling point... In his supremely individual *Glagolitic Mass*, played on the second evening, Janáček used ancient church Slavonic text to underscore his desire to celebrate all Slavic people. It's music that knows no political boundaries, and in the hands of the Czechs, with superb support from the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra Chorus, and laser-like tenor Aleš Briscein notable among the soloists, it more than achieved the composer's wish that it would be "festive, life-affirming, pantheistic, with little of what we could call the ecclesiastical". The Observer, 20 March 2022

With the Orchestra joined by the excellent City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra Chorus, this performance was frankly as good as it gets. Textures were detailed, forces immaculately balanced, and Bychkov paced it all magnificently. From the opening antiphonal brass, its themes echoing across the concert platform like the musical equivalent of a censor swinging in space, to the barbaric frenzy of the closing "Exodus," this was a seamless performance crafted to stir the soul. The substantial orchestra includes parts for glockenspiel, triangle, timpani, snare drum, cymbals, tam-tam, tubular bells, two harps, celesta, and organ— colorful additions, especially for a Mass. The Orchestra covered itself in glory with a richly blended ensemble sound and memorable solos including a blockbuster organ "Postludium" played with panache by Daniela Valtová Kosinová. Musical America, 18 March 2022

There could be no more appropriate choice than the *Glagolitic Mass*, with its text of Old Church Slavonic, for a concert which Bychkov had dedicated to the people of Ukraine... This account was urgent and imploring, a universal pantheistic masterpiece... Don't miss the BBC broadcast when it comes around. Bachtrack, 17 March 2022

One of the world's top five orchestras – sorry, but I locate them all in continental Europe – played on the second night of its London to an attentive and ecstatic audience at the Barbican. As for the much-criticised venue, which I've always been able to live with, playing as fine as this shows that you don't need a state-of-the-art auditorium to make the most beautiful sounds. With Bychkov, we get the best of both worlds in the stupendous, poleaxing *Glagolitic Mass*: the Bohemian warmth and richness when needed, but also the revelation of the sudden, violent gesture, the clear rhythmic oddities, the abrupt cut-offs. The Arts Desk, 17 March 2022

As expected from the Dvořák, the Orchestra performed with distinction, and Bychkov's intelligent direction brought out all of the work's exciting character from the bright opening trumpet fanfares to the thrilling final 'Intrada/Exodus' (surely the best bit of the work). musicOMH, 17 March 2022

Bychkov encouraged the feverish violins through an *Intrada* that, while ultimately triumphant, only heightened the searing intensity of what had gone before... Both these national statements felt so appropriate for the times, celebrating freedom of movement but also the power – and cost – of faith. As with the first night performances Bychkov eloquently dedicated the music to the people of Ukraine, before a performance of the country's national anthem. It is hard to think of two more appropriate or contrasting accounts, and the Czech Philharmonic and their Chief Conductor deserve the utmost credit for two nights of unrivalled artistic brilliance. Arcana, 17 March 2022

For the crowning finale of the Viennese residency, they chose a truly large ensemble: Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass* from 1928 is one of this country's rare gems of liturgical music, composed on the Old Slavonic mass text and scored with orchestra, organ, choir and vocal soloists, interwoven powerfully from the outset with constantly moving vivacity stretched with pathos. Salzburger Nachrichten, 7 March 2022



There was also a lot going on in Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass*. Bubbling, surging and sonorous, the Czech Philharmonic interpreted the unusual work as if it were completely natural under the direction of Semyon Bychkov who concluded it with swinging festivity.

Der Standard, 7 March 2022

And there is only one thing to say about the performance: it was great. The Orchestra was in superb form from the brilliant opening fanfare to the last timpani solo in the final Intradata. The choir seemed to be singing for all of us, from *Gospodi pomiluj to Agneče Božij*. Then, during *Věruju a Svet*, we literally got chills. The singing quartet of Evelina Dobracheva - soprano, Lucie Hilscherová - alto, Aleš Briscein - tenor and Boris Prýgl - bass was also convincing. And I must not forget organist Daniela Valtova Kosinova and her impressive, extremely dramatic performance of the solo Postlude. The *Glagolitic Mass* and the Old Slavonic language were heard in their full expressive power at this concert production.

Harmonie, 26 February 2022

Bychkov seems to have chosen a relatively spare approach without too much expressiveness, built mainly on details that further emphasised the alternating musical motifs of Janáček's abbreviated speech. Thus, despite this characteristic of the work, the music had a kind of order and carried a certain sophistication that Bychkov's proverbial approach can give birth to. Among the excellent playing of the Orchestra, one should highlight the precise and rich-sounding brass and then the guest of the evening, the Czech organist Daniela Valtova Kosinova, who conceived the organ Postlude in a highly expressive and effective manner at a relatively fast tempo. The Czech Philharmonic once again invited the Prague Philharmonic Choir, whose quality cannot be doubted for a second, and a balanced quartet of soloists, Russian soprano Evelina Dobracheva, violist Lucie Hilscher, tenor Aleš Briscein and bass Boris Prýgl. An extraordinary evening in terms of the music performed, the performances of the choir, Orchestra and soloists, but also the circumstances that gave the concert a completely different meaning. Hopefully we will remember in the future mainly the music and the performances.

KlasikaPlus, 25 February 2022

The combination of spiritual and secular beauty then occurred in the second half of the concert, in which Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass* was performed... The Orchestra took care of the secular beauty, while the Prague Philharmonic Choir took care of the spiritual one. Semyon Bychkov gave Janáček's work an almost concertante-like character, so that the *Mass* sounded perhaps more light-hearted than the listener would expect from a work of this nature. However, this was in no way to the detriment of the work, as this lightness was compensated for by the choir, whose sound was rich and intense, adding an element of unearthly dignity to the work. The spiritual and the secular thus merged into one harmonious whole, which powerfully impressed the audience in the hall and beautifully concluded the plot of the whole concert... It was another beautiful experience, which I hope we will have many more of thanks to the Czech Philharmonic.

OperaPlus, 24 February 2022

KABELÁČ *The Mystery of Time*

European Tour to Vienna – March 2022

Prague – February 2022

The Czechs also showed how Bychkov drives the Orchestra to peak performance with Dvořák's Eighth Symphony and Miloslav Kabeláč's *Mystery of Time*.

Kronen Zeitung, 6 March 2022

The first piece of the programme, the moderately modern *Passacaglia* for large orchestra by the Czech composer Miloslav Kabeláč, first performed in 1960 and entitled *Mystery of Time* was interesting. The beginning was floating, the pizzicati of the double bass like the ticking of a clock; a large-scale intensification followed.

Der Standard, 6 March 2022

Now the Orchestra is less tense, but still majestically displayed all the dreamy concentration of a work whose stylistic proximity to the Russian scores of the same period does not detract from the identity of the Czech composer, who is also very interesting in his symphonies... With two rare works [plus Ullmann's *Die Weise von Liebe und Tod des Cornets Christoph Rilke*], this programme impressed with its overall level of excellence and once again highlighted the quality of one of the world's finest symphony orchestras and its Music Director, who is even more fascinating to hear in the fantastic acoustics of Prague's hall.

February 2022

ResMusica, 24

MARTINŮ Concerto for Two Pianos

Edinburgh International Music Festival – August 2022

Bychkov balanced his forces with dreamy violins giving way to violent unison swipes across all string sections with rich woodwinds adding depth.

Bachtrack, 21 August 2022



MARTINŮ Double Concerto

Edinburgh International Music Festival – August 2022

Prague – October 2018; December 2017

Of the three items on the evening's programme, it was the Double Concerto that came off the best and the most powerfully for Semyon Bychkov. The strings of the orchestra were divided physically into two camps standing visibly opposed to each other, and they played with great commitment and intensity, the pianist Ivo Kahánek added a fiery approach with devotion to the music to the overall sound, and above them the timpanist Michael Kroutil dominated the stage...

KlasikaPlus, 4 October 2018

In the serious and shadowy second movement, the players deftly alternated the immense, dense passages with sections that sounded more transparent...

Harmonie, 22 December 2017

SMETANA *The Bartered Bride Overture*

London, BBC Proms – September 2019

Prague & London – October 2018

The Czech Philharmonic was on splendid form and the relationship with its new Music Director appeared to work like a charm. The acoustics of Albert Hall are well known to be treacherous, but Bychkov and the Orchestra worked wonders with orchestral balance and clarity, without losing an iota of nerve and enthusiasm. The Smetana selection had nerve and enthusiasm in abundance. In the Overture, the flexible articulation in the strings was perfect with a beautiful edge to the wood. The subsequent polka was magnificent with an effective and elegant rubato, a contagious rhythmic impulse for the Furiant and a thrilling final dance. Smetana's works were contagious and came across with joyful enthusiasm.

Scherzo, 13 September 2019

Whether due to Brexit blues or BBC budgets, this year's Proms have featured a smaller parade than usual of the greatest foreign orchestras. But one indisputably great band was on blazing form on Tuesday evening as it launched the final week of the Proms: 50 years since it first appeared at the festival, the Czech Philharmonic was making one of its periodic visits, this time in exciting partnership with its new music director, Semyon Bychkov. Where else to begin but with the overture and dances from *The Bartered Bride*? Smetana's masterpiece is a cornerstone of the rich Czech operatic repertoire, and this music proved a good showcase for the orchestra's deep culture and cultivated sound. Bychkov may have a reputation for staid tempos, but here they felt just right and well sprung, allowing the strings room for their articulation and all the players breathing space to enjoy the music.

The Daily Telegraph, 12 September 2019

This orchestra normally treads lighter in the exhilarating overture, but for the three jolly interludes that followed, Bychkov found his dancing shoes and we were happily whirled along.

The Times, 12 September 2019

It's a given that the return of that curtain-raiser Smetana's *Bartered Bride Overture* should fizz with the woodwinds in the Czech Philharmonic's traversal helmed by Semyon Bychkov, now their principal conductor from last October. You can tell how their years together meld the sharp palette of this orchestra to Bychkov's long-breathed gambits. Though not here just yet. The Smetana Overture and the following dances, a polka, furiant, and a circus polka on speed boast a tang and burnish a depth of engagement that's infectious and sweeping. I doubt whether we've heard it this disinhibited yet drum-tight for years.

Fringe Review, 12 September 2019

Few things are musically more uplifting than hearing a fine foreign orchestra playing its own national heritage. The Czech Philharmonic plays with an exceptionally incisive string sound and the technique with which they played Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* overture and three dances was stunning: all those delicious rhythms caught with glittering, percussive precision particularly in the third dance. Semyon Bychkov, who beats time quite simply and has his orchestra traditionally seated, certainly knows how to make Czech music sing. It made a delightful concert opener.

Lark Reviews, 11 September 2019

Joining the end-of-Proms beauty parade of visiting orchestra, the Czech Philharmonic and its Chief Conductor of barely one year, Semyon Bychkov, arrived not so much as an international brand as a bottomless well of instantly discernible national character, style, strength and delicacy that breaks boundaries. Shostakovich, for whom irony was a protective veil, would have appreciated the programming – zesty Czech humour and one of the further extremes of intensely Russian emotionalism heading towards one of the darkest stars in the symphonic universe.



In terms of anticipating mischief and sharp wit, Smetana's Overture to *The Bartered Bride* is up there with Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*, and the Czech players delivered it with incomparable high spirits, affection and panache, before further kicking up their heels in the three Dances Smetana added later. The playing and unmistakable Czech sound were so infectious that the Prom could have stayed in that vein for the whole evening.
Classical Source, 11 September 2019

Is it too early to coin the phrase "the Bychkov effect"?... But this concert, a repeat of last week's season opener in Prague, was all about the power of the live performance, something that even the most accomplished recording engineer cannot fully achieve. With striking contrasts between the two halves, Bychkov brought us the spice of life, unabashed romance and the bitterness of human survival, all through Czech and Russian eyes. In short, this concert packed quite a punch. Despite having a more international sound these days, it was pleasing to hear that the Czech Philharmonic has still retained its characteristic warmth, lyricism and rawness, displayed here with exceptional prowess, and that it has also kept steadfastly close to its roots. Opening with Smetana... at once, you could see that the players were as animated as the conductor – always a good sign.
Bachtrack, 11 September 2019

The tradition of playing Czech works by Czech orchestras is a strong one, and represented here by a commanding Overture and three dances from Smetana's *Bartered Bride*. A miraculous combination of full string sound and accuracy from the downbeat characterised Bychkov's Overture, taken fast but at a speed that allowed everything to speak joyously. The bucolic element was there, strongly, in the bassoon 'drone' below piping woodwind. Peppering the opera's three acts are the three dances heard here, an active Polka, a full-sunshine Furiant and that encore-favourite, the 'Dance of the Comedians', with its perfectly accurate trumpets and startling timpani shots.
Seen and Heard International, 11 September 2019

Semyon Bychkov was a surprising choice to take over the Czech Philharmonic last year, a conductor with few obvious connections to Czech music. But on the strength of this visit to the Proms, they make a good team. Bychkov communicates fluently with the players, conveying power and passion, and detail too, but without any overt theatrics at the podium. The Czech Philharmonic has a burnished tone, well projected and filling the Albert Hall, but more with colour than with weight. There is an elegant and lyrical flow to everything the strings play, which Bychkov is able to harness and shape. The woodwinds are sometimes reedy but always have plenty of character. And the brass can sound nasal, but deliver punch when required. But the defining virtue of the Czech Philharmonic sound is delicacy, a kind of fragility or reticence that adds an extra expressive dimension, and proves as valuable in Shostakovich as it does in Smetana.
The Arts Desk, 11 September 2019

The Czech Philharmonic and about thirty students from the Royal Academy of Music played both national anthems and the overture to the Smetana's opera *The Bartered Bride*. The students had been chosen for the side-by-side project; this was the first such undertaking with a world-class orchestra in the school's history. This is now being done in many places, and it is not at all a bad idea. The students seated themselves as partners at certain desks in the string section and with some of the woodwind and brass players. Smetana's score sounded wonderful, played at a sufficiently lively tempo and with enough precision. The Czech Philharmonic players carried it off with their younger colleagues, and one could hear nothing amiss.
KlasikaPlus, 25 October 2018

The Czech Philharmonic brought its distinctive sound and patriotic pride to the Duke's Hall [in London]. No better indigenous start than the Overture to Smetana's *Bartered Bride*, articulate rather than frenzied from Semyon Bychkov, pointed rather than with details glossed over, the music skipping buoyantly along...
Classical Source, 24 October 2018

The hall first resounded with the overture to Smetana's opera *The Bartered Bride*, followed by three dances from the same opera: *Polka*, *Furiant*, and *Skočná*. The conductor Semyon Bychkov accentuated the sharpness and brilliance Smetana's orchestration, chose moderate tempos, and emphasized the excellence of the orchestra's ensemble playing.
OperaPlus, 4 October 2018

This, of course, does not change the fact that the intimately familiar, joyous music [in Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* Overture] had reliably just the right energy, inducing patriotic and purely personal, pleasant emotions, and that at the beginning of the evening it served its positive, celebratory purpose.
KlasikaPlus, 4 October 2018

SMETANA *Má vlast*

European Tour to Vienna, Berlin & London – March 2022

Prague, Velvet Revolution Concert – November 2020

Prague – October 2019



The Czech Philharmonic played two (mostly) home-grown programmes at the Barbican under its music director Semyon Bychkov. This was the first major overseas orchestra at the Barbican since Covid and I went to the first night, on the principle that everyone should hear the Czech Philharmonic play Smetana's *Má vlast* at least once in their life. It was everything you'd hope: strings with the burnished sheen of antique silver, and an authentic, down-the-spine shiver as Smetana brought his 'Vysehrad' chorale back at the end of the final movement. The Spectator, 2 April 2022

It took only seconds for the packed house to fall under the spell of this Orchestra's all-enveloping, black-velvet tone... It's not often that an Orchestra and a piece of music seem so indivisible. They played as if they owned every note of it – which, in a way, they do. The strings' technical magnificence is steeped in the Czech tradition of playing, long noted for its finesse and eloquence; and as a whole, the substantial ensemble breathed marvellously as one unit. Bychkov is less grand maestro than friend and colleague to his musicians. Together they traversed many extra miles, sometimes tapering a diminuendo to the last possible degree, other times using a crescendo not merely to get louder, but to build up ferocious power. This blend of an Orchestra with such authentic spirit and a conductor of real integrity proved a potent mix. The i, 17 March 2022

Bychkov's brisk tempo (in *Vltava*) allowed the two flutes to chase each other like so many water nymphs frolicking, while an alertness to Smetana's accentuation gave the piece real dynamism. A special word for the brass section, and their legendary creaminess of tone in this movement before the drama of *Šárka*... The final movement, *Blaník*, refers in its title to the hill under which Czech warriors sleep until St Wenceslas causes them to arise to save the Czech nation. This was Bychkov and the orchestra's finest hour, finely calibrated, superbly articulated by the Czech strings, and a truly rousing close. Seen and Heard International, 17 March 2022

The Czech Philharmonic was the first international orchestra to appear at the Barbican since the pandemic began, and just to hear that central-European sound with its horn-drenched luxuriance and beautifully soft way of playing a chord together was heaven in itself... The notes did indeed sound different. But as already mentioned, the Orchestra can take part of the credit for that. The brass's rendition of the Czech Hussite hymn in the fifth movement had an old-gold sound, so different from the sharp sound of an Anglo-Saxon orchestra, and when the massed violins took up the famous melody in the well-known movement portraying the river Vltava, they hardly needed to try to produce a lustrous, spun-silk sound. The Daily Telegraph, 16 March 2022

There was absolutely no chance that the first of the Czech Philharmonic's two concerts in London this week would be anything other than a special occasion, for musical and non-musical reasons alike. And so it proved... But the invasion of Ukraine supercharged the opening evening. Czechs know better than anyone what a Russian invasion is like. The Orchestra rose to the occasion with its trademark warm intensity of tone, but also with flashes of a rare fire... The music-making in the second half felt altogether more momentous, electrifying in a larger way... After that build-up, the performance itself might just have been an anti-climax. No such danger. The Czechs have Smetana's six movement evocation of their homeland in their bones, and they delivered it with real feeling. The expertly scored romantic early movements, with their harps and woodwind solos evoking the Bohemian landscape, flowed expressively. But the more muscular two closing sections, in which Smetana builds the music around a steadfast and patriotic Hussite hymn of defiance, had an unmissable wider message for Europe today. The Guardian, 16 March 2022

The Ukrainian anthem was itself brilliantly done. The Czech Philharmonic's distinctive timbres — the almost throbbing strings, the fat, milky brass — sent the music straight to the stomach. And *Má vlast*? It is a totemic work for this Orchestra and the Czech nation but, as Bychkov intimated, that doesn't mean it's narrowly bellicose or jingoistic... *Má vlast* paints glorious images of Czech history and nature but does so through a mythic, half-illusory filter. One eye is always wet. That was how it seemed here, anyway, with the combination of magnificent, tireless playing from the Czechs and rapturous conducting from Bychkov... there were so many glorious episodes: an impetuous, surging *Vltava*, a full-blooded *Šárka*, and — not normally a highlight — the hymnic *Tábor*, where the instruments seem to ape a gigantic organ. The Times, 16 March 2022

The Czech Phil arrived in London, the Barbican's first international orchestral visitors since the pandemic began, during an ambitious European tour. There was, though, nothing jaded or routine about performances that married the underlying excellence of each desk – and the hawk-like attentiveness of Maestro Bychkov – with the urgency that came from those long shadows of the past... However familiar it must be for them, the orchestra managed to make the complete, six-movement version of *Má vlast* into a landmark event. Bychkov's ability to draw a consistent warmth and depth of sound from every corner of a very big band neutralised any challenges that the Barbican acoustic may have presented. From the initial rhapsody of the twin harps in *Vyšehrad* (Barbara Pazourová and Roxana Hädler) to the cellos and basses shaking the earth as the percussion stormed the heavens in the closing movements, *Tábor* and *Blaník*, Smetana's 1882 grand tour of Czech landscape, myth and history arrived not just with an epic amplitude. It glowed



with a sense of beloved local detail which each well-accented instrumental voice enhanced.

The Arts Desk, 16 March 2022

The audience was treated to a noble reading. The six symphonic poems celebrate the composer's beloved Czech homeland but here, in Bychkov's address, they were dedicated to a different homeland, the people of Ukraine... There's almost a slavish bite and darkness to the Czech Philharmonic's sound, a weightiness that suited Bychkov's approach... When an orchestra like the Czech Phil plays a staple like *Má vlast*, there's always the danger of routine creeping in, but this account was one where you felt the players' deep love and respect for the music. Bychkov favoured nobility and nostalgia over dramatic excitement – *Vyšehrad* stood in granite defiance and the tributaries of the *Vltava* were nudged and nudled into life.

Bachtrack, 16 March 2022

Written to bring pride and inspiration to the Czech people, Smetana's rousing set of six symphonic poems could not have wished for a more fitting performance here. The lofty construction of *Vyšehrad* was led off with expansive harps tracing the building's lofty lines, the music growing in stature as the rest of the orchestra joined. Bychkov's pacing in this noble movement was ideal, a powerfully wrought performance with tasteful phrasing. The same could certainly be said for *Vltava*, whose depiction of the river bubbling up was wonderfully exuberant. The wind section clearly enjoyed their vivid profile of the waters and their surrounds, with no obvious pause for breath as the current gained in power... If anything, this performance grew stronger and leaner as it progressed... Both wind sections stood out in this performance (in *From Bohemia's Woods and Fields*), stylish and authentic, but the finer details to this interpretation impressed greatly. The percussion, for instance, took such great care with their cymbal and triangle contributions, the shading just right and complementing Smetana's fulsome melodic writing, made all the remarkable with the reminder that he had lost his hearing by this point... There were no encores in the concert, and nor were they needed, for this was a wholly memorable occasion, a true privilege to say, 'I was there'.

Arcana, 16 March 2022

The Orchestra presented itself as a proud, magnificently weighty tradition preserving collective with Bychkov as its point man, who never intervened more than was necessary. So, in that sense, he did not have much to do. There was nothing reduced or slender about the sound and under no circumstances was the impression given that the 19th century wheel was being reinvented for the 21st century... The perfect rippling of the *Vltava* waves with which the woodwinds entered before the strings had something photorealistic about them. The Czech Philharmonic enjoyed the fabulous art of this music, its musico-dramatic rhetoric which, without any ambiguity, was what it is all about.

Hamburger Abendblatt 12-13 March 2022

The phrasing was exemplary, even in the sense of modelling, reciting, and pointing out musical ideas, and preparing their transformations and continuities. The dancing motifs had poetry, the tempi had logic and space to breath, the woodwind solos were perfect and magical, the episodes and stops were engaging, the strings were delicate, soft and flexible... Semyon Bychkov and the Czech Philharmonic succeeded in speaking poetry through the music. However, they did not emphasize the festive and solemn pathos of historical themes, letting rather beautiful romantic music ring out, full of imaginative images and transformations, music that was unhurried but appropriately exuberant in important places, music that was sublime, music previously unheard by the German audience (at Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie) who - it seemed - were quite excited by it.

KlasikaPlus, 11 March 2022

An excellent orchestra: the Czech Philharmonic and its Chief Conductor Semyon Bychkov inspire in Berlin with Smetana's tone poem cycle *Má vlast*... Presenting this national romantic music is audibly a matter of honour for the Czech Philharmonic. Semyon Bychkov, the Orchestra's Chief Conductor and Music Director, only needs to carefully coordinate the action from the podium, so familiar is the score to all involved. And that's how they handle it: even in the fortissimo it never gets noisy, the giant ensemble creates a wonderfully splendid sound, warm and compact, springing from a deep, honest love of the music. The Orchestra is simply fantastic this evening, captivating the audience over the 80 minutes of the performance, beguiling with sensuality of sound, impressing with technical precision. The famous *Vltava* is bathed in golden light, the *Šárka* episode, which tells of Czech Amazons and the ambush into which they lure the knight Ctirad, develops as excitingly as an action film. And even *Tábor* and *Blaník*, the weaker tone poems of the cycle, have rhythmic drive and enormous inner tension, right up to the last bar. This makes listening again a pleasure.

Der Taggespiegel, 10 March 2022

This intimacy continued with Smetana. Bychkov generated a musical epic with the rich, soft sound of his Orchestra, letting the waves of the *Vltava* flow gently and reaching a conciliatory ending.

Kurier, 10 March 2022

When the Czech Philharmonic speaks its musical mother tongue, every quaver and crotchet of the score is exactly in place, so to speak. The sound is full, warm, round in all sections; in a flexible mixture, everything seems to harmonise smoothly with each other in this Orchestra... The harps at the beginning of *Vyšehrad* were already rustling like a fairy tale; the way the low brass in the



moonlight scene of *Vltava* lay butter-softly under the glittering play of lights or the way the clarinet in *Šárka* did the seductive work of the cunning Amazon was magnificent. Die Presse, 4 March 2022

The enchanting power of this symphonic poem is unrivalled, and the Czech Philharmonic conveys it at the highest level. The brilliant harps showed right at the beginning what it means to play strings in this orchestra, the violins followed intensely: no musician stood out from this tutti, an absolutely synchronous and velvety soft sound. The flutes made the *Vltava* flow rapidly: every drop resounded with a perfection that a CD recording could not surpass... Both the plump, warm sound and the moment of silence of this evening will remain deep in the hearts of the audience.

Wiener Zeitung, 25 February 2022

Smetana's national epic comes up fresh and meaningful in a miraculous online happening... You may hear a different interpretation, but probably not a better, unless Bychkov and the players excel themselves in 2022. Catch it while you can.

The Art Desk, 21 November 2020

Semyon Bychkov was the ideal conductor for communicating the immensity of Smetana's vision and for responding to the circumstance. He gave the orchestra the time to prepare and trigger phrase after phrase with just the right sense of timing; the build-up to the climax of *Vyšehrad* was one such sequence, spellbinding in every respect, and similar in its integrity of line and purpose to the orchestra's historical predecessors.

Bachtrack, 20 November 2020

The most famous of the symphonic poems, Bychkov and his players allowed us to hear the score anew, flutes at a pace that was positively scampering as they chased each other at the opening. Baying, Czech-rustic hunting horns met the glorious flow of the river. Bychkov led the piece as an example of musical storytelling, riveting at each and every twist and turn... A phenomenal performance of great dignity and strength.

Seen and Heard International, 20 November 2020

Despite being distanced for this performance, the Orchestra managed to convey the strength and magnificence of the composition in its entirety. At the same time, Semyon Bychkov took full advantage of the monumental scale of the work, exposing both its textures and its transparency and building on the quality of the Philharmonic's musicians.

KlasikaPlus, 19 November 2020

The performance was sharp, the coordination precise and the solos lovely.

Hudobný život, December 2019

Only a couple of years ago, I would not have believed that the Czech Philharmonic would ever achieve such a slender and sometimes virtuosic string sound, rhythmically spot on even in the round acoustics of the Rudolfinum... Bychkov achieved an interesting intensity of expression... For thirty years, people have been pointing out that the composition should be freed from pathos, made lighter and clearer. But still, when listening to somebody really pursuing this idea, we are always a bit surprised. *Má vlast* is surrounded not only by many interpretation clichés but maybe even more journalistic ones. Let me mention one of them, that is when people talk about the Czech tradition represented by Talich-Ančerl or Neumann-Bělohlávek. There are so many differences between Talich and Ančerl that many people and musicians never accepted Ančerl in the 1960s. And the difference between aging and generous Neumann, and young and perfectionistic Bělohlávek was so big that the musicians decided to get rid of the young conductor in the early 1990s... Bychkov dared to go back to the basis of *Má vlast* and build his interpretation on a more thorough scrutiny of the autograph. There is a lot of hidden potential in energy and devotion, promising that the interpretation will mature and change with every single concert, allowing us to uncover the meaning of our interpretation tradition from a different point of view.

Harmonie, 11 October 2019

The conductor respected the best from the interpretation tradition he also tried to reshape, aiming for more emotion, singing quality and grace: as such, the solos were brilliant.

iDnes, 10 October 2019

ULLMANN *Die Weise von Liebe und Tod des Cornets Christoph Rilke*

European Tour to Vienna – March 2022

Once again, the Czech Philharmonic showed how it has developed under Bychkov into an Orchestra of the highest quality. With sometimes velvet, melting, sometimes powerfully shining sound of the strings, expressive woodwinds, and metallic radiance in the brass... Bychkov, as always full of energy and verve, captured the atmosphere sensitively. He gave sharp contours to the *Weise von Liebe und Tod des Cornets Christoph Rilke*, written in 1943 in the Theresienstadt concentration



camp shortly before Viktor Ullmann's murder, and animated the musicians to passionate
espressivo. Thomas Quasthoff found a touching narrative tone for Rilke's text.

Kronen Zeitung, 8 March 2022

Ullmann's music captivated and touched with its lifelike alternations of gloom, melancholy, poetry
and panic.

Der Standard, 7 March 2022