



# Thames Youth Orchestra

Simon Ferris, conductor

## Concert

Saturday March 20<sup>th</sup> 2010  
7.30pm

All Saints Kingston

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# Programme

## **Bedrich Smetana (1824-1884) *The Moldau* from *Má Vlast* Symphonic Cycle**

Smetana thought of himself as a composer of opera first and chamber music second; but it was in a third voice - orchestral composition - that he articulated his most eloquent and genre-defining expression of Czech nationalism.

It was a nationalism that grew slowly. Naturally enough for an ambitious young composer of his generation on the periphery of the Austro-Germanic musical world, his first move was towards the centre of gravity of European art music. But the relative failure of his attempted career as a travelling virtuoso pianist, coupled perhaps with the oblique perspective generated by a prolonged spell of teaching in the musical backwater of Gothenburg in Sweden, thrust him, on his return to Prague, into a reevaluation of his musical and personal heritage.

The emergent nationalism in music in the second half of the nineteenth century was of course symptomatic of deeper political fault lines running across Europe. There was, in particular, from roughly the middle of the century a growing movement in the various satraps of the Austro-Hungarian Empire towards national self-determination – a movement at times brutally suppressed; and Smetana, back in Prague and beginning to carve out a name for himself both as composer and musical director, found himself drawn into overtly nationalistic circles.

However, in the summer of 1874 Smetana, musically well-established in Prague, was afflicted by a more personal crisis – he was starting to experience difficulties with his hearing, and it was in the course of rapid auditory decline that he composed the first two movements of the monumental symphonic cycle *Ma Vlast*; by the time he was orchestrating these movements in the autumn he was profoundly deaf in both ears, first symptom of the syphilis which was to lead to his madness, incarceration and death ten years later.

The second of the movements, *The Moldau*, charts the progress of the Vltava from the confluence of two brooks, characterized by the intertwined flutes and clarinets of the opening – in a lyrically meandering programmatic evocation of the Bohemian landscape and of the dance-song idiom of the countryside. “Passing through dark forests,” run Smetana’s own notes, “the sounds of the hunter’s horn are heard ever nearer. Through meadowlands it passes where a wedding feast is being celebrated... the stream becomes a roaring cataract, beating its way through rocky chasms, widening at last into the majestic river that flows through Prague, greeted by the mighty old fortress Vysehrad, where it vanishes over the horizon, lost to the poet’s sight.”

## Leos Janáček (1854 – 1928) *Taras Bulba* JWIV/15

### I The death of Andrei

### II The death of Ostrap

### III The prophesy and death of Taras Bulba

*Taras Bulba* was written between 1915 and 1918 as a curious and perhaps ambiguously brutal homage to the Czech soldiers engaged in the First World War, fighting on behalf of an empire which to Janáček, as to perhaps all Czechs, was oppressive. And it was around this time that Janáček entered, perhaps not wholly coincidentally, the period of his greatest creativity, and from which the majority of his great works date.

Janáček's career followed an unusual trajectory. Born and rooted musically at the heart of the nineteenth century, he succeeded, in the last decade and a half of his life, in turning his deep understanding of Moravian folk idioms to the cause of European modernism. In folk music he found not material (he used no Moravian folk tunes after about 1900) so much as an anchor to place. "I maintain that a pure musical note means nothing unless it is pinned down in life, blood, locale. Otherwise it is a worthless toy."

Beyond his political antipathy to Germanic art-music was a realisation that much musical experience cannot be made to conform to Western classical musical notation or harmony systems. Janáček's late idiom moves within a functional tonal framework grounded in the nineteenth century. However, there is an overall lack of long-range planning, and his sporadic use of key signatures - in *Taras Bulba*, for instance, he occasionally notates passages in A flat (one of his favourite keys, the others being D flat/C sharp) - seem designed merely to help him orientate himself in this new and unusual territory.

*Taras Bulba* is based on Gogol's telling of the story of the Cossack who fought against Polish oppression, losing both his sons (the first by his own hand) and his own life in the struggle.

**Movement 1** - Bulba and his forces have laid siege to the Polish town of Dubno, but his youngest son recognises in the daughter of the governor of that town a former love, and he betrays his family and national cause to join the beleaguered Polish garrison and fight to defend his beloved, until he is struck down by his father's implacable hand. The movement begins with a melancholy version of Taras's own theme on cor anglais, and is centred on the love duet between Andrei and his Polish girl, interrupted by the martial blaze of Taras's theme on the trombones. Battle and the death of Andrei ensue.

**Movement 2** - Bulba's second son is captured by the Poles and carried to Warsaw, where Bulba follows him in disguise and is witness to his torture and public execution. Ostrap's anguished cries (high on the Eb clarinet, over snarling, flutter-tonguing trumpets) prompt Bulba, in the crowd, to shout out encouragement. The music is all derived from a brief

jagged motif in the violins at the opening, which then metamorphoses throughout the movement, overlain at times by a ghoulish Polish dance of triumph.

**Movement 3** - Taras is captured, tied to a tree and burned alive. But in his last moment he sees his own soldiers make a daring escape across the Dneiper river, and is moved to prophesy the ultimate vindication of their pursuit of liberty in a triumphal music of brass, bells and organs.

### **Bohuslav Martinů (1890-1959) Pamatnik Lidicim (Memorial to Lidice) H.296**

The bullishness of Janacek's *Taras Bulba* and the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire did not, in fact, herald an easy future for the new Czechoslovakia, and Martinů lived much of his life in exile of one sort or another – artistic and voluntary, in the first instance, in Paris; thereafter enforced, in New York, after he was forced to flee Paris by the approach of the Nazis and then prevented from returning after the war by his antipathy to the Communist regime.

The *Memorial to Lidice* was written to a commission from the Czech government-in-exile to commemorate the eradication of the villages of Lidice and Ležáky by the Nazis in 1942, in reprisal for the assassination of the SS General Heydrich, Deputy Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia, who had been specifically charged with the extirpation of the Jews in those provinces (and who was also one of the key architects of the final solution). The agents who carried out the assassination were killed or captured, and one was found to be carrying a scrap of a document on which the names of the two villages were written. All of the men in the villages were executed, and the women and children deported to Ravensbrück concentration camp. In all, 2000 men women and children died in the reprisals.

Martinů's *Memorial* mixes funeral dirge with blazing defiance in a single movement. It opens with a dark C minor chord quickly dissolving into C sharp minor, and then a more heroic E flat towards the centre of the piece; the C sharp minor dirge returns, but this time shot through by the “V for Victory” opening motif of Beethoven's fifth symphony. The music ends with peaceful assurance in C major.

*Interval (20 minutes)*

## **Anton Dvořák (1841-1904) Symphony no.9 in E minor, “From the New World”**

**I Andante – Allegro molto**

**II Largo**

**III Scherzo: molto vivace**

**IV Allegro con fuoco**

Dvořák, in 1891, was at the height of his fame in the English-speaking world. He had made numerous visits to an England which he found pleasantly free of what he regarded as the condescending arrogance of the Austro-German musical establishment, and he was now invited by Jeanette Thurber to take the post of artistic director and professor of composition at the National Conservatory of Music in America (in New York) of which she was president, at a rate of pay in the region of twenty-five times what he earned at the Prague Conservatory.

The offer was made in part because of Dvořák's popularity in the USA, where his works had been regularly performed since 1879, but largely because of his reputation as a nationalist composer, which Mrs Thurber expressly hoped could be turned to the accelerated development of a distinctive American art music. Dvořák accepted, and the first fruit of his three-year stay was the ninth symphony (published as his fifth). He took pains to point out that the symphony was conceived as a vehicle of the folk musical traditions of African American and Amerindian cultures (in search of idiomatic material he had asked Henry Thacker Burleigh, an African American student at the National Conservatory, to sing him plantation spirituals, and had also solicited transcriptions of Amerindian music from the critic Henry Krehbiel – from which it may be concluded that his knowledge of Native and African American musical culture cannot have been extensive).

In a sense, of course, Dvořák was repeating a trick – it had been his immersion in the folk idioms of his native Bohemia that had lent much of his own music what German critics regarded as its naive mongrel vigour. But in selecting the symphony as a form for his first offering he was also dignifying the material in the way that came most naturally to him – a recourse to the Austro-Germanic tradition into which he had, despite his grumbling, been accepted.

It is quickly apparent that there are no actual Amerindian or plantation spiritual tunes at play in the symphony – Dvořák preferred to distil what he believed to be the essence of those idioms into such characteristics as pentatonism in the melody, flattened leading note, strongly syncopated rhythms and so on. But it has been noted that the famous cor anglais melody of the largo has much in common with the spiritual *Steal away* - which Burleigh is known to have sung to him – and the opening theme of the finale, with its modal inflections and terse rhythmic energy, suggests Native American song. However, we are at no time in the presence of the exotic – American influences are digested into a European, and specifically Czech, idiom.

The slow introduction prefigures the horn call of the first theme – a theme which is to recur throughout the course of the symphony. The tempestuous scurrying of the first theme group contrasts with the more lyrical second and third themes introduced on flute, which are nevertheless motivically linked to it.

The second and third movements both owe something to Dvořák's aborted Hiawatha opera. The second movement was evidently written with Minnehaha's Forest Funeral in mind, and the Scherzo seems to have been inspired by the dance of Pau-Puk-Keewis at Hiawatha's wedding feast (although the Czech character is at its most pronounced here).

The finale introduces a theme of heroic defiance which, in its development, is pitted against the first theme of the first movement, and the tension between the two is carried over into the coda and ultimately dissolved only in the ambiguous and surprising final chord.

At the bottom of the full score of the symphony, Dvořák wrote "Praise God! Completed 24th May 1893 at 9 o'clock in the morning. The children have arrived at Southampton (a cable came at 1:33 p.m.)" (the four children that Dvořák and his wife had left behind would be in New York a few days later) - as if wishing to mark, obliquely, that this is a symphony as much to do with a Czech composer's homesickness, and a personal rather than political nationalism, as it is with the textures of a new world.

programme notes © John Ferris, 2010

## **Simon Ferris, conductor**

Simon Ferris, founder director of the Thames Youth Orchestra, read music and was organ scholar at King's College London. As an undergraduate he pursued additional instrumental and musicianship studies with Bernard Oram at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and, after graduation, received composition tuition and encouragement from the composer and John Ireland pupil, Geoffrey Bush.

A skilled and experienced jazz pianist, Simon's wide-ranging professional career now embraces an array of genres and disciplines, as performer, composer (published by ABRSM), arranger, writer (with programme note credits for, among others the Maggini Quartet and the Hanover Band), conductor and teacher, with duties including preparing children's choirs for the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

Simon is currently Musician in Residence at Tiffin School, and Musician in Residence at Tiffin Girls' School, Kingston upon Thames, where in addition to his composing and performing duties he also teaches harmony.

## Friends of TYO

The purpose of the Friends' Association is to provide financial support to the orchestra to help offset the significant expenses of running a full-scale symphonic ensemble. These costs include music, venue and instrument hire, staffing, performing rights, publicity, transport, maintaining a web presence, catering – the list goes on.

The cost of membership of the friends' scheme is £15 per annum for an individual subscription, £25 for family membership and £40 for corporate members. The benefits are as follows:

- Reduced ticket prices for concerts and events
- Members' names listed in concert programmes
- Receipt of a regular email newsletter

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For further details, or to apply for membership, please contact Friends Coordinator, Miranda Fagandini: [friends@thamesyouthorchestra.co.uk](mailto:friends@thamesyouthorchestra.co.uk)

## TYO Staff

Musical Director – Simon Ferris  
Executive Director – Rebecca Lacey  
Violins Coach – Adrian Charlesworth  
Cellos Coach – Sarah Hedley-Miller  
Lower Strings Coach – Pippa Hyde  
Brass Coach – Ian Stott  
Wind Coach – Andrew Watson  
Percussion Coach – Ben Porter  
Treasurer – Lisa Hawkins  
Friends Coordinator – Miranda Fagandini

# THAMES YOUTH ORCHESTRA

Ellie Lee, leader

## First Violins

Ellie Lee\*  
James Walsh  
Bola Kim  
Celia Rogers  
Anna Selig  
Zara Kwan  
Lara Barlow  
Timothy Shipley

## Second Violins

Rosie Parker\*  
Aashraya Shankar  
Imogen Dodds  
Jessica Plummer  
Adisha Kapila  
Toby Piachaud  
Sung-Hyo Lee  
Alex Ewan  
Michael Crean  
Steffi Schofield  
Kath Roberts  
William Brunt  
Sian Davies

## Violas

Eleanor Figueiredo\*  
David Knowles  
Grace Moon  
Ed Tan  
Heppy Longworth  
Tom Pollard  
Tillie Dilworth

## Cellos

Hannah Evans\*  
Eunyoung Lee  
Miles Dilworth  
Fred Mikardo-Greaves  
Arran Mornin  
Sarah Ebsworth  
Krzysztof Kaczmarek

## Flutes

Katy Ovens\*  
Lauren Lovick  
Ellie Barlow  
Mayuko Tanno

## Oboes

Catherine Hancock\*  
Jesus Duque  
Diya Kapila

## Clarinets

Georgina Feary\*  
Tom Nichols  
Ellie Pryde  
Miranda Evans

## Bassoons

Isabel White\*  
Alison White

\*principal

## Horns

Alexei Watkins\*  
Tom Jackson\*  
William Whiting  
Clara Hardingham  
Chris Born  
David Liu  
Sadhbh O'Sullivan

## Trumpets

Imogen Hancock\*  
Bryony Watson  
Nicolaj Schubert  
Robert Hawkins

## Trombones

Edmund Jillings\*  
Julius Whiteman  
Matilda Ashe-Belton

## Timpani

Patrick Milne

## Percussion

Daehyun Lee  
Enoque Adolpho

## Organ

Simon Toyne