



Czech Philharmonic

## Performances with Semyon Bychkov

*"After the death of the orchestra's chief conductor Jiří Bělohlávek, the management of the Czech Philharmonic was faced with a difficult question: whom would they choose in place of that irreplaceable person? Management and the players were in agreement: it would be Semyon Bychkov, who is enormously experienced with orchestras around the world, an acclaimed opera conductor, and above all a superb musician and a demanding professional who is a guarantee that the quality of the leading Czech orchestra will not fade. But what good would there be in high standards and professionalism without empathy, kindness, and a deeply humane approach to the orchestral players? That fact that Semyon Bychkov has these qualities in abundance will perhaps be clear even just from the interview that follows."*  
OperaPlus, 28 November 2017

Not only did the Czech Philharmonic get the country's most important music festival outside of Prague off to a wonderful start but, it also confirmed that it is making its way to the centre of the world's leading orchestras. As long as it continues to collaborate with figures like Semyon Bychkov, even the recent passing of its principal conductor Jiří Bělohlávek – who was honoured here by a performance of Nedbal's *Valse triste* as he had been at the Rudolfinum – should not stand in its way.  
Hospodářské noviny, 17 June 2017

This week, the Czech Philharmonic is playing under the baton of its Chief Conductor designate, Semyon Bychkov. If Wednesday's concert is any indication of the orchestra's future under the leadership of this conductor, wonderful times are ahead. The orchestra played with focus and total commitment right from the start...

When Semyon Bychkov walked out to take a bow for the third time and signalled for the orchestra to rise, the players demonstratively remained in their seats and joined in the applause, in order that the conductor could first take a bow alone – this is a grand gesture of acknowledgement, and in truth, I cannot recall if I have ever seen it done before in the Rudolfinum and by the Czech Philharmonic. Promising signs, expectations, and mutual attunement seem to be at a maximum.  
OperaPlus, 7 December 2017



## **BERIO *Sinfonia***

Prague – October 2018

During the labyrinthine third movement [of Berio's *Sinfonia*] that overwrites the Scherzo of Mahler's Second Symphony with snippets of everyone from Beethoven to Boulez, the newly installed chief conductor Semyon Bychkov led with rhythmic precision while maintaining an air of old-school elegance, now wielding his baton with restrained gestures, now swooping in with his torso like a hawk...  
Classical Voice North America, 26 October 2018

At the third concert on Friday, the performance [of Berio's *Sinfonia*] was not merely excellent, but also very relaxed and precisely coordinated thanks to the musicians having already played it. In particular, the eight singers of the London Voices were visibly engrossed with the music. The voices hovering above the orchestral layer created intoxicating soundscapes supported by simple electronic amplification. The layers were so lucidly shaped that one got the impression of observing the clouds in an inversion from above on a mountain peak.  
OperaPlus, 22 October 2018

The Chief Conductor led the music [Berio's *Sinfonia*] insightfully, and the London Voices, an eight-member amplified vocal group, were wonderfully prepared with secure intonation, making their entrances in the rather complex structures with confidence. The Orchestra carried out the unusual task well, and the result was both colourful and interesting.  
KlasikaPlus, 18 October 2018

Berio [in his *Sinfonia*] conceived the orchestra and vocal ensemble as equal partners, creating multiple layers of music, but at the same time he made uncompromising demands on the individual performers. Semyon Bychkov was able to rely on both the singers and the orchestra to bring this off. He moulded them into a beautifully balanced-sounding ensemble...  
Aktualne, 17 October 2018

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## **BEETHOVEN *Coriolanus Overture***

From the opening notes of Beethoven's *Coriolanus Overture* it was clear that, despite the complications associated with coronavirus, our leading Orchestra is in great shape. Semyon Bychkov chose the perfect tempo and dynamics for the orchestral "punches", which sounded Beethovenian in their gravity, but it was not spasmodic: on the contrary, the fortissimos sounded springy and light. The passing of the themes from violin to woodwind was soft and, even in the shorter phrases, each note was developed. The Orchestra displayed its wide dynamic range in the declarations which some orchestras see as merely rhythmic.  
KlasikaPlus, 29 March 2021

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## **BEETHOVEN *Symphony No. 3***

Prague – March 2021

Finally, we must thank major European arts bodies, such as the splendid Czech Philharmonic, for their determination to bring live music to their Covid-generation audiences, albeit through the medium of online streaming. Under Maestro Semyon Bychkov, the orchestra – so well-known for the spiky sound it memorably created on the Supraphon label – has more of a Vienna Philharmonic-type burnish to it these days – yet still preserving that vigorous blast of brass from the trumpets, that Bohemian rural radiance to the wind-playing. For those who know and admire Paul Kletzki's vintage account of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 3* with the Czech orchestra of 1968, it is clear that Prague's Beethoven tradition has been sustained and strengthened over the decades – with Bychkov leading his players (in their spring concert) through the *Eroica* *Symphony* with abounding energy and nobility, thrilling us, as ever, with a finale that rushes in a single, unstoppable torrent. We look forward to the day when we can see and hear the orchestra "in the flesh" – but perhaps the availability of streaming will open up a new, younger audience for the great orchestras.  
The Quarterly Review, 4 May 2021

Beethoven's Third *Symphony Eroica* gave the Orchestra a further opportunity to show its virtuosity and that it is in great shape. The powerful sections sounded full, tight and focused and I felt throughout the whole piece as if Chief Conductor Semyon Bychkov was holding the reins of a spirited horse. The symphony gives prominence to the brass, which complemented the opulence of the sound perfectly. Lyrical phrases, such as in the woodwind section of the second movement 'Marcia funebre' were shared, as if telling a story. The Scherzo in the third movement reminded one of nature at play. The lively tempo was delivered with ease by the Orchestra, and it was a pleasure to listen to the music enhanced by the input of the brass. The last movement is intermittently philosophical, allowing the listener to ask various questions. The anthem-like ending sounded majestic, bringing to a close a fine evening of music and, one that also that helped through its fundraising efforts.  
KlasikaPlus, 29 March 2021



In the subtlety of sound, Eroica was even more sophisticated than the opening *Coriolanus*, the strings sounded fine and in good harmony – but for this performance the conductor seemed to have toned them down, leaving more space for the winds. It is rare that you get to hear oboe, clarinet, flute and bassoon solos in the first movement of Eroica... the horns always assert themselves, but the other instruments are usually covered by the strings. This performance was as a result dominated by the magical Philharmonic winds. Harmonie, 27 March 2021

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## **BEETHOVEN Symphony No. 5**

Sychrov Castle - June 2020

Finally came Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, in a brilliantly paced performance. The mysterious second movement, with its burst of martial glory in between strange spectral forebodings, has rarely seemed so eloquent. At the very end, Bychkov and the orchestra created a wonderful sense of liberty finally let off the leash. For a moment, it felt as if the sun had broken through. Then came the most moving moment – the applause. Music was truly back again, in all its glory.

The Daily Telegraph, 26 June 2020

After another round of awards and speeches, the stage was clear for Bychkov to spread his wings and launch into a commanding version of Beethoven's Symphony No. 5. The tempo was brisk, with none of the usual pauses that lend the piece so much of its drama. Under Bychkov's baton the music tumbled along, gathering momentum and drawing its impact from especially deep reaches into the lower register. At one point in the first movement, it sounded like a lion roaring. Bychkov let the music relax and breathe in the second movement, drawing out lingering horns. But the respite was short, as the final movements soared to majestic heights with an energy that seemed as if the storms had moved from the sky to the stage. By the final notes, the music felt supercharged. Some concerts are more than the sum of their parts, and that was certainly the case with this one. The impressive performance, historic backdrop, refreshing rain and audience of medical heroes all combined to create a rare and memorable experience. And did a bird perched in a nearby tree really imitate one of the trills in the cadenza in the Haydn concerto? If not, this critic needs to get out more and in touch with the real world again. As do we all.

Bachtrack, 26 June 2020

From the beginning, Chief Conductor Semyon Bychkov chose a brisk tempo... In this way, he freed the piece from a needlessly heavy interpretation, instead giving it strength and energy.

OperaPlus, 26 June 2020

The playing of the Czech Philharmonic was notable for its highly cultivated blend and balance. Of all the A-list orchestras, this is surely the one that is most undervalued.

Financial Times, 25 June 2020

Semyon Bychkov found refreshingly phrased beauty in the slow movement, the woodwind principals liberated musically, the closing pages imbued with faded middle-European nostalgia.

Classical Source, 25 June 2020

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## **BEETHOVEN Symphony No. 7**

Prague - January 2020

Semyon Bychkov knows his Beethoven perfectly. He conducted the symphony (No. 7) by heart and his gestures led the orchestra accurately, indeed he lived Beethoven's music. And the entire Orchestra lived Beethoven's music with him. The Orchestra's joy was almost unbelievable. In the second movement's *Allegro*, the clarinets and bassoons together with the strings gave first-rate performances on a par with the finest orchestras in the world. The second movement sounded almost unearthly. As did the winds in the third movement, *Presto*. It is hard to think of any greater praise. It was a joyous, triumphant and excellent Beethoven. The Czech Philharmonic's performance was almost unreal. It is becoming increasingly evident that the combination of Bělohlávek's work over the years and Semyon Bychkov's current leadership are bearing fruit. The Czech Philharmonic has its place amongst the world's top orchestras once again. And, if the musicians continue to play they did in Beethoven's Symphony No. 7, they absolutely deserve their place there.

KlasikaPlus, 17 January 2020

Bychkov's interpretation of Beethoven's Symphony No. 7 was the climax of the evening. I am delighted to say that the Czech Philharmonic's sound is changing gradually from the traditionally smooth and soft tonality for which it has been known... More distinct colours are beginning to emerge, the overall sound is fresher, and its sound world is more distinct... No matter the roots of this change, it is definitely positive... The performance of the Czech Philharmonic on 15 March showed yet again that the quality of the Orchestra is far ahead of the other Prague orchestras and in recent years the difference appears even greater. I have heard Beethoven Symphony No. 7 in the Rudolfinum far too often but yesterday for the first time I heard it on a level which would stand the



test of European criteria. I am not talking about some new-fangled approach but more about the pacing and the temperament of the sound, full of energy and joy from playing music which was truly captivating.  
Harmonie, 16 January 2020

Semyon Bychkov is now in his second season as Chief Conductor of the Czech Philharmonic. Judging by the atmosphere in the Rudolfinum last night, it hasn't taken him long to win a place in the hearts of the both the audience and the orchestra: rarely have I seen a concert in which orchestral players looked so devoted to the man on the podium. The person who epitomised the happiness in this concert was the mohican-haired cellist Jan Keller, who spent the whole evening casting beaming smiles across at his partner and anyone else who might be looking. But spare a thought for our two bassoonists, who were rocking and rolling to Beethoven's Seventh, clearly relishing the dance feel of the piece... Bychkov and the Czech Phil seem still to be firmly in honeymode. Long may that continue...  
Bachtrack, 16 January 2020

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## **BRAHMS Symphony No. 1**

Prague – February 2022

The concert not only offered the audience a sensational musical experience, but its dramaturgy was also extremely interesting and unique... Brahms's elaborate and long-prepared work formed the second half of the programme and was performed with care and style, but without losing freshness, in short, it was completely flawless... The Czech Philharmonic was graced by countless solos coming from various places. It was the symbol of perfection, made from a combination of excellent intonation, phrasing and feeling, in this case, for example, the performances of oboist Jana Brožková and flutist Naoki Sato...  
KlasikaPlus, 20 February 2022

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## **BRUCH Violin Concerto No. 1**

Prague: Nikolaj Szeps-Znaider, soloist – March 2021

The Czech Philharmonic accompanied Nikolaj Szeps-Znaider sensitively, gently entering into the dialogue. It was absolutely clear that ensemble and soloist complemented each other perfectly.  
KlasikaPlus, 29 March 2021

Semyon Bychkov was able to unleash the dynamics of his ensemble in stormy and dramatic passages (in Bruch's Violin Concerto No. 1). In the first movement of the *Allegro moderato* we heard nimble excursions and tension in the cadenzas, caressingly delicate cantilenae, triumphantly sung violin pitches. The second movement *Adagio* was the essence of romance. The soloist and accompanying orchestra rode the same single wave of emotion, slowly and quietly feeding directly into the heart of the listener. It would be great if the Philharmonic were to release this live recording one day, it is a thing of great beauty... Semyon Bychkov was also in his element, following the soloist and unleashing a symphonic whirlwind, escalating the tempo to a spectacular conclusion.  
OperaPlus, 26 March 2021

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## **DESSNER Concerto for Two Pianos**

Prague: Katia & Marielle Labèque, soloists - February 2021

The question then remains whether the soloists tore down the Orchestra with that expressive musical fervour, or if it was the other way around? From the outset, the Czech Philharmonic was equally full of enthusiasm and perhaps a euphoric desire to play. All players could see that not only did this concerto require maximum concentration, but they also enjoyed each phrase. Together with the soloists, the whole group on stage seemed very compact and well-drilled, but above all extremely interested in the cause. I cannot help feeling that the smaller frequency of concerts must have this effect on many musical ensembles; although the Czech Philharmonic is one of the best orchestras in the world, it is composed of the best players and its sound is unique, I have not yet heard this ensemble bringing this level of commitment and happiness from its players.  
KlasikaPlus, 5 February 2021

The members of the Czech Philharmonic – frequently shown in close-up – accompanied Dessner's 22-minute concerto with commendable enthusiasm for such unfamiliar music. It was equally embraced by the animated Bychkov in an urgent, fleet-footed performance  
Seen and Heard International, 5 February 2021



## **DESSNER *Mari***

Prague – December 2021

The meeting of two musical worlds never sounded so good... Dessner's one-movement orchestra piece *Mari* is a beauty, a neoclassical stroll through the forest of French Basque country, where the two men originally met. Bychkov took some of the usual edge off his style and slipped into pastoral mode, highlighting the glimmering strings and woodwinds, following the melodic flow and bringing descriptive passages to life with vibrant colours. You could almost see the sunlight dappling through the trees. A relaxed tempo and careful control of wide-ranging dynamics enhanced the idyllic atmosphere.

Bachtrack, 16 December 2021

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## **DUTILLEUX *Symphony No. 2***

Prague – January 2020

The Czech Philharmonic's playing was excellent. The dozen musicians in the small orchestra gave a great performance, showing superb coordination with the rest of the orchestra and presenting the composition in a way which allowed the audience to really understand the structure. Everything worked within the ensemble - the changing expression, dynamics, gradation and as well as the harsh contrasts - and created a clearly conducted entity.

KlasikaPlus, 24 January 2020

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## **GLANERT *Weites Land***

Prague – January 2019

[Glanert's *Weites Land*] is a highly original work that is very impressive for its colour and dynamism. The music's effect was further enhanced by Semyon Bychkov's perfect feel for the score and the detailed preparations for the performance given under his baton by the ever more wonderful Czech Philharmonic...

Harmonie, 10 January 2019

Seeing the composer's visible joy when he joined the conductor on the podium, I would dare to suggest that Semyon Bychkov's meticulously prepared performance [of Glanert's *Weites Land*] with the Czech Philharmonic is a further important success for the work.

OperaPlus, 10 January 2019

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## **HAYDN *Trumpet Concerto***

Sychrov Castle; Stanislav Masaryk, soloist - June 2020

In Haydn's famous Trumpet Concerto, Bychkov was a deft and tactful accompanist to Stanislav Masaryk. He made a noble and distinctly unflashy soloist, and spun a beautiful lyric line in the slow movement.

The Daily Telegraph, 26 June 2020

Haydn's Trumpet Concerto in E flat major served as an introduction to soloist Stanislav Masaryk, who will occupy the first trumpet chair when the orchestra starts the new season in September. Masaryk brings a smooth technique and polished sound, which will be interesting to hear across a range of pieces and periods. For Haydn, it was not as bright as one typically hears, at times almost understated. Technically, Masaryk was superb, but in expression and flair he was outshone by the orchestra - which is not a negative comment on either. Bychkov's accompaniment was so vibrant and graceful, it's hard to imagine anyone but an early music specialist matching it.

Bachtrack, 26 June 2020

The Czech Philharmonic accompanied soloist Stanislav Masaryk nicely and colourfully in their themes and gave Haydn's music the necessary shine and grandeur.

OperaPlus, 26 June 2020

Stanislav Masaryk's assured, stylish Haydn Trumpet Concerto was the highlight. Here was fresh, elegantly toned playing, not a note out of place, responsive to virtuoso as much as expressive demands, Bychkov (dispensing with baton) securing buoyant, classically-sprung support from the Czech Philharmonic. From Bratislava, Masaryk, this side of thirty, is a name to watch.

Classical Source, 25 June 2020

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## **MAHLER *Symphony No. 1***

Prague – October 2021

An extraordinary concert of Mahler's First Symphony was performed on 5 October under the baton of the Czech Philharmonic's Chief Conductor Semyon Bychkov. The long-standing ovation following the work, subtitled "Titan" gave assurance that the Mahler - Bychkov - Czech Philharmonic



connection works... Bychkov and the Czech Philharmonic played with gusto and emotion, the tempi and dynamic flourishes were not wanting and there was obvious communication between conductor and orchestra... Semyon Bychkov, made the orchestra play in a sophisticated manner and, especially in the first movement, was sympathetically sparing with the "forte" dynamics and succeeded in keeping the ensemble 'at bay'...  
OperaPlus, 7 October 2021

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## **MAHLER Symphony No. 2 *Resurrection***

Prague, Bratislava, New York, Vienna – October-November 2018

In its performance of Mahler's Second, the *Resurrection* Symphony, the Orchestra demonstrated its "special qualities" such as the massive, rich sound that Bychkov used in the huge build-up and explosions of sound that gave the first and fifth movements an increased sense of theatricality. The second and third movements were idyllic and dreamy, full of irony and pleasure in the parody... Bychkov's broad and demonstratively powerful conducting gave the performance weight.

Kronen Zeitung, 29 November 2018

The performance of Mahler's Second Symphony at Vienna's Musikverein demonstrated that this relationship has much to offer. The long-established orchestra followed its conductor's emotional interpretation to the letter. The *Totenfeier* was monumental in every respect... The Choir's singing of the finale completed a memorable performance. Congratulations.

Kurier, 28 November 2018

In the final movement [of Mahler's Second Symphony] which veers between dramatic turbulence and thought-provoking mysticism, the wonderfully rehearsed Viennese Singverein, the Orchestra and the exquisite soloists - Christine Karg and Elisabeth Kulman - achieved a perfectly balanced spontaneity under the direction of their conductor. The climax, however, was the "Urlicht", articulated with great intimacy by Kulman and sensitively accompanied by the Orchestra. It will be remembered for a long time to come.

Die Presse, 28 November 2018

An overwhelming performance at Carnegie Hall... Now fair warning: be prepared for an excess of praise. Because if beauty can be overwhelming, at this performance, it most certainly was... From the beginning, conductor Bychkov made good on Mahler's desire to create a symphony that was a 'world'... The players radiated a passion and intensity as they met this magnificent music as if it was a dizzying, glorious challenge. The first movement was simply breathtaking... The next movements, all appreciated and enjoyed by me in the past, have never shone as brightly as they did here... Because what happened inside that hall, where Mahler himself once conducted, was *beyond* memorable; it was a gift to all who heard it.

OperaWire, 1 November 2018

Deep feeling was conveyed solely through musical excellence and restraint. Remarkably, that proved no less true the following afternoon, when the Orchestra returned to Carnegie to perform Mahler's massive Symphony No. 2... Mr. Bychkov worked something close to magic, completing slight rhythmic and sonic shifts that conveyed exponential changes in mood without losing focus or suggesting fussiness. The huge string choirs varied their sound bracingly, from dense earthiness to gossamer. And the brasses produced a warm, coppery hue... Often, this music flags under its own weight, leaving audiences impatient for the choral finale and its cries of immortal life. Not this time. If anything, those elegiac spasms seemed to arrive too soon.

Wall Street Journal, 31 October 2018

Mr. Bychkov brought forth a genuine sense of awe and wonder in his Orchestra players at the awesome events that were unfolding, maintaining the sometimes patchwork narrative of this ecstatic vision of the end of the world [Mahler's Second Symphony at Carnegie Hall]. There was a crescendo at one point that made the hair stand on end.

Super-Conductor, 31 October 2018

There are three orchestras considered great Mahler ensembles: the Vienna Philharmonic, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra and the New York Philharmonic. But there is another that deserves to be in this company: the Czech Philharmonic. The Czech group always had a unique national sound, with bucolic winds and unusually warm, soft timbres coming out of the horn and brass sections. And then there is the landscape. Mahler is the sound of landscape, as is the Czech Philharmonic, and the two combined with Semyon Bychkov on Sunday afternoon in Carnegie Hall delivered an exceptional performance of the *Resurrection* Symphony. Bychkov's way with Mahler is natural in that everything seems just right — unforced, organic, even effortless... Conductor and Orchestra were precise and masterful about every detail in the score... This was Mahler delivered with utmost musicality, care and understanding. Every tempo felt perfect... dynamics were exquisitely refined and shaped, with rises and falls that felt like the orchestra was slowly breathing... Around all this was the constant flow of the dramatic and musical journey of Mahler's anonymous protagonist. Beginning in darkness and finding its way to light, the unaffected naturalness of the playing delivered a *ne plus ultra* Mahler experience.



The Czech Philharmonic and Semyon Bychkov celebrated the centenary of the Czech Republic's independence with a splendid performance of Mahler's Second Symphony [at Carnegie Hall].  
Classical Source, 29 October 2018

The conductor's pacing of the work [Mahler's Second Symphony at Carnegie Hall] was flawless, and there were long paragraphs of superbly layered sound from the Orchestra. The Symphony's epic climaxes and their ensuing ebbing away were impeccably judged by the Maestro... Full-bodied strings and expert solo woodwind playing gave a great deal of pleasure, and the chorus played their part in the proceedings to wonderful effect.  
Oberon's Grove, 28 October 2018

This was a testament not only to Mahler, but also to Mr. Bychkov and his orchestra... this was a moving and intelligent reading of the *Resurrection*, dramatic in the opening and finale, sweet and playful in the inner movements, and sublime in the setting of *Urlicht*... Let's hope that, under Mr. Bychkov, we don't have to wait another four years to hear them here [at Carnegie Hall] again.  
The New York Times, 26 October 2018

At the helm of the massive forces was Semyon Bychkov, the current Chief Conductor of an orchestra capable of competing with the world's top-tier ensembles. The guest appearance by our neighbours left nothing to be desired... Semyon Bychkov plunged into the depths of this world, revealing its hidden recesses, and inspiring all of the vast forces to give a perfect performance.  
Kultura Pravda, 16 October 2018

Perhaps the biggest event of the year at the Bratislava Music Festival was Mahler's Symphony No. 2 performed by the combined forces of the Czech Philharmonic, superb vocal soloists, and the exceptionally refined Prague Philharmonic Choir – led by the brilliant conductor Semyon Bychkov.  
Opera Slovakia, 15 October 2018

... the performance was sonically opulent, full of contrasts and sudden changes. The orchestra playing was concentrated and brilliantly colourful; the difficult solos for woodwind and brass came off successfully; and the cello and violin sections played with great expression, as did the concertmaster Josef Špaček in his solos. The vast first movement [in Mahler's Second Symphony] had several gradations of climaxes with crushing force in places. It was as if the conductor were setting the sounds of the individual instrumental sections against one another in a starkly contrasting dialogue. The Orchestra played their hearts out throughout...  
Lidove Noviny, 15 October 2018

The symphony was a reflection of Bychkov's enormous musical intelligence and passion for music... The performance in Bratislava was unique, almost impossible to describe in words, full of emotion, and verging on artistic perfection.  
Opera Slovakia, 13 October 2018

Bychkov and the Orchestra left no doubt that a new era was underway with a glorious performance of Mahler's *Resurrection* Symphony. Authoritative, colourful and full-blooded, it also had unexpected moments of whimsy and light, agile playing that contrasted nicely with the heavy intensity and high volume the conductor favours. Mahler is considered a native son in the Czech lands, but under Bychkov's baton his music sounded more universal and accessible without losing any of its distinctive personal dimension... In short, there was a lot of genuine bonhomie in the air. And the new team has already shown what it can do onstage. To borrow a line from a famous film, this looks like the beginning of a beautiful friendship.  
Bachtrack, 12 October 2018

The interpretation itself [Mahler's Second Symphony] was first-class. The difficulties of ensemble playing with such vast forces, including the offstage instruments, came off without a hitch and the energy with which everyone was playing held the listeners' attention, drawing the audience into the music ...  
iDNES, 11 October 2018

Magnificent Mahler with the Czech Philharmonic...  
Novinky, 11 October 2018

Bychkov structured Mahler's Second, nicknamed the Resurrection Symphony, like a massive cathedral of music which, in accordance with the composer's wishes, also emanated from the hallways of the Rudolfinum. The winds and percussion placed there sounded like harbingers of an earthquake, a fascinating divine mystery towards which we are all (perhaps) being drawn unconsciously. Bychkov paid attention not only to the expansion and reinforcement of the orchestra, but to the shading of individual instruments, so that they can be heard independently and from this emerges a harmonious, energetic whole... Bychkov also has a dynamic understanding of Mahler, and from the opening bars, the Czech Philharmonic accommodated him bringing out the subtle colours. The Orchestra's handling of Mahler's hypersensitivity was tender... The opening concert of Bychkov's era with the Czech Philharmonic might be a portent of a new direction. Clearly, the conductor will put



effort into careful, detailed preparation and will want more variations of colour and tempo. He is not afraid of vast symphonic structures; quite the contrary, he will be seeking them out, because it is in their construction that an orchestra can show what it is really made of. Mahler's Second showed us that we can have great expectations.

Czech Radio Vltava, 11 October 2018

This was a spectacular opening to the new season!

Harmonie, 11 October 2018

The Czech Philharmonic is on wonderful form. Hard work is bearing fruit, and Semyon Bychkov is certainly making a contribution ... There is an obvious resonance between him and the players. Already from the first movement [of Mahler's Second Symphony], *Allegro maestoso*, it was clear that there was no friction anywhere. Bychkov had thought through the work carefully, as was clear right from the beginning.

KlasikaPlus, 11 October 2018

The Orchestra played with a beautiful richness of sound [in Mahler's Second Symphony] that maintained its vivid colours even in the quietest moments. In the Rudolfinum the dynamic climaxes gave the impression of an impenetrable wall of sound, but with no loss of detail. The conductor Semyon Bychkov built his performance not on empty effects but on a foundation of balanced, refined sound and subtle handling of dynamics. When the dynamic climaxes arrived, however, they were sonic eruptions...

Aktualne, 11 October 2018

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## MAHLER Symphony No. 4

Prague, August 2020

The special Czech Philharmonic concert on 20<sup>th</sup> August was truly exceptional... Following the last tones of the harp at the end of the last movement, the audience rewarded the musicians with an undying applause lasting several minutes during which the conductor singled out all the soloists and the sections. They deserved it, they did an amazing job.

KlasikaPlus, 21 August 2020

I finally heard the piece with fantastically clear patterns and dimensionality of the voices and sections, which allowed the originality of the instrumentation and orchestration to shine... Semyon Bychkov is proving himself to be a very good choice for the Czech Philharmonic, both on the level of interpretation and on personal level.

OperaPlus, 21 August 2020

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## MAHLER Symphony No. 5

Prague, December 2021

Despite the rules, which were strictly adhered to (not generally the norm unfortunately), the hall was almost completely full of an audience of all ages. The spectacular concert, unthinkable this time last year, is perhaps a signal that better times are ahead for us all.

KlasikaPlus, 10 December 2021

The Czech Philharmonic and its Chief Conductor Semyon Bychkov gave us another great experience. First, they accompanied pianist Kirill Gerstein in a performance of Richard Strauss's *Burleske* and then captivated the audience with an evocative performance of Mahler's Fifth Symphony... Already the trumpet notes that begin the first movement of this monumental work indicated that the time for theatrical effects and tricks was over. While in the first part of the concert the audience could afford to observe the theatrical performances on the stage, in the second part, Mahler's music drew the whole concert hall into itself, and everyone in the auditorium became part of the symphony that was being played. They walked along with the funeral procession in the first movement, were carried away by the storm of the second, in the third they danced the Viennese waltz or the slower *ländler*, were consoled by the sweet notes of the famous *Adagietto*, and after the rousing conclusion of the last movement they burst into long-lasting applause.

OperaPlus, 10 December 2021

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## MAHLER Symphony No. 9

Prague, October 2021

Prague, April 2019

The Czech Philharmonic presented Mahler's Ninth in Prague's Rudolfinum last week with technical brilliance and in all its forms: from the sharpness and urgency of the first multi-layered movement, through the irony and sarcasm of the mocking second movement, the restless and varied third movement, to the captivating and elegant conclusion... The performance of the more than eighty-





minute composition kept the audience in permanent suspense. Although the ensemble's playing was full of dynamic changes and individual climaxes, the music flowed easily and as if consciously. The dynamic consistency, precision and clarity of articulation, or the balance of the individual sections was striking... We witnessed excellent solo entrances, whether from the wind section players, concertmaster Josef Špaček or violist Eva Krestová (who impressed with her rich and crisp tone). Immediately after the finale, the audience erupted in a long-lasting ovation

ČT art, 2 November 2021

There is no doubt that the Philharmonic succeeded in fulfilling their Chief Conductor's wishes. But Mahler as seen through the eyes of Semyon Bychkov, conducting without a baton in the final movement for greater verisimilitude, is not existentially tragic, rather it is urgent and passionate, romantic and expressionistic. The last movement, was also initially faster and consequently more conventional, but towards the end it plunged even deeper to where time seems to cease to exist, to captivating expression and foreboding. The last long minutes of the symphony were pure and sublime, beautiful and magical. The dynamics and tempi were perfect and deeply inspired. The symphony soothed, diluted and quieted for an interminable period until it faded into complete silence... Be that as it may, it is above all a totally unique composition. Even more so than Mahler's earlier symphonies. And so was its performance on Wednesday. Played brilliantly, wholeheartedly and sympathetically by the Philharmonic.

KlasikaPlus, 29 October 2021

Mahler's Second Symphony under Semyon Bychkov at the start of this season had a mixed response, but the Ninth was brilliant music-making created by a strong emotional connection from all the musicians. If this continuation is "tradition," Mahler's authenticity in Prague is being preserved in the best sense of the word.

KlasikaPlus, 4 April 2019

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## **MENDELSSOHN *A Midsummer Night's Dream Overture & Scherzo***

Sychrov Castle - June 2020

The Czechs opted for sure-fire, copper-bottomed masterworks. But they came up beautifully fresh. The Overture from Mendelssohn's incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was absolutely the right choice to begin things: its four magical opening chords sounded like the birth of music. The sound in open-air orchestral concerts can often be disappointingly thin and top-heavy, but here it was miraculously good, showing off the fabulously pure tuning and soft-edged warmth of the orchestra to perfection. It meant we could focus on the musical qualities of the event, which were certainly high. Bychkov is an enormously intelligent conductor, who never does anything egregiously odd or "striking" but always makes the music speak in a specially eloquent way.

Financial Times, 26 June 2020

Mendelssohn opened the program, with strings that sounded luxuriant even through loudspeakers. Bychkov brings an intensity to everything he conducts, which propelled his picturesque treatment of this piece, brimming with colour and swirling with melodies that danced like fireflies.

Bachtrack, 26 June 2020

To mark midsummer's day, the programme opened with the Overture and Scherzo from Mendelssohn's incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It was an urbane performance, elegantly shaped, with Bottom sounding a more debonair figure than one might imagine from Shakespeare's comic rustic. The magic of Mendelssohn's fairy-dust music was heightened here by the backdrop of the neo-Gothic Sychrov Castle.

Financial Times, 25 June 2020

Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Overture and Scherzo, with the Wedding March as an encore) bustled away, Bychkov all about clear beat, penetrating eyes and pointed entries, a tousled, jewelled commander on the battle field. But a painter, too, sensitive to niceties of orchestration. And a poet, in the lyricism of the Overture's slower paragraphs – pedigree woodwind and strings reinforcing the extraordinary emotional intensity of an inspired seventeen-year-old – elevating an otherwise largely routine reading into something approaching greatness.

Classical Source, 25 June 2020

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## **MENDELSSOHN Violin Concerto**

Prague – February 2013

The Mendelssohn Violin Concerto was performed by soloist Vadim Gluzman, a young Russian-born Israeli... While the solo was being imagined perfectly, it was the Orchestra that created the true concert atmosphere. Bychkov demonstrated that the programme really demanded an opera conductor, and the soloist responded sensitively – like a singer. While at no point dominating the soloist, the Orchestra excelled, bringing out all the colours in the romantic score... to witness someone as composed as Semyon Bychkov in the middle of the season is truly an experience.

Lidové Noviny, February 2013



Semyon Bychkov's performance of the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto with soloist, Vadim Gluzman, was truly captivating. Following the interval Bychkov concluded the concert with an outstanding performance of Brahms with excellent solos from all sections. Právo, February 2013

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### **MENDELSSOHN Symphony No. 3 *Scottish***

Prague, February 2021

From the interpretation, I didn't think the main desire was for the satisfaction of the listener - which frequently leads to excessive showing off - but more for a thirst to penetrate the very depths of the music, and so bring to life the hidden musical story of the symphony. At the same time, however, the interpretation lacked nothing from a technical point of view: the individual sections were well rehearsed (it is especially important to draw attention to the readiness of the woodwinds, who did not have any difficulties at all with the tempo set by the conductor in the second movement); the whole orchestra sounded perfect, and (especially in the case of such a well-known composition) a refreshing element was the performance of some secondary themes, which can often be overlooked; the phrases (especially in the first movement) contained a strange inner thrust, which at first floated calmly and then escalated in tension for the tense dramatic passages.

OperaPlus, 5 February 2021

The exceptional opportunity to hear the concert in the hall brought both revelations and confirmations - intense, urgent and even touching - that no technical intermediaries can replace. And also the assurance that the Philharmonic, even without the motivating and inspiring presence of an audience, give 100 percent.

KlasikaPlus, 5 February 2021

It was so majestic that it turned an exceptionally accomplished performance into an inspired one as Bychkov bowed to his orchestra in the all-pervading silence of the otherwise empty Rudolfinum. The players had shown they deserved all the praise their Chief Conductor and Music Director lavished on them in a pre-recorded interval interview when Bychkov said - amongst much else - how 'This orchestra is so gifted, these people are so deeply musical, that whatever it is that they love will be in their DNA simply because they are outstanding musicians.'

Seen and Heard International, 5 February 2021

This great orchestra's instinct to make music, however, is irrepressible, and last night they and their chief conductor Semyon Bychkov performed in their Prague base, the resplendently gilded (but, alas, completely empty) Rudolfinum. Back in June, they comforted the rain-soaked attendees with copper-bottomed classics; this time they surprised their online audience by launching off with a quintessentially American concerto for two pianos, performed by those doughty proselytisers for new music, Katia and Marielle Labèque... In the concert's other piece, Mendelssohn's Scottish Symphony, the Czech Phil players had to call on different skills: a mastery of the long lyrical line and the delicately turned phrase, which they certainly showed in abundance. As always, Bychkov's tempos were never strikingly fast or slow; what mattered were the innumerable telling flexibilities he made within them. The one disappointment was the distant and unengaging broadcast sound, but the performances were so thrilling it hardly mattered. The Daily Telegraph, 5 February 2021

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### **MENDELSSOHN Symphony No. 4 *Italian***

Prague & Vienna, June 2021

The programme included Shostakovich's Piano Concerto No. 2 followed by Mendelssohn's Symphony No. 4. In the second work in particular, my mind was jumping with excitement at the Orchestra's completely perfect playing, conducted from memory by Semyon Bychkov without a score. Perhaps it was my aforementioned comment or, the thanks for the audience's goodwill we received at the beginning of the concert but either way, I couldn't shake the impression that every note of this well-known piece, every precisely executed entrance of the theme and the perfectly synchronized and colourfully unified playing of the instrumental sections were equally enjoyed by everyone including the audience. In the context of the plight of performers in a time of pandemic, I would hate to blaspheme, but it sounded as if the playing of the Philharmonic players was "rested" and "fresh".

OperaPlus, 12 June 2021

Bychkov and his Orchestra appeared at the Konzerthaus not with this repertoire, but with works of Russian modernism and German romanticism: Shostakovich's Piano Concerto No. 2 and Mendelssohn's "Italian" Symphony, a symphony which Bychkov particularly likes to programme. In this guest performance, one could hear how much this work in A major is close to his heart. He presented it with an exuberant joy of music-making in the ideal Konzerthaus.

Die Presse, 25 June 2021



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## **RACHMANINOV Piano Concerto No. 1**

European Tour to Vienna & London: Yuja Wang, soloist – March 2022

Prague: Yuja Wang, soloist – February 2022

Earlier, Yuja Wang had played Rachmaninov's First Piano Concerto, and seemed to dial back her usual flamboyance out of respect for Bychkov and his Orchestra. She glowed rather than dazzled; the result was oddly touching. The Spectator, 2 April 2022

A Yuja Wang in scintillating form in Rachmaninov's first piano concerto with the sumptuously free strings of this historic orchestra. Semyon Bychkov's extraordinarily fluid magic wand creating a continuous stream of sounds from an orchestra of the grandest of traditions. It was from the very opening romantic sounds of Rachmaninov that there was a flexibility of shape and style of operatic proportions with a richness of sound and colour that I have only ever heard from Rachmaninov's favourite orchestra in Philadelphia. Russian Art & Culture, 25 March 2022

In the closing *Allegro* the dance theme triggered some blazing fortissimo moments. Wang commanded the whirlwind of stormy passagework while the Czech strings – impressively led by concert-masters Jan Mráček and Jan Fišer – soared and swooned with their sleek, velvety purr. The Arts Desk, 17 March 2022

Semyon Bychkov was a responsive accompanist [to Yuja Wang], drawing lovely string sound from the Czech Philharmonic. The Guardian, 16 March 2022

It was a generous Orchestra that also laid on a firework display to start the night. Yuja Wang, a bolt of energy in a tangerine dress, was in excellent form for Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No 1. The work is skittish in temperament but then so is this pianist. Cushioned by the rich, thick strings, she negotiated Rachmaninov's expressive volatility with fizz and flair. The Times, 16 March 2022

The balance between soloist and orchestra was ideal throughout and proved especially satisfying in the *Andante cantabile* second movement, where the volume dipped to a mere whisper. Certainly, the Barbican was almost completely silent in response to Wang's absorbing and feather-light playing, and her dovetailing with the eloquent bassoon of Ondřej Šindelář was a delight... Her dedication was wholehearted and her love for the piece was clearly shared by the orchestra, who were smiling readily. Rachmaninov's first and underplayed utterance was well served indeed. Arcana, 16 March 2022

The F-sharp minor Concerto was a triumph of pianistic perfection, to which the Orchestra responded with lush indulgence. Kronen Zeitung, 6 March 2022

The Orchestra was also excellent. Although the main weight in this piece lies with the piano [performed by Yuja Wang], Semyon Bychkov worked out the orchestral component with such inspiration that it was a complete equal to the solo piano part. Moreover, he revealed many interesting details in Rachmaninov's score that I had never noticed before. The stirring performance understandably drew great applause. Harmonie, 26 February 2022

Yuja Wang worked well with the Orchestra, both dynamically and rhythmically. Bychkov led the concerto towards a more lyrical approach, giving the soloist even more space. In short, Wang delivered the Rachmaninov in an oscillation between her fascinating technical skills and sophisticated interpretative ideas, taking this piece to the next level. KlasikaPlus, 25 February 2022

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## **RACHMANINOV *Symphonic Dances***

Prague – December 2021

The storm abated with Rachmaninov's *Symphonic Dances*, which were surprisingly light and animated... the approach was striking... which brimmed with life and vitality. A rambunctious first movement set a festival tone, and in the second Bychkov found jazz accents to open and then, remarkably, a melodic lilt that could have passed for a Strauss waltz. The third movement is packed with sound effects that Bychkov put to effective and entertaining use, especially the whimsical concluding gong. For all that, the most impressive aspect of the piece was Bychkov's masterful control. Though spirited and often fast-paced, the music had room to breathe, allowing the many small details to show through. And the rhythms were infectious. Composed a generation before rock 'n' roll burst on the scene and took over the world, under Bychkov's baton it was music that made you want to get up and dance. Bachtrack, 16 December 2021

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## **SCHUBERT *Unfinished* Symphony**

Prague - January 2020

Then Semyon Bychkov and the Czech Philharmonic showed us a completely different Franz Schubert. Above all, Bychkov used strong transitions, dynamics that stretched from the softest pianissimo (fantastic first violins – how can ten violinists play "ppp" so tenderly that it is barely audible, this is truly masterful!) to the strongest fortissimo; choosing faster tempi, he took the drama away from the cello solo in the *Allegro Moderato*. Suddenly, the orchestral colours were really fresh. The Orchestra was totally at one with the interpretation. Especially in the second movement, where the themes were passed with precision and the phrasing was brilliant. Both oboist Jana Brožková and clarinetist Jan Mach played their solos very well. It was a completely different Schubert from the one we know. Coarse, unconventional and without melancholy, it raises a wave of exciting emotions...

KlasikaPlus, 17 January 2020

The broadly benevolent feel of the evening had started with Schubert's Unfinished Symphony. Schubert may not have had Beethoven's connections with Bohemia, but the music suits the Czech style down to a T, most particularly the use of woodwind which evokes the hills and forests much as it does in Dvořák. The Czech Phil's woodwind section were on blistering form, with the second movement clarinet solo the most notable of many beautifully executed solo lines...

Bachtrack, 16 January 2020

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## **SCHUBERT Symphony No. 9 *The Great***

Prague – February 2019

Each performance had a different atmosphere, but they had much in common: the Czech Philharmonic gave a great and detailed performance under Semyon Bychkov, with excellent performances from Kirill Gerstein for whom it must have been a real pleasure to perform with such a well-rehearsed Orchestra. And something that was very noticeable was the joy of playing that emanated from all the members, and the warm relationship between the Chief Conductor and the Orchestra... The highlight of the whole evening was Schubert's Symphony No. 9 in C major *The Great*. A bad interpretation of this hour-long piece can sound endless. The evening's spectacular performance would ultimately be heard several times and every time, one could find something new in it. The audience had the opportunity to reap the results of Bychkov's long, wearying and precise work on the details and variations he initiated in the orchestra. The beautiful oboe solo from Vladislav Borovka, and the excellent horns, stood out for the purity of sound. Bychkov brought an incredible charge and tension to the entire performance.

Harmonie, 26 February 2019

Franz Schubert's "The Great" Symphony in C major is one hour long and the audience would have been happy if it went on even longer... The Czech Philharmonic are very lucky to have persuaded Bychkov to succeed Jiří Bělohlávek. He and the Orchestra understand each other perfectly, and Bychkov draws excellent performances from every section of the Orchestra. The flute, oboe and clarinet solos in the first movement, alongside the trio of trombones in the second movement should get the most credit; the strings shone as they passed from pianissimo to forte, and the oboe solos were excellent.

KlasikaPlus, 15 February 2019

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## **SHOSTAKOVICH VIOLIN CONCERTO**

Prague: Karen Gomyon, soloist – December 2021

Bychkov immediately set a somber, brooding tone in the orchestra that was matched by soloist Karen Gomyon... That cadenza is fiendishly complex, and segues directly into the demanding, furious pace of the final movement. Gomyon just seemed to pick up more energy as the pressure mounted, mounting a brilliant, anguished voice against a deep, imposing orchestra. She and Bychkov connected on an instinctive level that brought the concerto to a tight, razor-edged finish and the audience to its feet.

Bachtrack, 16 December 2021

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## **SHOSTAKOVICH Symphony No. 7 *Leningrad***

Prague, 126<sup>th</sup> Season Opening – September 2019

After a painful 2020/21 season, the Czech Philharmonic has returned in full force. Led by Chief Conductor and Music Director Semyon Bychkov, the Orchestra showed that even as demanding a work as Shostakovich's Leningrad Symphony was no problem for it at all... The overall level of the performance was of the highest quality: clean, balanced and precise playing dominated throughout.



especially in the critically delicate passages including at the end of the first movement... during the build up of the well-known 'marching' theme, Bychkov's work with tempo was particularly interesting: unlike most foreign interpretations, he was not ashamed to sharply increase the tempo at one moment... his work with articulation too was to be noted whereby he was able to 'harden' the expression by consistently emphasizing repeated notes at the end of each phrase... The second movement Moderato brought lighter themes. The artists performed these with great playfulness and sensitivity. One could not only hear this but also see it, most notably between the concert masters who were clearly enjoying themselves during this great performance.

OperaPlus, 3 October 2021

Electrifying Shostakovich in Prague from Bychkov and the Czech Philharmonic... Throughout, precise control gave the music a knife edge. Strings slashed, percussion snapped and gentle interludes rose and sharpened into waves of fear and anxiety. One of the hallmarks of Bychkov's tenure with the orchestra has been a brilliant clarity in the sound, but even by that standard this was a remarkable performance. There were so many musicians onstage that eight additional brass players had to sit up in the empora, yet the orchestra sounded as tight as a string quartet. Overall, there was a sense of being at the eye of the storm, focused and disciplined amid the whirling tumult... This was not so much a concert as a journey, harrowing at times, thrilling at others, heartbreaking, inspirational – as Bychkov promised, the whole gamut.

Bachtrack, 1 October 2021

With the opening attack of the string section, the Czech Philharmonic showed that despite almost no concerts last season, it had lost none of its vigour, before giving way to the splendour of sounds of the first oboe and solo flute... After the fascinating cataclysm of the tutti, supported by sharp percussion and sparkling brass, calm returned with the wonderful lamenting melodies in the violins before moving to the second movement - a Moderato which hesitated between a brief peace and the constant threat of another assault. The conductor, who always organizes his ensemble precisely, kept the Adagio melancholic, marked by the darkness of the bassoons and bass clarinet yet counterbalanced by the lightness of the flutes... Bychkov's overall vision remained focused throughout keeping the attention of the magnificent musicians of the Czech Philharmonic until the very last moment in a performance which was followed immediately by a standing ovation.

Altamusica, 30 September 2021

The extraordinary opening concert of the Czech Philharmonic's 126th season was, really extraordinary in every way, and all the more so because of the Chief Conductor's personal connection to Shostakovich's Leningrad Symphony which was performed... it was a truly exceptional experience... The Czech Philharmonic's performance under Semyon Bychkov was top-notch throughout: the playing was compact and perfect, fully in the service of musical expression. The impression it made in the auditorium was stunning.

KlasikaPlus, 30 September 2021

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## SHOSTAKOVICH Symphony No. 8

Prague – September 2019

London, BBC Proms – September 2019

The eighth is, of course, a sombre, deeply tragic score and torn in the pain of the long first movement. Even though the climax is expected, when it comes it is overwhelming, even more so when it is performed with the intensity which Bychkov drew from the Czech Philharmonic... Throughout this long, intense and devastating journey, Bychkov and his magnificent orchestra took us on an experience as perfectly constructed in the music as it was intense and devastating to the emotions.

Scherzo, 13 September 2019

The weight of the evening fell after interval with a searing performance of Shostakovich's Eighth Symphony. A wartime (1943) work that sits squarely in the middle of Shostakovich's 15-symphony cycle, this massive score is among the composer's bleakest, and Bychkov's unfolding of it was taut and inexorable. He drew sinewy playing of great stillness, also unleashing blistering climaxes and allowing all sections of the orchestra to shine along the way towards the music's ambiguously grey ending.

The Daily Telegraph, 12 September 2019

Instead he pits the Czech Phil's great strengths – elegant string line, burbling and characterful wind section and a bright clean brass with a hint of Russian DNA just audible and strong timps and melds this in the opening *Adagio* moves to *Allegro non troppo*. Bychkov takes a long-breathed way with developing dissonance logically.

Fringe Review, 12 September 2019

Earlier in the evening, in Prom 69, we heard the last in what has been a hard-hitting trio of Shostakovich symphonies this season when Semyon Bychkov conducted the Eighth with the Czech Philharmonic. The Czechs have a particularly spicy, theatrical woodwind section and their vehement contributions to the jolting second movement and the remorseless savagery of the third – here is



the Soviet war machine on the march, but the composer is hardly worshipful towards it – were especially pungent. The Times, 12 September 2019

I can't think of any other symphony which has a 30 minute first movement either but it was evocatively played here particularly when it reached the long, plaintive cor anglais solo. I also admired, among other strengths, the quality of the trumpet solo in the third movement and some vibrant viola work along with the strange gurgling flute sound the score requires. For me, though, the hero of the evening was the piccolo player who more than earned his money with prominent – and beautifully played work – in each of the three pieces. Lark Reviews, 11 September 2019

Joining the end-of-Proms beauty parade of visiting orchestra, the Czech Philharmonic and its Chief Conductor of barely one year, Semyon Bychkov, arrived not so much as an international brand as a bottomless well of instantly discernible national character, style, strength and delicacy that breaks boundaries... Bychkov's realisation of this [Shostakovich 8] will stay with me for a long time, especially the wraiths and shadows that seep through the start of the first movement, strangely placed before the harsh martial music that, as it were, caused them, so that you lose your grip on what is reality and what is memory... You had to be quick to catch Bychkov and the Czech players reveal layer upon layer of shade and meaning before they just as quickly evaporated, and it was strange to be both stimulated and devastated by this outstanding performance. Classical Source, 11 September 2019

Bychkov produced a powerful and compelling performance, with intense and fully committed playing by the orchestra, overwhelming at times not only in its sonic impact but also its emotional charge. Bleak undercurrents were maintained from the very beginning, and the expansive first movement climaxed in terrifying ways, shrill and chilling, and with the players straining at the very extremes of their instruments. Bychkov continued to blaze Shostakovich's trail of horror and hope with a sardonic bite to the incessant march-like Scherzo of the second movement, the piquant piccolo deserving a special mention, and a relentless acidic aggression to the third movement, building crescendo after crescendo as though stretching sanity to its limits. Bachtrack, 11 September 2019

And how the orchestral sections play together within themselves: three trumpets, perfectly balanced, shone. The succeeding Allegretto, full of life with its superb piccolo contribution and the Allegro non troppo with its manic trombones led to the aching Largo, with its magnificent solo strings and superb control from the *tutti* string section... This, it would appear, is a key appointment for both Bychkov and the Czech Philharmonic; Bychkov's rapport with the players is beyond doubt. Seen and Heard International, 11 September 2019

The inner movements were a showcase the many fine soloist of the woodwind section, particularly the cor anglais. The violas held their own at the start of the third movement, with plenty of weight, but agility too. Bychkov's mastery of Shostakovich's musical rhetoric was clear from the way he introduced the belated turn to the major in the last movement. There was nothing triumphant about it, more wearied acceptance, the players delivering the brighter harmonies, but again with their trademark burnished tone, all the details clearly illuminated within the orchestral textures, a clarity that only highlighted the ambiguity and reticence of the composer's message. The Arts Desk, 11 September 2019

A conductor of great symphonies, Semyon Bychkov was finally at home here [in Shostakovich's Eighth]. The Czech Philharmonic presented itself as a superb orchestra which can handle all dynamic shades, distinguish various moods with confidence and is also united in difficult rhythmical sections... As a composition full of war and its opposite, peace, it demands an absolutely devoted orchestra which Semyon Bychkov and his musicians managed with conviction and ease... For the beginning of the season – an experience full of earthly nobility and great promise. Aktualne.cz, 6 September 2019

The symphony ends with a flute whisper, almost a prayer, and pianissimo of the stings. Just like a quiet closing of the curtain and a voiceless testimony of time, it took our breath away. A perfect symbiosis of the conductor's vision and top musical craft. A perfect presentation of the Czech Philharmonic. OperaPlus, 6 September 2019

But this makes the [Eighth Symphony] piece even more precious and means that it touches us even more. The Czech Philharmonic players and their Chief Conductor did their utmost for such an outcome. The long and weighty silence after the final notes was self-explanatory – the audience experienced a musical story which one does not forget... KlasikaPlus, 5 September 2019

In particular in its dramatic climaxes, the performance [of Shostakovich's Eighth Symphony] was very emotional and memorable. iDNES.cz, 5 September 2019



## **STRAUSS *Burleske***

Prague: Kirill Gerstein, soloist – December 2021

The musicians approached the scherzo piece of comic mood (*Burleske* means something like a joke or farce) with honesty and feeling. Pianist Gerstein impressively played all the technical trappings with ease and clarity, while the similarly attuned Bychkov alternately roused and calmed the orchestra. An interesting element of this composition is the melodic use of timpani, which not only introduces the first theme but also often complement each other with the piano. These moments in common sounded very good and balanced. While the dynamic range of the whole Orchestra was extensive, the pianist was more contained. In the interest of maintaining brilliance and perhaps even intended character, Gerstein's delivery was slightly restrained, at times appearing too light or thin given the sound of the Orchestra and the size of the hall. The interplay with the Orchestra, however, was perfect...

KlasikaPlus, 10 December 2021

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## **STRAUSS *Ein Heldenleben***

Prague – December 2017

Although it would be easy for things to come unstuck, Semyon Bychkov gave the work a surprisingly firm structure, kept things moving as needed throughout the piece and got the most out of its magnificent orchestral colours. In this work [Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben*], Strauss gives almost every instrument a solo opportunity, and to the credit of the orchestral players, it must be said that in the solo passages each of them, without exception, excelled. The star of the evening was the concertmaster Jiří Vodička – his solo (nearly as demanding as playing a violin concerto) was unrivalled and formed the centrepiece of the entire performance.

Harmonie, 22 December 2017

Under Bychkov's baton, the music [Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben*] could be heard with all its post-Romantic pathos but with aural restraint, so that the audience was not overwhelmed by sound, but able to enjoy the playing of individual instruments, especially the violin solos of concertmaster, Jiří Vodička.

iDNES, 21 December 2017

With Semyon Bychkov conducting, the concert was a success. A promising sign of what is to come... Both in the innumerable solos and in the imposing tuttis, the Czech Philharmonic realised the music's [Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben*] colourful late-Romantic vision wonderfully whether at full or at hushed dynamic levels. The players gave their all, and the result was brilliant sounding and emotionally stirring. The concertmaster's solo in this composition is as long and difficult as a violin concerto, and Jiří Vodička played it wonderfully... Throughout the piece, Semyon Bychkov displayed his total comprehension of the work. His conducting leads and inspires the orchestra.

OperaPlus, 21 December 2017

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## **TCHAIKOVSKY *Eugene Onegin* Letter Scene**

London, BBC Proms – September 2019

Elena Stikhina was beautifully accompanied by Bychkov and the Czech musicians, with a special mention for the strings and the oboe, clarinet and horn soloists.

Scherzo, 13 September 2019

The orchestra play their heart out here, still buzzy one feels with Smetana's operatic brio and good spirits... Elena Stikhina's voice is already full, flexible (a sine qua non when young) and trumps one might say the wind and brass beautifully, though Bychkov and the Czech Phil are naturally responding to every twist in the way Stikhina expresses the text.

Fringe Review, 12 September 2019

It was an inspired programming idea then to change the mood completely with the intensity of the letter scene from *Eugene Onegin* in the concerto slot. The orchestra played with well-balanced operatic excitement from the first note and Russian soprano, Elena Stikhina sang this gloriously melodic scene with rich clarity and plenty of warmth and passion.

Lark Reviews, 11 September 2019

The whole was made all the more memorable because of the orchestral contribution, Bychkov encouraging the strings to play at their tenderest.

Seen and Heard International, 11 September 2019

Bychkov and the orchestra proved ideal partners, the conductor leaning into the ebb and flow of the impassioned music, and the orchestra responding with suitably lyrical and expressive lines.

The Arts Desk, 11 September 2019



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## TCHAIKOVSKY *Serenade for Strings*

Tchaikovsky Project Residency Prague – September 2019

But the shape, control, and opulence that the orchestra brought to the *Serenade for Strings* to start the evening – plus the Viennese lilt to the Valse movement – demonstrated that the Czechs' excellence encompasses sensitivity and finesse as well as brilliance and power.

Classical Voice North America, 4 October 2019

Striking and powerful were the distinctive characteristics of Semyon Bychkov's interpretation and the Czech Philharmonic musicians respected his directions and followed them completely... The *Serenade for Strings* fully revealed the mastery of the Czech Philharmonic strings and their concertmaster Josef Špaček - it was a thrilling performance, especially the *Elegy*...

The performance of *Serenade for Strings* showed that the Orchestra had spent a long time working on the piece. It was very expressive and full of gusto... the entire Orchestra played brilliantly...

KlasikaPlus, 19 September 2019

The Czech Philharmonic offered something completely different from the Tchaikovsky that we usually hear performed in this country. Both Orchestra and conductor Semyon Bychkov gave world-class performances. Not everything was completely in line with my own ideas about how the pieces should sound, but Bychkov's conception was perfectly performed in every detail, especially in Symphony No. 5 and the *Serenade for Strings*. Total devotion, flawless coordination and minute attention to detail – hours of demanding rehearsals and the recording process more than paid off... With Josef Špaček playing first violin (in *Serenade for Strings*), it was a perfect representation of the Philharmonic strings. It was a delight to hear the wonderful phrasing, the slightly lengthened accents, the dynamics and treatment of the sound, with quivering pianissimos and strong fortes...

Harmonie, 18 September 2019

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## TCHAIKOVSKY *Symphony No. 1*

Prague, Hamburg, Frankfurt, Düsseldorf – January-February 2019

The fact that conductor Bychkov especially admires this composer was clear from his interpretation which was consistently transparent, charming but never banal, and above all beautifully phrased. The flutes were remarkably smooth, and even more so the kettle drums – the piece is called "winter dreams" but there was nothing cold in this lively performance.

Cellesche Zeitung, 11 February 2019

The second movement with its melancholic themes has the effect of everything being as one. The playing of the woodwind soloists was outstanding. One rarely hears such a soft, pure horn sound. Semyon Bychkov, conductor of the Czech Philharmonic since the beginning of this season, sculpted the quiet moments of the symphony with great sensitivity, letting go of the musicians for the great musical climaxes. The Orchestra thanked him for this freedom by making the tutti moments exceptionally organic.

Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung, 11 February 2019

After the interval, the Tchaikovsky was presented very seriously, with measured and moderate temperatures for the "Winter Dreams" of the work's title. High praise for the Orchestra which left nothing to be desired.

Neue Presse, 10 February 2019

After the break, there was a symphonic gem to discover: Tchaikovsky's rarely performed first symphony, nicknamed "winter dreams". Melancholia and melancholy are the prevailing moods in this three quarter of an hour, four-movement work. Although the symphony conceals an ambitious architecture, it is dominated by extensive landscapes of sound with large, organically developed arches of suspense. The Czech Philharmonic used their finesse for a rhythmically tight, yet poetic and dramatically broad performance.

Nordbayerische Nachrichten, 9 February 2019

With Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 1*, the Czech Philharmonic showed unequivocally what is hidden in Tchaikovsky's music: an inexpressible secret?

Westdeutsche Zeitung, 7 February 2019

Under the proven direction of Semyon Bychkov, the Czech Philharmonic gave a finely balanced performance. Tchaikovsky's first symphony describes the comfort of being able to dream even in winter. The Czech Philharmonic's very expressive playing made this easy: *Dreams of a Winter Journey* with its pithy melody and gripping rhythm showed that the young Tchaikovsky was a keen observer of emotion and passion; *Land of Mists* drew wonderful playing from the strings; the last two movements made one wonder why this symphony is any less well regarded than Tchaikovsky's final three symphonies.

Frankfurter Neue Presse, 7 February 2019





The Orchestra played in total harmony with perfectly articulated phrases, playfully bringing out the individual themes [of Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 1] the strings played softly with a distinctive warmth as did the solo clarinetist in the second movement.

Harmonie, 7 February 2019

Semyon Bychkov has a remarkable understanding of the final movement [of Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 1] and with his subtle use of percussion, flowing violins and woodwinds, built up to the striking ending which was both magnificent and sensitively handled by the conductor... The audience erupted almost like a huge orchestra and applauded the Czech Philharmonic and Bychkov enthusiastically.

Online Merker, 6 February 2019

Some orchestras' reputations precede them. Such is the case with the Czech Philharmonic who brought only two works to the Elbphilharmonie but they were enough to show off their skills. First and foremost the shining, sparkling, intense and above all singing strings that shimmered with infinite warmth under the baton of Chief Conductor Semyon Bychkov, and repeatedly astonished in Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 1.

Klassik, 4 February 2019

Semyon Bychkov revealed the universe of Tchaikovsky's soul [in Symphony No. 1] as the flowering of chastely compassionate feelings. I have never heard the tender grace of such incredibly beautiful pianissimos as emanated from the players of the Czech Philharmonic under Bychkov. This made the dynamic range all the more effective. As the conductor's baton outlined the structure of the music, the Orchestra played as if at one with the composer. There were no superfluous gestures. It was clear that the conductor knew every detail intimately and ensured that everything was played perfectly. An amazingly evocative magic was hidden within the music... Semyon Bychkov is unquestionably one of the most interesting phenomena amongst today's elite conductors, and the Czech Philharmonic is very lucky that he accepted their invitation to be Jiří Bělohávek's worthy successor. Let's hope that as the Orchestra continues to perfect under his leadership, they will keep him for a long time.

Harmonie, 10 January 2019

This was my first opportunity to hear the Czech Philharmonic with its new Chief Conductor. Semyon Bychkov's conducting [of Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 1] was economical, creating elegant arcs with his arms to draw melodies from groups of instrumentalists and soloists as a magician would pull rabbits from a hat. Regardless of the dynamics, his gestures remained under-stated and fluid. Melodrama is just not his way.

OperaPlus, 10 January 2019

Semyon Bychkov led the members of the Czech Philharmonic in a performance [Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 1] of this expressively melodic and richly temperate music that was accurate, unsentimental and straight-forward. The symphony was rich yet tender, beautifully balanced and full of many wonderful moments.

KlasikaPlus, 10 January 2019

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## TCHAIKOVSKY Symphony No. 2

Prague – April 2021

Prague – February 2019


The Czech Philharmonic has enjoyed extraordinary success with Tchaikovsky recently and this time performed Symphony No. 2 in C minor, Op. 17 "*Little Russian*". The sound of Tchaikovsky's music has "matured" nicely during the time the Orchestra, under the direction of Semyon Bychkov, has been intensively devoted to it and nowadays the Czech Philharmonic performs all Tchaikovsky's works unambiguously and with real added value. There was no lack of earthiness, greatness, but also playfulness. The admirable collective improvement of the musicians in this unjustly overlooked symphony inspired by Ukrainian folk music deserves recognition and admiration.

KlasikaPlus, 3 May 2021

However, what constantly surprises me (especially recently) is the international level of the Czech Philharmonic. But it's no wonder, because Semyon Bychkov is very precise when rehearsing repertoire and captures both the focus on detail and the overall tone. Listening to it, we can thus enjoy the emergence of individual voices and counter-voices and fully savour all the tonal shades of specific places, as well as admire the perfectly built surfaces and (especially the final) gradations. His enthusiasm is infectious. We could observe all these phenomena during the Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 2 which the Czech Philharmonic and Semyon Bychkov have performed several times around the world and even recorded for Decca Classics. So we listened to a well "polished" interpretation, which, however, lost none of the brilliance of the première; the orchestra showed signs of a deep understanding of the work. Everything here had its time and place, yet the performance did not lose the necessary drive, culminating in a grandiose conclusion.

OperaPlus, 30 April 2021

The three concerts concluded with a performance of Symphony No. 2 *Little Russian*... It was incredible to see how the orchestra could feel the Ukrainian folk melodies as if it were its own. The



long and demanding bassoon solo of Ondřej Roskovec was breath-taking which Semyon Bychkov recognised by giving him his bouquet. In reality, he had to divide the flowers so that at least half could be given to the first horn player Ondrej Vrabec for his solo at the opening of the symphony. They both really excelled from the joy of playing. It is clear from the mutual smiles and long thanks from the conductor to all the players in the orchestra, that relations between conductor and orchestra are good, that there is mutual respect and a real chemistry which is conjured up for audiences during performances, as it was for both these concerts.

Harmonie, 26 February 2019

### **TCHAIKOVSKY Symphony No. 3**

Prague – January 2016

In Symphony No. 3 in E flat major "Polish", Op. 29 there was even greater harmony between conductor and orchestra. The Symphony is really appealing particularly for its strong melodies, elegant dance-like qualities, refined style, its touching introspection a positive catharsis.

Harmonie, 30 January 2016

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### **TCHAIKOVSKY, Symphony No. 4**

Prague – February-March 2018

After the interval, the performance of Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4 was also a major event. Bychkov will record it with the Czech Philharmonic for Decca and had prepared all four movements with such impact and attention to detail that the symphony came off sounding like a new work, with all sections of the Orchestra outdoing themselves, especially winds and strings. It was a performance of total concentration and perfection, so it was understandable that the audience was tremendously enthusiastic and remained on their feet as if spellbound long after the performance finished.

Hudebni Rozhledy, April 2018

Just as in its first recording for the complete Tchaikovsky cycle, the Czech Philharmonic was radiant under the leadership of Semyon Bychkov. Tchaikovsky suits the orchestra beyond measure, allowing them to show off both as instrumental sections and as outstanding soloists. The precision and consequent assuredness of Semyon Bychkov's performance was a clear result of the Orchestra being well-rehearsed.

Although the composer's broad melodies are a temptation for grand pathos, everything was amazingly polished, without any hint of excessive sentimentality or bitter-sweetness. There was smoothness to the sonic conception, favouring the inner voices, and even at the climactic moments, the sound was never violent. It was clearly audible as well as visible that the conductor knows when he can give the orchestra room, without limiting it with his gestures. Moreover, I have never before heard the musicians of the Czech Philharmonic play with such respect for the dynamics, such breadth and suspense, and with such great intensity, all the way to the very back desks. And you could see the joy on their faces. Decca could directly release a recording of yesterday's performance of the Symphony No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 36. An awesome evening of music making.

OperaPlus, 3 March 2018

We expect the wonderful solos by the players, many of whom we have long known individually and from other chamber ensembles. More surprising however, was the balanced, homogenous tone of all of the string sections, which played up the symphony's extraordinarily lively dialogue. The second movement sounded touching and elegant, but Tchaikovsky also had a feel for instrumental virtuosity, as the pizzicato third movement as well as the fourth movement, shows. Aurally, this pure, concentrated performance, further motivated by the ongoing recording project, was simply wonderful.

Lidové Noviny, 2 March 2018

The degree of commitment of all of the players to Bychkov [in Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4], his refinement of detail, the unfolding of the ingenious score, and the manner of interpretation were extraordinary...

The core of the work is unquestionably the first movement, and from the opening fanfares of the French horns and bassoons, the Philharmonic players gave a performance of great intensity. Under Bychkov's direction, the orchestra breathed every phrase. The Andantino was stratospheric. The opening of the solo oboe sounded delectable, and the orchestra responded to it with the utmost elegance! And then the third movement with the superb string pizzicato and the dialogue with the wind instruments... And, finally the fiery Allegro with its underlying folk tunes. And what caught my ear the most? The way the whole symphony breathed, how precise everything was, how carefully the interpretation's architecture had been thought through, how the playing had all of the intensity of any foreign orchestra, and the excellence of the solo playing (Jana Brožková, Andrea Pazderová,



Tomáš Kopáček, Jan Machat... ). Under Semyon Bychkov's leadership, the Tchaikovsky Project on the Decca label could leave a timeless mark on the history of classical music recordings.

Harmonie, 1 March 2018

A new Chief Conductor and a new friendship: the Czech Philharmonic and Semyon Bychkov understand each other...

Under Bychkov's baton, [Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4] sounded poised; the conductor took pains to shade the dynamics, and managed to sustain the music's tension... Among the scintillating moments were the brass's pronouncements of inexorable fate. Bychkov embodies a combination of meticulousness and relaxation, and he is obviously passing this combination onto the Orchestra. One definitely comes away with the impression that a friendship like that expressed by the concert programme is also growing between the orchestral musicians and the Chief Conductor which is certainly promising for the future.

iDNES, 1 March 2018

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## TCHAIKOVSKY Symphony No. 5

Tchaikovsky Project Residency Paris – November 2019

Tchaikovsky Project Residency Prague – September 2019

Prague – December 2017

The undeniable highlight of this first evening was the memorable interpretation of Symphony No. 5 – the second part of the fateful trilogy – given by Semyon Bychkov and the Czech Philharmonic. It was carried from beginning to end by one epic breath which oscillated between enthusiasm and desolation, and on a par with that of the incontrovertible Mvraivinsky. It is hard to know what to admire the most: the quality of the orchestral playing or the 'rightness' of the conducting.

ResMusica, 26 November 2019

The gorgeous, impactful Symphony No. 5 from Bychkov and the Czech Philharmonic was not at all anticlimactic, with splendid playing from the principal French horn, bravura from the timpanist, and tack-sharp section work from the brass.

Classical Voice North America, 4 October 2019

The main theme – first introduced by the clarinet – dominates the symphony [No. 5], and stretches through the entire piece. The Viennese-waltz-like third movement was like an invitation to the St. Petersburg season ball... and the spectacularly built up finale, elegiac at first but transformed into an impressive whirlwind of sounds, reminded us all that the Tchaikovsky – Czech Philharmonic – Semyon Bychkov trio is unique. This performance can stand comparison to any of the famous recordings. It certainly belongs in the hall of fame.

OperaPlus, 22 September 2019

After the interval came Tchaikovsky's most melodious Symphony No. 5 – an audience favourite. Semyon Bychkov chose somewhat unusually fast tempos in my opinion. The first movement is supposed to be played *Allegro con anima*, and was just a little too vigorous for me. Like this, Bychkov emphasised the dramatic character of the piece. But not just for the first movement. The dramatic line followed through the entire performance. Perhaps this is how he understood Tchaikovsky's intention, as this symphony in particular shows how much turmoil the composer was in at the time... Whether the French horn, the bassoonist or the clarinetist, each was superb and the musicians deserved the roaring applause they received at the end... where both vigour and drama were in keeping. Bychkov built the finale splendidly: the gradation of the sound was astonishing and very emotive.

The Orchestra had worked for a long time on the Fifth Symphony during the recording process which gave the interpretation a particular sophistication. It was slightly different from other interpretations but this is the magic of classical music. One composition can have many different interpretations. The one chosen by Semyon Bychkov was monumental and dramatic.

KlasikaPlus, 19 September 2019

The Fifth Symphony was not only a compositional highlight but also an interpretative one. Once again, Bychkov showed his apparently unflinching sense for the architecture of the overall structure. We are all familiar with the famous leitmotif which runs through the piece. It is not easy to hold the audience's attention while, at the same time, create convincing dynamics and lead the vast mass of sound to a transcendental triumph. The conductor managed this without any hesitation. Bychkov's interpretation was completely different from any other that I have heard, amongst which I have particularly enjoyed those of Haitink and the Royal Concertgebouw, Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic or Bernstein and the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. Bychkov's approach however was equally convincing and offered an interpretation which could become timeless.

Harmonie, 18 September 2019

Once again, Prague is a city where audiences can hear world-class music ... The Czech Philharmonic deserves recognition for its courage in programming Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 5,



and the highest praise for its performance Tchaikovsky's famous Symphony No. 5... The Czech Philharmonic's playing was truly exemplary [in Prokofiev's Fifth Piano Concerto]. This was surely thanks in part to the relationship between conductor and soloist [Yuja Wang], but I had a feeling that the orchestra was entirely captivated by the music and by her playing, and wanted to give her maximum support...

The highpoint of the evening was Tchaikovsky's symphony [No. 5] to which the conductor gave a more modern interpretation than is frequently heard: more dramatic, less rambling and more emotional. The public's long ovation was, amongst other things, an expression of faith in the Czech Philharmonic's future.  
Pravo, 11 December 2017

Tchaikovsky and Bychkov – are one. That is the feeling that I got from their performance of the Fifth Symphony. The music had been rehearsed meticulously (and not only because of Decca's recording), but on stage it was simply par for the course, as if the recording were secondary. The chief attribute was the creativity that was pouring out of Bychkov, who was conducting from memory, and seemingly streaming forth from every member of the orchestra in their unity... quite simply, I had the physical sensation that on the stage of the Dvořák Hall there was a team that was committed to the best interpretation of the music possible... The evening of 7 December was one of the most powerful experiences of my year.  
Harmonie, 11 December 2017

... all the wind solos came off superbly, including the horn solo in the second movement and the numerous appropriately dark clarinet and bassoon solos. The strings were supple with a wide range of colour. Bychkov was clearly satisfied, and the players paid tribute to him over the course of the long ovation. The concert was full of refinement, and totally focused on the works that were being performed [Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 5 and Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 5]. It bodes well for a powerful musical collaboration and the highest of artistic aspirations.  
Lidové Noviny, 8 December 2017

The second half of the evening amounted to a concerto for orchestra. Tchaikovsky's very famous symphony [No. 5], perhaps the most rewarding of them all, makes a great impression. Semyon Bychkov's interpretation is more dramatic than lyrical. He doesn't allow himself to be carried away by long cantilenas, but rather concentrates on the detail, and imprints on every phrase, however brief, a tangible emotional effect. Under him, the string section sounded unusually supple, and its playing in the third movement was brilliant...  
OperaPlus, 7 December 2017

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## TCHAIKOVSKY Symphony No. 6

Tchaikovsky Project Residency Paris – November 2019

Tchaikovsky Project Residency Vienna – November 2019

Tchaikovsky Project Residency Prague – September 2019

Symphony No. 6, known as the *Pathétique* filled the second part of the concert. As with the Fifth the previous evening, Semyon Bychkov's interpretation was really convincing... the *Allegro Molto Vivace* found all its vitality and its Dionysian tension in a formidable crescendo that made the most of all the orchestral forces, before the true lament of the final *Adagio*, where the wails of the strings mingled with the dark cantilenas of the bassoon and horn and, in a resigned and premonitory acceptance, the threatening brass set the seal on the victory of destiny. With these two concerts, Semyon Bychkov and the Czech Philharmonic continue to assert themselves as brilliant new references in Tchaikovsky's music...  
ResMusica, 26 November 2019

Things really took off after the break, and how! This was definitely one of the most convincing *Pathétiques* I have heard. Dark, at times terrifyingly so, and eventually totally devastating. Bychkov and his Czech forces took no prisoners in their all-consuming journey. Conducting from memory, Bychkov was in complete control throughout and the orchestra followed him blindly. Nothing seemed superfluous, there wasn't a second of weakness, every bar made logical sense in the overall structure. The balance and sound were absolutely astonishing. Whether in the softest passages or pushed to the brink, the flexibility of the Czech Philharmonic seemed boundless... A tremendous performance, not just because of the vision behind it, but Bychkov gets his orchestra exactly where he wants to. As the previous night he graciously gave all credit to his musicians. He made them stand up to receive the ovation while he remained with his back to the audience, before finally taking a bow himself. Not surprisingly he looked totally exhausted after such complete investment. Surely, it can't be good for the heart, but what fabulous music-making this is!  
Bachtrack, 21 November 2019

The audience's enthusiasm was accordingly high on Tuesday over the confident and responsive Orchestra, which best expressed its strengths in the dazzling forte passages, especially the bellicose brass section. Dedicated: Bychkov conducted the last item on the programme - Tchaikovsky's swan song, the Sixth Symphony *Pathétique* – by heart.

Wiener Zeitung, 21 November 2019



After that Bychkov and his Prague musicians presented Symphony No. 6 in B minor. Both structure and colour were in perfect balance: Bychkov skillfully unfolded a panorama poised between relaxed cheerfulness and aggression, and the deep melancholy of the final movement which reflected Tchaikovsky's "state of mind". The audience cheered enthusiastically.

Kronen Zeitung, 21 November 2019

Under the Russian conductor, the Orchestra from the Czech Republic was equally enthralling in the *Pathétique*, the nickname given to Tchaikovsky's sixth symphony. Here one could feel the deep despair and long-suffering pain in the "Requiem" of the Russian composer, who died a few days after the premiere. The full emotional range was touched with a wonderful richness of color and stirring power. Large and rousing dynamic arcs were meticulously built and lyricism savored, while balanced and detailed music was made. Bravo!

Kurier, 21 November 2019

Bychkov knows his Tchaikovsky. Naturally, he conducted from memory and worked the individual movements into the tiniest details. He built the whole symphony very dynamically and let each motif shine. The orchestra played with total devotion... The audience was deeply touched by the performance and it took a while for everybody to collect their thoughts. The musicians were paralysed as well. And Semyon Bychkov also seemed to be emotionally struck. It took him a while, despite the audience's vigorous applause, to turn around and take a bow. Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony played by the Czech Philharmonic was a truly powerful experience.

KlasikaPlus, 23 September 2019

The *Pathétique* Symphony was a great feast – for me, this was the highlight among the festival concerts I visited... I personally place Bychkov's interpretation alongside those I value most – Bernstein from the sixties, Jansons, Karajan, Kleiber... The Czech Philharmonic's performance offered a perfect symbiosis of the content and the form. In a way, the entire evening had a concert-symphonic-pathetic quality thanks to the orchestra. I believe that all those who heard this *Pathétique* Symphony had to be wishing they had their own Tchaikovsky Project from Decca at home as a reminder of that evening.

Harmonie, 23 September 2019

Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6 *Pathétique* was not only the highlight of the evening but also of all three festival performances of the Czech Philharmonic... The fateful connection between the Czech Philharmonic, Semyon Bychkov and Tchaikovsky was proven again. Their recording of all the symphonies is impressive but nothing compares to a live performance, above all when delivered with a deep and honest enjoyment and devotion of the musicians themselves.

OperaPlus, 22 September 2019

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## **TCHAIKOVSKY *Manfred* Symphony, *Francesca da Rimini*, *Romeo & Juliet* Fantasy-Overture**

Prague – May 2021

Tchaikovsky Project Residency Paris – November 2019

Tchaikovsky Project Residency Vienna – November 2019

Tchaikovsky Project Residency Prague – September 2019

Prague – April, June 2017; January 2016

Bad Kissingen – July 2016

Tchaikovsky's *Romeo & Juliet* Fantasy Overture followed. A composition that Tchaikovsky personally conducted with great success in Rudolfinum in 1888. Semyon Bychkov's interpretation gave the work a mysterious atmosphere, the quiet dynamics held for a long time intensifying the necessary tension, which built gradually with percussion instruments or in the silvery swarm of fast strings. The funereal mood was evoked by tubas with timpani and the pure breath harmony at the end reminded us of the purity of the souls of the two young lovers ascending to heaven. It was one of the highlights of the evening.

OperaPlus, 12 May 2021

During the hour that the *Manfred* symphony lasted, we had time to savor the rich sound of the Czech Philharmonic and the sense of musical drama that Bychkov cultivated. Nothing was left to chance, starting with the layout of the orchestra... this very theatrical organization allowed the qualities of each desk to be made the most of... Conductor and musicians gave a remarkable interpretation of the most dramatic and lyrical pages of the symphony inspired by Lord Byron's poem: under Bychkov's high, noble and highly exacting beat, the strings rippled beautifully in the outer movements and the winds produced an epic – but never pompous – breath which allowed this long fresco to sweep along without ever being conscious of the few longeurs.

The fracas of percussion resumed and Bychkov unleashed the entire force of the Czech Philharmonic, especially in the masterly fugue. *Manfred*, the story of a thousand torments that translates into as many sounds and notes as can be created from a multitude of instruments (including an organ, which blended beautifully with the Orchestra). An epic fragrance and a tragic



moment, it is not possible for Manfred to leave one indifferent. Even less so when the Orchestra sounds like this: harsh and corrosive while melodious and supple when required... The Philharmonie audience were not wrong to give a lengthy standing ovation to conductor and Orchestra at the end of the concert. A conductor with who has an old acquaintance with the Parisian public since he conducted the Orchestre de Paris between 1989 and 1998. After that, there is nothing left to say other than that *The Tchaikovsky Project* is a huge success. I can't wait for the rest!

Le blog de andika, 24 November 2019

After the interval, the Czech Philharmonic under Semyon Bychkov, which had already given a superb performance of Piano Concerto No. 1, unveiled the finery of *Manfred's* thematic material, from the sublime sounds of the bassoon and bass clarinet, to the extraordinary silky strings...

Altamusica, 22 November 2019

Bychkov has been Chief Conductor of the Czech Philharmonic since 2018. He began recording all Tchaikovsky symphonies with this orchestra in 2015. And so, as we heard in *Manfred*, he has done this composer an important service. He staged this "Symphony in B minor in four pictures by Byron" theatrically, exploiting the soft, velvety sound of the orchestra in all its facets. It was pure drama. The principals, especially the woodwinds, were all excellent. The applause lasted a long time.

Kurier, 21 November 2019

Semyon Bychkov and the Czech Philharmonic have realized a Tchaikovsky cycle. The result was recently released as a boxset of recordings - and selections from it can be heard in guest performances at the Musikverein. What the conductor achieves with his Orchestra - and it really has become his Orchestra - is extraordinary. This was amply demonstrated in the Golden Hall in a delicately balanced programme... The palette of the Czech Philharmonic (in the *Manfred* Symphony) ranged from glaring, caricatured accents to widely flowing lyrical lines, characterized again and again by sharp dramaturgical cuts. Anyone who has followed the Orchestra's recent history can regard this guest performance as a particularly pleasing sign of life. Some will still remember how the performances of the Prague musicians in the final years of communist dictatorship sounded lacking in all musicianship; how Rafael Kubelik's return after the fall of communism revived memories of the Orchestra's glory days, before it was re-established in less favorable circumstances. Now it is there once again, inspiring.

Die Presse, 20 November 2019

How restlessly depressive the composer must have felt while composing this work, and how he identified himself more and more with Manfred's figure could be heard in each of the four movements in Bychkov's powerful and effective interpretation with the Czech Philharmonic. It is a psychodrama in which the Orchestra unleashed the full splendor of late romantic colors.

Kronen Zeitung, 20 November 2019

The Czech Philharmonic under their Principal Conductor and Music Director Semyon Bychkov took up residence at Vienna's Musikverein, performing selections from their "Tchaikovsky Project". Bychkov is the latest of musicians who take their Tchaikovsky really serious. Meticulously prepared and informed with archival research as well as passion, he invites us to listen with new ears. If you think you know your Tchaikovsky well, you may want to reconsider after hearing Bychkov and the Czechs... The chemistry between the Czechs and their newly found "daddy", as they dubbed maestro Bychkov, performed wonders in Tchaikovsky's *Manfred Symphony*. They played like devils for him, clearly relishing the music just as much as he does. Far from overlong or incoherent, this performance still burned with the enthusiasm of discovery and was gripping from start to end. The distinctive sound of the orchestra that seems to encapsulate centuries of Central-European tradition - glowing violins, characterful winds and some of the most pregnant brass you can hear - bloomed in the marvellous acoustics of the Musikverein..

Bachtrack, 20 November 2019

There was spontaneous exultation from the audience... The musical partnership of the orchestra and conductor produced the best results revealing their full passion for Tchaikovsky's work [*Manfred* Symphony].

OperaPlus, 15 September 2019

I once read somewhere that you know an extraordinary concert performance by the silence that follows the final notes. For a good few seconds following the last notes of *Manfred* on Friday, you could cut the silence with a knife.

KlasikaPlus, 14 September 2019

The Czech Philharmonic and Bychkov gave one of their best joint performances yet (in the *Manfred* Symphony). It was full of acoustic beauty, smoothness and spark when all of the instrumental groups literally competed with each other in their qualities, while still forming a perfectly interconnected whole. At the same time, every phrase was intense and deep. Romanticism with its pathos can sometimes be viewed as shallow and showy but in this case, it was what it is meant to be - a human emotion.

iDNES.cz, 14 September 2019

Moreover, the Czech Philharmonic is currently on excellent form and trusts Semyon Bychkov. And, being battle-hardened from working around the world with the best orchestras on the planet, he



gives the players of the Philharmonic the room to develop their musical potential. The result is a unique musical creation [in Tchaikovsky's *Francesca da Rimini*]...

Hospodářské noviny, 17 June 2017

Under Bychkov's guidance, the orchestra played at times with metronomic precision (this sounded wonderful at the end of the first movement with its fateful "ticking"), and in places the strings had an irresistibly "steely" sound, while the winds shone. I would go so far as to say that the Czech Philharmonic is showing itself to be an ideal interpreter of Tchaikovsky's music, not only because of its knowledge of the traditions of Dvořák (as well as of Janáček and Smetana), but also thanks to its meticulous tradition of interpretation, rightly appreciated by many foreign conductors. Tchaikovsky combines beautiful melodies inspired by the folk music of Eastern Europe with the compositional structure of the West, and this orchestra knows both these elements well and is able to react to them. If Semyon Bychkov's mission is to bring *Manfred* back to the concert hall, I wish him success. Either way, for many listening to the Czech Philharmonic that evening it will be a piece that they never forget, a fact that was confirmed by the quiet, as silent as the grave, that fell over the audience as the last notes faded away.

Harmonie, 25 April 2017

The second concert of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra began as Saturday night's had ended: with great music. This time it was Semyon Bychkov who conducted the Czech Philharmonic, beginning the evening with Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet Fantasy-Overture*. Tchaikovsky did not focus on the struggle of the feuding families, but on the spiritual aspect of the relationship between Romeo and Juliet. Bychkov created wonderful sounds and a calm environment for the emotional worlds of the famous lovers.

Saale Zeitung, 11 July 2016

The evening opened with the overture to the immortal love of *Romeo and Juliet*. Bychkov has tremendous charisma and a gift that convinces everyone in the orchestra to give their all. Rhapsodic and with constant pulsations, the flamboyant Shakespearean prelude took off. The attention to detail gave every indication that the conductor had devoted plenty of time to prepare. The Orchestra followed his every direction, maybe even breathing with him.

Harmonie, 30 January 2016

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## TCHAIKOVSKY Piano Concerto No. 1

Tchaikovsky Project Residency Paris – November 2019

Tchaikovsky Project Residency Vienna – November 2019

Leading the Czech Philharmonic, Semyon Bychkov provided excellent accompaniment with exemplary phrasing, forthright attacks and great attention to nuance. The *Andantino semplice* was a moment of pure grace, which was barely affected by the symphony of coughs that came from the stalls. The chamber-like harmonies of the Czech orchestra were notably highlighted by the interaction between solo oboe and the pianist who excelled in alternating dialogues with different instruments... Semyon Bychkov's response to the soloist was thrilling [in the third movement]. The textures and details that he elicited from the Orchestra achieved a finale of great elegance with the full measure of the strings creating an impressive density... Le blog de andika, 24 November 2019

This was newly minted Tchaikovsky, more alive, elegant and convincing than ever. The warm and balanced sonority of the Czech Philharmonic fully matched Kirill Gerstein's colourful pianism. Dialogues between piano and orchestral soloists, as in the graceful *Andantino semplice*, revealed exquisite detail...

Bachtrack, 20 November 2019

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## TCHAIKOVSKY Piano Concerto No. 2

Prague – February 2019

Continuing his Tchaikovsky Project, conducting the complete orchestral works by Tchaikovsky, Semyon Bychkov conducted the little known Piano Concerto No. 2 with Kirill Gerstein, as well as Symphony No. 2 which was perfectly suited to the splendid Czech Philharmonic... The traditional Russian touch showed itself to be especially supple from the *Allegro brillante* which, responding to the score, Bychkov conducted magnificently and vigorously without ever reducing it to an overly celebratory work... Josef Špaček, demonstrated the ever-splendid brilliance of the musicians of the Philharmonic from Prague – previously heard in the magnificent flute solos and reinforced by the solos played by the sublime first cello of Václav Petr... Semyon Bychkov directed his Orchestra with real freedom bringing out the most beautiful sounds from each desk. All without ever seeming to push for slightly more intensity to highlight the passionate moments.

ResMusica, 27 February 2019

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## TCHAIKOVSKY Piano Concerto No. 3



Prague – February 2019

[Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 3] was a huge undertaking for both soloist [Kirill Gerstein] and Orchestra, and the Orchestra rose to the occasion... The performance was perfect. The sound of the orchestra was beautiful, rounded, steady and robust. It was beautiful Tchaikovsky, and it would be good if this Decca recording brings this neglected piano concerto greater attention...

KlasikaPlus, 15 February 2019