



*International  
Presentations of  
Music & Dance*

THE UNIVERSITY MUSICAL SOCIETY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

## Czech Philharmonic

VACLAV NEUMANN

*Conductor*

SUNDAY EVENING, MARCH 25, 1984, AT 8:30  
HILL AUDITORIUM, ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

### PROGRAM

Má Vlast (My Country), six symphonic poems ..... SMETANA  
Vyšehrad (The Ancient Castle of the Bohemian Kings)  
Vltava (The Moldau)  
Šárka (A Valley North of Prague)

### INTERMISSION

From Bohemia's Meadows and Groves  
Tábor (The Camp: Introducing the Hussite War Song)  
Blaník (A Region in Bohemia)

*Deutsche Grammophon, London, Angel, Telefunken, Supraphon, Turnabout, Serenes,  
Quintessence, and Nonesuch Records.*

*Merrill Lynch Pierce Fenner & Smith has generously provided funds to defray the printing costs  
of this concert program and those that remain in the 1983-84 Choral Union Series.*

## PROGRAM NOTES

Má Vlast (My Country) ..... BEDŘICH SMETANA  
(1824-1884)

This cycle of six symphonic poems called "My Country" was written from 1872 to 1879, and is one of the most momentous works of Czech music of the 19th century. When Smetana began this work, he had already written three symphonic poems during his stay in Sweden. He was a close friend and adherent of Franz Liszt, under whose influence he began to write neo-romantic musical poems, at first after literary and theatre themes. Later, after returning to his own country, Smetana wrote symphonic poems on his own poetic themes and according to his own ideas.

"My Country" comprises samples of the Czech myth, old legends and tales, a reminder of the most illustrious times in Czech history, the Hussite epoch and, on its basis, a prophecy of the Czech future, once again as a time of glory, freedom, and independence. It should be remembered that Smetana composed this work at a very joyless time — in the oppressive years of the 1870s when the Czech nation was not only still a part of the Hapsburg monarchy, but, in addition, the nation itself was divided by petty disputes between the "Old Czechs" and the "Young Czechs." It was just at that time that Smetana presented the nation with a perspective in the form of this masterly work which he founded on the historical concept of František Palacký. He celebrates the Hussite movement as the leading ideology of Czech history, regarding it as moral principle reviving the life of the nation so that, through its own strength, it can regain its freedom. The Baroque legend had it that hidden in Blaník Mountain were the knights of St. Wenceslas who would come to the aid of their country in its worst hours. In his interpretation of the last poem, *Blaník*, Smetana says: "On the basis of this melody — 'Ye Who Are God's Warriors' — and this Hussite principle, the revival of the Czech nation, its future happiness and glory, will develop."

Characteristic of this work is Smetana's profound optimism. He wrote "My Country" after he had become deaf, not able to conduct it himself, but also unable to hear it. In all, with many intervals, it took Smetana seven years to compose the cycle. When composing the fourth poem, *From Bohemia's Meadows and Groves*, he learned that he would never regain his hearing. This fact, however, left no mark on his music or the concept of the work. Indeed, it is just this poem that has a wholly optimistic, positive sound. Prevailing over the work as a whole is the collective feeling that the future of his beloved country would be happy and joyful.

In structuring the work, Smetana used common musical forms providing they met his aims. Thus, *Vyšehrad* has an almost classical sonata form; *Vltava* has the form of a developed rondo; *Šárka* is a purely epical and balladic work; *From Bohemia's Meadows and Groves* is a lyrical poem making beautiful use of free polyphony; *Tábor* is a monothematic composition with the use of variations; and *Blaník* is a rich summary of everything, fulfilling the function of a magnificent finale.

Smetana dedicated "My Country" to Prague, the capital of his country. It is performed on the most solemn occasions of the Czech nation, and it is now a tradition that the annual Prague Spring Music Festival is opened with this work.

Several writers have endeavored to write a verbal accompaniment to the whole cycle with various measures of success. Smetana himself placed emphasis on his music, but he did write some comments in connection with the work. These comments follow, in abridged form.

### *Vyšehrad*

The harps of bards begin, followed by the song of the bards about the history of Vyšehrad, its glory, glitter, tournaments, and battles up to its final fall into ruin.

### *Vltava*

This poem describes the course of the Vltava from its first two sources . . . the joining up of the two streams to form one flow, then the course of the Vltava through woods and fields, through regions where merry feasts are taking place; in the night glow of the moon, water-sprites dance; on nearby rocks, castles, chateaux and ruins rise proudly to the sky; the Vltava swirls in the St. John's currents; it flows in a wide sweep to Prague, where Vyšehrad appears, only to disappear in the distance in a majestic flow into the Elbe.

### *Šárka*

This poem begins with a description of an angry maiden who swears to take her revenge on the whole male sex for the infidelity of her lover. In the distance, Ctirad and his armor-bearers are heard approaching. Suddenly they hear the feigned lamentations of a young maiden tied to a tree. On seeing her, Ctirad is captivated by her beauty. He frees her and she offers Ctirad and the armor-

bearers a prepared drink which makes them fall asleep. On a given signal sounded on a horn, the maidens, hitherto hidden at a distance, rush forward to commit their bloody deed. The horror of mass murder is the tone on which the work ends.

### *From Bohemia's Meadows and Groves*

This poem is a general portrayal of the feeling evoked on gazing at the Bohemian landscape. Passionate melody rings out from all sides, sometimes gay, sometimes melancholy. Forest scenery — in the solo horns — and the gay, fertile lowlands of the Elbe valley and other places, are all celebrated in this part of the cycle.

### *Tábor*

The whole structure of the work is based on the magnificent song, "Ye Who Are God's Warriors." It is quite certain that this chorale rang out most powerfully and most often at Tábor. The work also depicts strong will, victorious battles, endurance, and stubborn unyieldingness. It cannot be broken into details because it contains, as a general whole, all the glory and praise of the Hussite struggles and the unbreakableness of the character of the Hussites.

### *Blaník*

This is a continuation of the previous work. After their defeat, the Hussite warriors concealed themselves in Blaník Mountain in order to wait for the moment when they are to come to the aid of their country. As in *Tábor*, the same motifs form the base of the structure of *Blaník*: "Ye Who Are God's Warriors." A small intermezzo is also heard in the form of a short idyll, a description of the Blaník region, where a small shepherd plays his pipe and its echoes reply.

## **About the Artists**

The reputation of the **Czech Philharmonic** is a world synonym for musical excellence. The ensemble began its life under the baton of Antonin Dvořák in 1896, continuing its tradition of excellence into the present century under the guidance of Vaclav Talich, and later by Rafael Kubelik and Karel Ancerl. Through the decades, many composers have conducted their own works with the Philharmonic, among them Gustav Mahler, Siegfried Wagner, Edvard Grieg, Richard Strauss, Sergei Prokofiev, and Igor Stravinsky. Guest conductors who have worked with the Philharmonic include Arthur Nikisch, Leonard Bernstein, Zubin Mehta, Erich Leinsdorf, Lorin Maazel, George Szell, Bruno Walter, Antal Dorati, Otto Klemperer, Charles Munch, Sir Adrian Boult, Erich Kleiber, John Barbirolli, Sir Thomas Beecham, Felix Weingartner, and Vincent D'Indy. Its gallery of soloists have included the renowned artists Pablo Casals and Arthur Rubinstein.

In 1945 the Philharmonic came under state subsidy. To celebrate the significance of this development an annual festival was inaugurated, which has become an immense international musical celebration. The Prague Spring Festival now attracts musicians and ensembles from around the world to participate in an occasion that affords a review of Czech musical traditions, past and present. The Philharmonic also carries its standard of excellence abroad, with tours to Yugoslavia, Hungary, Great Britain, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, China, West and East Germany, Australia, New Zealand, India, Japan, Norway, Canada, the Soviet Union, and the United States.

**Vaclav Neumann** was appointed chief conductor of the Czech Philharmonic in 1968, following varied experience with other major musical organizations in Czechoslovakia. Earlier in his career, Neumann was a member of the famed Smetana Quartet, as well as a member of the viola section of the Czech Philharmonic. In 1947 Maestro Neumann left the Quartet to devote his career to conducting.

His career as a conductor began to flourish with several prestigious engagements and debuts, including the *Komische Oper* in Berlin, Music Director of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, the Stuttgart Opera, and as conductor of the Prague Symphony. He has achieved extraordinary success not only with the Czech Philharmonic, but with other major orchestras that include the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Toronto Symphony, Berlin Philharmonic, and the Bayerischer Rundfunk in Munich.

The Czech Philharmonic is currently on its fourth American tour, previously appearing in Ann Arbor on its first tour in 1965, under Vaclav Neumann. Maestro Neumann also conducted the Royal Philharmonic of London here in 1968.

## Remaining Concerts

- HUNGARIAN NATIONAL FOLK ENSEMBLE . . . . . Wed. Mar. 28  
NORTHWOOD ORCHESTRA / DON JAEGER . . . . . Thurs. Mar. 29  
KAREN EMONS SMITH, *Soprano*  
J. C. Bach: Sinfonia in B-flat; Francaix: Serenade for Chamber Orchestra;  
Barber: Knoxville: Summer of 1915; Albinoni: Oboe Concerto, Op. 9, No. 2 (Jaeger);  
Rodrigo: Cuatro Madrigales Amatorios; Ibert: Divertissement
- THE CANADIAN BRASS . . . . . Fri. Mar. 30  
Music by Mozart, Vivaldi, Bach, "Fats" Waller, and "A Tribute to the Ballet"
- YO-YO MA, *Cellist* . . . . . Wed. Apr. 4
- ORPHEUS CHAMBER ENSEMBLE . . . . . Fri. Apr. 13  
J. C. Bach: Sinfonia in B-flat; Mozart: Bassoon Concerto, K. 191 (Frank Morelli);  
Schoenberg: Verklärte Nacht, Op. 4; Bartók: Rumanian Dances

## 1984 Ann Arbor May Festival

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ending the Philadelphians' long reign in Ann Arbor

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ALDO CECCATO, *Guest Conductor*

The Festival Chorus

EUGENE ISTOMIN, *Pianist*      LOUISE RUSSELL, *Soprano*

UTO UGHI, *Violinist*      LORNA MYERS, *Mezzo-soprano*

Wednesday — *Ormandy and Istomin, all Beethoven: Leonore Overture No. 3; Piano Concerto No. 5 ("Emperor"), Symphony No. 5 in C minor*

Thursday — *Ceccato and Ughi: Berlioz: Benvenuto Cellini Overture; Brahms: Violin Concerto in D major; Dvořák: Symphony No. 7*

Friday — *Ceccato, Festival Chorus, Russell, Myers: Mahler: Symphony No. 2 in C minor ("Resurrection")*

Saturday — *Ormandy, all orchestral: Prokofiev: Classical Symphony; Strauss: Don Juan; Respighi: The Pines of Rome; Ravel: La Valse; Tchaikovsky: "1812" Overture*

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