
London Philharmonic Orchestra
DVOŘÁK
OTHELLO OVERTURE
SYMPHONY NO. 6
SYMPHONY NO. 7
YANNICK NÉZET-SÉGUIN conductor
LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

## DVOŘÁK
## OTHELLO OVERTURE, OP. 93

As Dvořák approached his 50th birthday in 1891, he began to conceive a grand new project. He must have had at the back of his mind the example of fellow Czech Bedrich Smetana's *Má vlast* ('My Country') – six independent tone-poems which, played together, add up to a kind of super-tone-poem. What Dvořák wanted to express was in essence a philosophy of life. He had the idea of doing so in three connected tone-poems or 'overtures' – viable as separate statements but also playable together as a triptych. At first he wasn't sure what exactly to call these three connected pieces, but eventually it clarified in his mind as 'Nature, Life & Love'. The 'philosophical' element is the illustration of how those three crucial expressions of the life force are interconnected. Eventually though, possibly after pressure from his publisher, Dvořák chose three individual titles: *In Nature's Realm*, *Carnival* and *Othello*. That's how they were printed, and soon afterwards they began to take on independent life, with *Carnival* the most popular, then *In Nature's Realm*, then *Othello*.

*Othello*'s relative neglect is strange, as it is the most powerful and strikingly original of the three overtures. Like Shakespeare's play, Dvořák's *Othello* is focussed on the dark side of human love – jealousy, 'the green-eyed monster that doth mock the meat it feeds on' – and how destructive that can be to even the noblest natures. There may well have been an element of autobiography here. In his youth Dvořák had experienced powerful but unrequited love for one of his pupils, Josefina Čermákóva. No doubt there were strong feelings of jealousy when she accepted another suitor. Dvořák eventually married Josefina's younger sister, Anna, but the memory of that pain seems to have lingered. The beautiful opening, hymn-like on muted strings, could be an image of ideal love, or perhaps it's the sleeping Desdemona, the innocent target of Othello's inflamed suspicions. But soon darker passions erupt, and one particularly eerie passage towards the climax (flickering flutes, quietly clashed cymbals, sinister muted horn) surely shows us Othello himself approaching Desdemona's chamber with murder in mind. It all ends, as it only can, in rage and despair.

## DVOŘÁK
## SYMPHONY NO. 6 IN D MAJOR, OP. 60

It often needs only a simple stroke to transform a lame musical idea into a vibrant one. Dvořák's first conception for the opening movement of his Sixth Symphony was a rather square tune in D minor, based on a Czech folksong. Then inspiration struck: the key changed from minor to major, and a fast three-time replaced the original two. The result was a theme with a wonderful swinging momentum, like an airborne waltz. The potential for development was now clear, and it's no surprise that from this beginning Dvořák was able to create his first truly great symphonic first movement.

Something else that is new about the Sixth Symphony is the complete assurance of the orchestral writing. The freshness and refinement of the Sixth's sound-world is never compromised, and here for the first time in an orchestral work we sense how much of Dvořák's thinking was influenced by nature – birdsong and the sounds of wind and water. This new mastery may have been partly due to encouragement from the outstanding conductor Hans Richter – originally a Wagnerian but increasingly sympathetic to Dvořák's champion Brahms. In 1879 Richter gave a fine performance of Dvořák's Third *Slavonic Rhapsody* in Berlin in the presence of the composer. Not only was the audience enthusiastic, but Richter dragged Dvořák out of his seat and embraced him on the concert platform. Afterwards Richter took Dvořák to dinner and made the composer promise to write a symphony for Richter himself to conduct. The result was the Symphony No. 6, completed in the summer of 1880 – after a couple of false starts. Dvořák clearly realised that he had to turn out something extra-special for a conductor like Richter, which may explain why the first movement's leading idea took time to shape itself.

A song-like *Adagio* follows the sustained flight of the first movement. Then comes a more direct invocation of Czech folk music in the *Scherzo*. The subtitle is 'Furiant': a reference to a wild dance in a constantly shifting rhythm, reflected in the recurring ONE-two ONE-two ONE-two ONE-two-three ONE-two-three pattern of Dvořák's main theme. A gentler pastoral Trio section follows, in which Dvořák makes unusual lyrical use of a solo piccolo. The *Finale* makes no secret of its debt to Brahms: the first theme of this movement and that of Brahms's Second Symphony (also in D major) are clearly related. But this is an act of homage, not of theft, and the movement as a whole is fully independent in spirit, building confidently to one of Dvořák's most exhilarating endings.

## DVOŘÁK
## SYMPHONY NO. 7 IN D MINOR, OP. 70

The Seventh might not be Dvořák's most popular symphony, but it's arguably his best. In the composer's own mind, he simply had to deliver something special for the London Philharmonic Society, who had commissioned the piece in 1884. His career was at a crossroads: success had finally come, offers were being made, and contacts were putting themselves forward. Brahms and others were urging Dvořák to consider a move from his hometown of Prague to Vienna or Berlin. All Dvořák had to do – in his own mind – was prove that he could write first-class symphonic music already; music that didn't rely overtly on indigenous Czech folk themes and that demonstrated a firm grasp of symphonic thought.

On that front, Dvořák more than succeeded with his Seventh Symphony. It was first performed on 22 April 1885 in St James's Hall, London, and was immediately hailed as a masterpiece. As a symphony it's near flawless, and certainly Dvořák's most organic and well-argued. For that, the composer had Brahms to thank. Dvořák had recently heard Brahms's Third Symphony, whose taut, concise and clear-cut structure is wholly evident here. There are also a good few points of direct comparison: both symphonies contain radiant horn solos (you'll hear Dvořák's in his second movement) and both are stalked by a sense of underlying darkness.

That darkness – perhaps 'severity' is a better word – had been uncommon in Dvořák's music up to this point. The Seventh was the composer's first symphony written in a minor key and it only rarely finds the major. Even so, the joy and bustle associated with Dvořák's music is somehow ever-present – either fighting to be heard or peering through the composer's minor-key colourings. Perhaps it's the composer's profusion of rich melodies that keeps the Symphony so consistently radiant even when resolutely rooted in the minor (as in the demonic dance of the *Scherzo*, for example).

So organic and rich in cross-referencing is the Seventh's music that an analysis of its themes and their origins is best left for academics. What's worth listening out for in the first movement, however, is the restlessness of Dvořák's lower strings, which helps create a feeling of impending stormy weather; throughout, instruments enter in a fragmentary fashion, each seeming to stride into the conversation with a conflicting view.

Dvořák's second movement is a continuous, river-like flow of inspired melodies opening

with what sounds like an ancient chorale in a serene F major, the key that also closes the movement. The aforementioned horn solo that comes later represents one of the Symphony's only moments of warmth; a sudden appearance of the sun between clouds. Though the third movement features an idyllic Trio section, it's surrounded by a demonic dance built from an insistent, syncopated figure that combines duple and triple time in reference to the *furiant*, a Czech folk dance.

Dvořák didn't want to over-egg his use of devices and themes from Czech folk music in the Symphony, and uses them similarly fleetingly and subtly in his finale. This movement is a fierce tussle, relieved only by its bright secondary idea cast in a major key and first heard on cellos, supported by lightly ornamenting violins. Dvořák seems to triumph over the movement's nervous energy as he introduces a theme of distinctly Czech character on the flutes. In a dramatic coda, the Symphony's final paragraph, the music finally finds victory as it discovers the warmth of D major.

*Programme note © Andrew Mellor*

## **YANNICK NÉZET-SÉGUIN** *conductor*

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Yannick Nézet-Séguin was Principal Guest Conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra from 2008-2014. In 2012, he added the Music Directorship of The Philadelphia Orchestra to his roles as Music Director of the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra and long-time Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Orchestre Métropolitain, Montreal, where he has served since 2000. 2017/18 will be his 10th and final season with the Rotterdam Philharmonic and will draw to a close with the Orchestra's centenary celebrations. In 2020/21 he succeeds James Levine as the third Music Director of the Metropolitan Opera, New York and remains in post with The Philadelphia Orchestra until at least summer 2026.

Notable operas include *Lohengrin* at the Wiener Staatsoper and his first Wagnerian production at the Metropolitan Opera with performances of *Der fliegende Holländer*. Orchestral collaborations include projects with the Bayerischer Rundfunk, Wiener Philharmoniker as part of the Internationale Stiftung Mozarteum's Mozartwoche and the Berliner Philharmoniker in addition to a tour of Asia with The Philadelphia Orchestra and a tour of Europe with the Rotterdam Philharmonic and Chamber Orchestra of Europe. Recent Deutsche Grammophon releases include the complete Schumann symphonies and *Le nozze di Figaro* with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, which was nominated for a Grammy Award for Best Opera Recording. His discography also includes *The Rite of Spring* and Rachmaninoff Variations with Daniil Trifonov and The Philadelphia Orchestra; Tchaikovsky with the Rotterdam Philharmonic and Lisa Batiashvili and recordings with Rotterdam Philharmonic (EMI Classics, BIS and DG) and Orchestre Métropolitain (ATMA Classique).

Nézet-Séguin studied piano, conducting, composition and chamber music at the Conservatoire de musique du Québec in Montreal and choral conducting at the Westminster Choir College in Princeton, New Jersey before going on to study with renowned conductors, such as maestro Carlo Maria Giulini. His honours include Musical America's Artist of the Year (2016), Royal Philharmonic Society Award; Canada's National Arts Centre Award and the Prix Denise-Pelletier. He holds honorary doctorates from the University of Quebec in Montreal, Curtis Institute in Philadelphia and Westminster Choir College of Rider University. He was appointed a Companion of the Order of Canada in 2012.

# LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

The London Philharmonic Orchestra is one of the world's finest orchestras, balancing a long and distinguished history with its present-day position as one of the most dynamic and forward-looking ensembles in the UK. This reputation has been secured by the Orchestra's performances in the concert hall and opera house, its many award-winning recordings, trail-blazing international tours and wide-ranging educational work.

Founded by Sir Thomas Beecham in 1932, the Orchestra has since been headed by many of the world's greatest conductors, including Sir Adrian Boult, Bernard Haitink, Sir Georg Solti, Klaus Tennstedt and Kurt Masur. Vladimir Jurowski was appointed the Orchestra's Principal Guest Conductor in March 2003, and became Principal Conductor in September 2007.

The Orchestra is based at Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall in London, where it has been Resident Orchestra since 1992, giving around 30 concerts a season. Each summer it takes up its annual residency at Glyndebourne Festival Opera where it has been Resident Symphony Orchestra for over 50 years. The Orchestra performs at venues around the UK and has made numerous international tours, performing to sell-out audiences in America, Europe, Asia and Australasia.

The London Philharmonic Orchestra made its first recordings on 10 October 1932, just three days after its first public performance. It has recorded and broadcast regularly ever since, and in 2005 established its own record label. These recordings are taken mainly from live concerts given by conductors including LPO Principal Conductors from Beecham and Boult, through Haitink, Solti and Tennstedt, to Masur and Jurowski. **lpo.org.uk**

## **ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK** (1841–1904)

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|---|---|---|---|
| **CD1** | 01 | ***14:38*** | **Othello Overture, Op. 93** |
| | | ***43:54*** | **Symphony No. 6 in D major, Op. 60** |
| | 02 | 13:04 | Allegro non tanto |
| | 03 | 12:06 | Adagio |
| | 04 | 07:54 | Scherzo (Furiant): Presto |
| | 05 | 10:50 | Finale: Allegro con spirito |
| **CD2** | | ***39:49*** | **Symphony No. 7 in D minor, Op. 70** |
| | 01 | 11:19 | Allegro maestoso |
| | 02 | 11:28 | Poco adagio |
| | 03 | 07:39 | Scherzo: Vivace |
| | 04 | 09:23 | Finale: Allegro |

**YANNICK NÉZET-SÉGUIN** *conductor*
**LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA**
**Pieter Schoeman** *leader*

Recorded live at *Southbank Centre's*
**ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL**, London

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