

Dvořák's Sacred Music, a Tribute to Bernstein, and the Celebration of the 100th Anniversary of Czechoslovakia's Founding Characterise This Year's Dvořák Prague Festival

Prague, 2018 – Antonín Dvořák's monumental sacred works, piano virtuosos, world-class orchestras, and great soloists, the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the founding of Czechoslovakia, a tribute to Leonard Bernstein, a series of chamber music concerts, and young talents – that describes this year's eleventh annual Dvořák Prague International Music Festival, to be held from 7 to 21 September. This year, the key programme series Dvořák Collection will complete a two-year cycle presenting the master's oratorios, cantatas, and masses. The festival has entrusted Jakub Hrůša and the Czech Philharmonic, the festival's orchestra-in-residence, with performing the monumental choral works *The Spectre's Bride* and *Saint Ludmila*. A rarity in the repertoire will also be performed – the cantata *The American Flag*, Dvořák's only setting of a text in English, as well as the seldom heard *Lužany Mass* in the composer's own arrangement for the Rudolfinum. The festival's collection of prestigious orchestras will expand to include the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment from the UK, the Camerata Salzburg from Austria, and London's Academy of St Martin in the Fields, which has earned long-lasting acclaim for its superb interpretations of Mozart. The Staatskapelle Dresden is returning to Prague after a two-year absence, this time with the conductor Manfred Honeck and the enchanting Bernarda Fink. Representing today's greatest instrumentalists on the festival programme are the pianists Krystian Zimerman, Evgeny Kissin, and Valentina Lisitsa and the violinist Janine Jansen. The Israeli clarinettist Sharon Kam will be the first woman to serve as curator of the chamber music series.

Mr. Karel Komárek is a culture patron whose Karel Komárek Family Foundation is a major supporter of the Dvořák Prague International Music Festival. Before the festival programme was made public, he said: *"I believe that the arts play a fundamental, indispensable role in society, and I am glad to have been able to take part in establishing a festival that has a growing reputation both in this country and abroad. I am pleased that each year there are increasing numbers of people who are as enchanted by the festival as we are."* The Dvořák Prague Festival is known for its finely polished dramaturgy combined with respect for tradition and characterised by its loving care for the whole legacy of the great Czech composer with a clearly defined dramaturgical direction. *"I construct the festival's programming like carefully planned architecture, and over the long term that lets me develop it and built it up, with the goal of having the festival's greatest stars serve the programme, and not the other way around,"* says the festival's artistic director Marek Vrabec.

The Dvořák Collection is the traditional series presenting the main line of programming that pays tribute to the world-famous composer. This year, the series will complete a two-year cycle featuring all of Dvořák's works for choir and orchestra – oratorios, cantatas, and masses. The festival will open with the cantata *The Spectre's Bride*, with words by Karel Jaromír Erben, performed by the Czech Philharmonic led by Jakub Hrůša, the Czech Philharmonic Choir from Brno, and soloists. The performance of the monumental oratorio *Saint Ludmila* in its original, complete version will be a special event commemorating the 100th anniversary of the founding of Czechoslovakia. Giving the performance will be the Czech Philharmonic and the Prague Philharmonic Choir led by Jakub Hrůša. The concert will be broadcast live on Jan Palach Square, where a number of Czech and Slovak choirs will join in. Another important item on the festival programme is the *Lužany Mass* in Dvořák's seldom heard arrangement for organ and strings, which he created for the Rudolfinum. For this performance, the festival has invited the conductor and organist Stephen Cleobury, Czech soloists, and England's Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and the King's College Choir. Besides these vast, imposing works, there will also be performances of other music by Dvořák combining the majesty of the human voice with the power of the orchestra's sonority. We will also be hearing the very rarely performed cantata *The American Flag*,

Psalm 149, and the *Festival Song*. Performing the solo vocal parts in Dvořák's cantatas, oratorios, and masses will be an elite lineup of Czech and Slovak soloists, including sopranos Kateřina Kněžíková and Pavla Vykopalová, mezzo-sopranos Markéta Cukrová and Alena Kropáčková, tenors Richard Samek, Ondřej Koplík, and Aleš Voráček, baritone Roman Hoza, and basses Jozef Benci and Svatopluk Sem.

The rest of the festival's programme consists of five thematic series that form the firm yet flexible backbone of the festival dramaturgy and that feature the music of many other great composers from several different centuries, from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart to Johannes Brahms, Claude Debussy, and Leonard Bernstein. The one-hundredth anniversary of Bernstein's birth will be commemorated by two great soloists: the sought-after Dutch violinist Janine Jansen, who will be appearing with the Camerata Salzburg, a leading Austrian orchestra, and the pianist Krystian Zimerman accompanied by the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra under its new chief conductor Alexander Liebreich. Among the eagerly anticipated events of the festival are a concert by Evgeny Kissin, the phenomenal Russian pianist with the reputation of a child prodigy, and a recital by Valentina Lisitsa, a pianist of Ukrainian origin. Marek Vrabec commented on this exceptionally strong lineup of world-class pianists with a touch of hyperbole: *"The presence of Krystian Zimerman, Evgeny Kissin, and Valentina Lisitsa during a single season is enough to make the Dvořák Prague Festival into a piano festival of no small importance."*

For the first time, a woman will serve a curator of the chamber music series: the Israeli clarinetist Sharon Kam. She will be presenting herself on five evenings with outstanding chamber music players and soloists and will be appearing as soloist with the famed Academy of St Martin in the Fields to perform Mozart's great Clarinet Concerto. There will also be performances of clarinet quintets by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Max Reger, and Johannes Brahms, works with the characteristic combination of clarinet, viola, and piano, and great music for quartet from three different periods performed by the celebrated Belcea Quartet from London. Concerning her choices of superb chamber music partners, including the Dutch violinist Isabelle van Keulen, Ori Kama who is the curator's brother and a respected violist, and the Czech violinist Josef Špaček, Sharon Kam had this to say: *"I am bringing my core musical partners to Prague, the people with whom I have been playing the longest and with the most enjoyment. There are many ways to go about it. You have to have some sort of central idea or theme... But I have decided that I want to bring the best of my chamber music life to Prague."*

At the festival's invitation, several leading foreign orchestras are coming to Prague. The Staatskapelle Dresden with the conductor Manfred Honeck and the mezzo-soprano Bernarda Fink, a specialist in Dvořák's songs, will provide for one of the highlights of the Dvořák Prague Festival. Together, they will be performing Dvořák's *Biblical Songs*. Concerts on other evenings will feature famed British orchestras – the Academy of St Martin in the Fields and Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment – and the Austrian ensemble Camerata Salzburg.

Making their debut this year on the main festival stage in the Dvořák Hall at the Rudolfinum are the South Korean violinist Bomsori Kim and the young Czech pianist Lukáš Klánský. In this way, the festival is continuing with the introduction of successful, young performers who are gradually making headway on the international scene and are gathering awards at international competitions.

The main centre for the festival is Prague's Rudolfinum, a unique concert hall. The concerts of the chamber music series take place at the Convent of Saint Agnes of Bohemia. Tickets to all of the concerts can be purchased at www.dvorakovapraha.cz.

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About the Festival

The Dvořák Prague International Music Festival is not only a celebration of Antonín Dvořák as a musical genius and as the most celebrated Czech composer around the world, but also an important societal event. The festival brings a succession of top soloists, conductors, and internationally acclaimed orchestras and chamber ensembles to Prague to present Dvořák's music and works by other composers from around the world to an international public. The festival organiser is the Academy of Classical Music, and its cofounder and supporter for many years is the entrepreneur and arts patron Karel Komárek. The festival has received long-term support from the Czech Ministry of Culture and the City of Prague. We wish to thank all of our other partners and patrons who help bring the most important classical music stars and performers from around the world to Prague.

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The Dvořák Prague Festival is a member of the Association of Music Festivals of the Czech Republic. It will take place from 7 to 21 September 2018.

More information is available online at www.dvorakovapraha.cz.