

## The centenary of Czechoslovakia and the Czech Philharmonic in London

It's been almost two and a half years since the general director of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, David Mareček, and I sat down together and unleashed our fantasy about a grand concert by the Czech Philharmonic in London during the celebrations to mark the centenary of Czechoslovakia's establishment. We were led to this idea by a key point: Czech music, Czech composers, Czech conductors and master musicians have always enjoyed great sympathy, understanding and appreciation on the British Isles. They fortified the good name of their country, expanded awareness about it, and helped to forge and develop invaluable ties. Without exaggeration it can be stated that the Czech–British cultural connection by way of music is an extraordinarily strong one. Our dream gradually took on a real framework, and after a period of intensive work and overcoming obstacles both big and small, it now finds its expression in a unique concert by the Czech Philharmonic under the baton of the renowned Semyon Bychkov at the Royal Academy of Music.

Here is the proper place to thank our partners, friends, allies and all those who share in our enthusiasm, because without their help and participation this beautiful yet organizationally and financially demanding project could never have happened. But gratitude also belongs to our critics and doubters, because their sceptical view of a head-in-the-clouds idea brought us back down to earth and towards a practical approach — and that's no small thing. During celebrations of the hundredth anniversary of modern statehood, the Czech Republic is presenting an extraordinary gift not just to London audiences but through a live BBC Radio broadcast also to the entire British public: a concert of breath-taking compositions by Bedřich Smetana and Antonín Dvořák. It is not my task to assess the artistic content of the concert, but I would like to mention its unique Czech–British connection. Antonín Dvořák began composing his Symphony No. 7 in D Minor in June 1884, after receiving an offer from the London Philharmonic Society and becoming its honorary member. He finished the work in March 1885, and on April 22nd of the same year he conducted its world premiere at St James's Hall, London's principal concert venue in those days.

This thrilling composition has been stirring British music lovers for 133 years. Just a little younger in age is Dvorak's Concerto for Cello and Orchestra, which also

had its world premiere in London, in March 1896. It even could be said that the foundation of contemporary Czech–British relations in all its breadth and thematic diversity is rooted in music. From music it grew and to music it returns. Notwithstanding the rare dissonant tones, our shared history is characterized by teamwork, harmony, connection by an ideal. Music is a compelling and noble symbol of our deep friendship. I firmly believe that this concert by the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra will provide listeners with a profound experience, that they will remember the impression of Czech music, Czech genius and Czech artistry for a long time to come. I have the same wish as Antonín Dvořák did: for his Symphony No. 7 to “move the world”. And perhaps more generally, that music and culture will move today’s world.

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