

Serenades

DVOŘÁK Op. 22

TCHAIKOVSKY Op. 48

Balkan Chamber Orchestra
Toshio Yanagisawa

Antonín Dvořák

Serenade for Strings in E Major, Op. 22

- I. *Moderato* 5:10
- II. *Tempo di valse* 6:33
- III. *Scherzo. Vivace* 5:53
- IV. *Larghetto* 7:35
- V. *Finale. Allegro vivace* 6:32

Peter Tschaikowsky

Serenade for Strings in C Major, Op. 48

- I. *Pezzo in forma di sonatina: Andante non troppo – Allegro moderato* 9:53
- II. *Valse: Moderato – Tempo di valse* 3:56
- III. *Élégie: Larghetto elegiaco* 10:05
- IV. *Finale (Tema Russo): Andante – Allegro con spirito* 7:53

In addition to his nine symphonies, Antonín Dvořák wrote a number of other orchestral works that are less well known. The Serenade for Strings, Op. 22 (1875), however, gained great popularity. The work has five movements that seduce the listener with their sensual melodiousness; the musicians are allowed to indulge in the most beautiful Bohemian melodies. This music is completely carefree and infectious in its good mood and optimism. There is an abundance of memorable melodic ideas throughout the work. The strings develop a full-bodied, velvety sound, an aura of intimacy and warmth. There is also an element of recollection: Dvořák surely had the classical serenades and divertimenti of Haydn and Mozart in the back of his mind when he composed this piece. The formal conception of the five movements, the themes and their developments never go beyond classical proportions. There is always clarity and transparency. The entire work shines like a cloudless Bohemian sky: here, the world is still in order. The opening, tripartite *Moderato* acts as a prelude at a leisurely pace. Its melody, circling around the interval of a third, is presented as a canon. Dvořák treats many themes in this work in a similar manner. The strings enter into dialogues, the violas respond to the first violins, the cellos to the violas, the second violins to the first violins. The second movement is a nimble-footed waltz (*Tempo di valse*) with a melancholy tone and a contrasting lyrical trio section, a charming *Ländler* melody over descending thirds. The harmonies shift wistfully between major and minor, with pizzicatos and small echoes adding a sense of magic. The second dance movement, the *Scherzo*, is gripping and full of zest. Cheerful and contemplative melodies appear; the theme of the trio is particularly attractive. The romantic highlight of the string serenade is the slow fourth movement – a warm, flowing *Larghetto* of simple beauty. A powerful counterpoint, which later returns in a rondo-like form, opens the sparkling finale. Themes from previous movements make surprising appearances: in the middle of the movement the opening of the *Larghetto* returns, and just before the coda there are short sections from the first movement.

“You cannot believe, my dear friend, what incomparable joy I feel when I immerse myself in his music”, Pyotr Tchaikovsky wrote to his patron Nadezhda von Meck in 1880. The composer was referring to the oeuvre of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, whose scores he studied with admiration in order to take a break from his own work. Tchaikovsky’s Serenade for Strings, Op. 48, was intended to pay homage to Mozart. It was therefore with pride that Tchaikovsky wrote to Mrs von Meck in October 1880: “I composed the serenade with an inner urge. It is warmed by emotion and, I hope, not without artistic merit. As always, the most successful passages are the ones where I thought of you, and it fills me with joy to think that they might awaken the same feelings in you as they did in me.” The result is a sumptuous work, a “symphony without winds”, as it were, containing hardly any echoes of Mozart or Haydn. In its four-movement structure, it follows the classical model and combines *rococo* elegance with a great romantic gesture. The first movement is entitled *Pezzo in forma di sonatina*. The opulent and pathos-laden introduction, based on baroque forms, is followed by a sonata movement (without a development section), featuring two contrasting themes that indicate a closeness to Brahms or Mozart. After a solemn repetition of the slow introduction, the movement ends in a triple forte. The second movement is an elegant, weightless waltz, immediately reminiscent of the “flower waltz” from the ballet *The Nutcracker*, or the second movement of his Sixth Symphony, the *Pathétique*. The slow movement, a lament, begins much like the last movement of the *Pathétique*. This is followed by a broad cantilena for the violins with pizzicato accompaniment, which is then taken up by the violas and cellos: a love duet which builds up to a passionately elegiac climax. With the return of the opening, the movement ends in dark resignation and melancholy. The finale also begins slowly, this time with a Russian folk melody. A spirited folk dance follows as an *Allegro con spirito*. Happiness and exuberance are now the defining characteristics until the pathos-laden introduction of the first movement returns at the end.

Norbert Hornig

Translation: Viola Scheffel



Toshio Yanagisawa

conductor

Born in Japan in 1971, Toshio Yanagisawa studied orchestra conducting at the École Normale de Musique de Paris. In 2002, he won Second Prize at the Tokyo International Competition for Conducting. In 2003, he was invited to the Verbier Festival in Switzerland and studied with James Levine and Kurt Masur. From 2005 to 2007, he was Chief Conductor at the Macedonian National Opera. Since 2007, Toshio Yanagisawa has been Chief Conductor of the Kosovo Philharmonic. In 2007, he also established the Balkan Chamber Orchestra (BCO). In addition, he has collaborated e.g. with St. Petersburg Symphony Orchestra, Prague Symphony Orchestra, Serbian Radio Symphony Orchestra, Belgrade Opera, Serbia Niš Symphony Orchestra, Sarajevo Philharmonic, and Albanian Radio Symphony Orchestra as well as with several major Japanese orchestras.

Currently, he is Music Director of the Balkan Chamber Orchestra, Chief Conductor of the Kosovo Philharmonic, Honorary Chief Conductor of the Belgrade Sinfonietta and conductor of the Tohoku Youth Orchestra which was originally organized to perform in Lucerne Festival's ARK NOVA in Matsushima in 2013 after the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 (director: Ryuichi Sakamoto).

The Balkan Chamber Orchestra (BCO)

The BCO was founded in 2007 by Japanese conductor Toshio Yanagisawa in order to foster understanding among the Balkan nations – the countries of former Yugoslavia, shaken by ethnic conflicts. On 17 May 2009, a commemorative concert was held in Mitrovica by musicians from multi-ethnic groups for the first time after the Kosovo War, supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Kosovo Force (KFOR), and the police. Since then, the BCO has served as a cultural bridge connecting people around the world through music.

Toshio Yanagisawa and the BCO members travel worldwide to give one or two *World Peace Concerts* per year which continue to aim at international understanding of all people and to overcome boundaries as “world citizens”. *World Peace Concerts* have already led the BCO to Vienna, Geneva, Belgrade, Sarajevo, New York, and Tokyo as well as to the General Assembly Hall of the UN offices in Geneva. The orchestra has collaborated with renowned musicians such Akiko Suwanai (violin), Pascal Rogé (piano) and Peter Jablonski (piano). In co-operation with the UNDP, it also realized an improvisation concert with Roma children in Albania.

The BCO consists of excellent musicians who serve as principal string players in orchestras of their home countries and take leading roles in the classical music scene in these Balkan countries. Despite the difficulties to promote classical music during the recovery process after the political conflict, the BCO's has been able to improve its musical quality tremendously.



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