



MUSICA VIVA NY

Alejandro Hernandez-Valdez
Artistic Director



A CELEBRATION OF CZECH HERITAGE

With Aeolus Quartet and Alejandro Hernandez-Valdez

Sunday, February 2, 2020

4pm at Bohemian National Hall

321 East 73rd Street, New York, NY 10021

MESSAGE FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

As the Artistic Director of Musica Viva NY and a member of the Board of the Dvořák American Heritage Association, I am pleased to warmly welcome you to our special program this evening with music by Czech composers Antonín Dvořák and Erwin Schulhoff. We sincerely thank the Dvořák American Heritage Association and its President, Susan Lucak, for their support and for allowing us to perform in this beautiful space: the Bohemian National Hall. There isn't a more appropriate venue in all New York City to enjoy the type of program you will be enjoying this evening.

Several years ago, I had the opportunity to spend a sabbatical in Europe. I was based in Berlin, but I often took the train or the bus to experience other cities as well. Out of a large number of wonderful memories, there is one that particularly stands out: my first visit to the Czech Republic. In mid-July, about half-way through my sabbatical, I decided to rent a car to travel to Prague. I purposefully avoided highways so that I could take inspiration from the countryside and, since I was going to cross into the Czech Republic for the first time, I decided to load the car's CD player with the complete symphonies of Antonín Dvořák, as played by the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra.

I crossed from Austria into the Czech Republic early on a Sunday morning as the 6th Symphony began playing through the speakers. The experience of listening to this masterpiece while, for the first time, taking in the sights, aromas, and sounds that inspired such music was surreal. The beautiful landscape—with its valleys, lakes, and rivers—gave me a deep sense of tranquility and the sensation that Dvořák's spirit was revealing itself to me for the first time. Through my musical education I had learned much about Dvořák—the gifted composer who emerged from very humble origins in rural Bohemia to become one of the most successful and beloved figures in classical music—but it wasn't until then that I began to fully understand his soul and what he was trying to communicate with his music.

Dvořák, the nature-loving, pigeon-loving, locomotive-loving, family-loving, God-loving composer who we honor in part of our program this evening, was, by many accounts, a man of contrasts. He was disarmingly simple and fascinatingly complex at the same time. He loved the countryside but drew much excitement from bustling cities like London and New York. His modesty was one of his most distinct and endearing traits, but he also rejoiced, often with child-like amazement, in the wild successes he collected throughout most of his adult life. These contrasts imbue his music, and provide the listener with a wealth of profoundly rewarding listening experiences. Throughout his life, Dvořák reached exhilarating highs and also experienced devastating lows. As a result, his music is at times thrilling and at times melancholy. Most characteristically, his music is, in a particularly moving way, disarmingly genuine and through and through Bohemian.

On behalf of everyone involved, I'd like to thank all present tonight for your constant and vital support. Please enjoy the program!

—Alejandro Hernandez-Valdez, *Artistic Director*

Sunday, February 2, 2020 4pm
Bohemian National Hall

A Celebration of Czech Heritage

with Aeolus Quartet & Alejandro Hernandez-Valdez

A co-presentation of Musica Viva NY
and the Dvořák American Heritage Association

Aeolus Quartet

Nicholas Tavani and Rachel Shapiro, *violins*

Caitlin Lynch, *viola*

Alan Richardson, *cello*

Featuring Alejandro Hernandez-Valdez, *piano*

Program

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841-1904). *Selections from Cypresses, B. 152*

ERWIN SCHULHOFF (1894-1942). *Five Pieces for String Quartet*

- I. Viennese Waltz
- II. Serenade
- III. Czech Folk Music
- IV. Tango
- V. Tarantella

Intermission

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK. *Piano Quintet No. 2 in A Major, Op. 81, B. 155*

- I. Allegro, ma non tanto
- II. Dumka: Andante con moto
- III. Scherzo (Furiant): molto vivace
- IV. Finale: Allegro

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Czech Love and Death, Quartets and Quintets

We do love a good love story: more, perhaps, we love a tale of an artist crushed in the throes of true love, bidden by an unseen hand to convert that love to art. We have Berlioz's legally questionable love translated to the overkill-scaled *Symphonie Fantastique*, Alban Berg's encoded *Lyric Suite*, Beethoven's "Immortal Beloved," and the bulk of Brahms' vocal output. Add to the list ***Cyresses***, by **Antonín Dvořák**.

In 1865, Dvořák, in order to keep the proverbial wolf from the door, was giving piano lessons, and fell madly in love with Josefína Čermáková, one of his pupils, also an actress. He wrote her 18 love songs based on a set of poems by Gustav Pflieger-Moravský, texts rooted in the notion that the Cypress tree spoke in equal melodramatic measure of love and death: the bible has it as a Funeral Tree—"its dark, tall, waving plumes render it peculiarly appropriate among the tombs" in the book of Isaiah—and Ovid makes use of the same symbolic notions, as someone who killed a deer which was a gift from Apollo despaired so deeply of his deed that he became said tree with tear-shaped sap droplets.

In 1887, Dvořák, having married Anna Čermáková (whose sister refused the composer) converted the songs to 12 movements for string quartet, a selection of which will be played tonight. Alas, the publisher was not in the market for small pieces for string quartet (audiences wanted meatier fare from the medium), so it took the composer and violinist Josef Suk, lobbying for Dvořák beyond the grave, to get it published, changing the title from "The Echo of Songs" to the current one.

In 1924, Olin Downes wrote, in the *New York Times*, about the ***Five Pieces for String Quartet*** of the young composer and Dvořák protégé **Erwin Schulhoff**: "These pieces attempted only to charm or entertain. They had spontaneous humor, sentiment, a fluent and admirable technic. [sic] The idiom has enough modern pepper in it to constantly stimulate the ear; but the music is not forced, any more than it is portentous. A young composer of talent disported himself in these pieces, and his audience was duly grateful. Not all composers, old or young, have the good sense not to take themselves, now and again, too seriously."

Schulhoff, from a German born Czech milieu (like Franz Kafka) seemed destined for a spectacular career, from his early studies at both the Prague Conservatory and then private piano and composition studies with an illustrious roster of teachers including Claude Debussy and Max Reger. Early on, like many modernists, he was interested in the work of Richard Strauss, attending the Prague premiere of *Salome*, but the world changed

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

and Schulhoff changed with it, finding inspiration in the Second Viennese School of Schoenberg and Berg, and eventually embracing new sonic notions like Dadaism (even, years before John Cage's 4'33", writing a piece made only of rests), American ragtime and, topmost, jazz.

It is in the spirit of exploration that the composer wrote the *Five Pieces for String Quartet* in 1923, a first fulmination of what would later go on to be called a "third stream" movement, one that sought to reconcile the Great Western Tradition of classical music with the burgeoning upstart notions of jazz. Unfortunately, like they did to many things, the Nazis managed to stanch the progress, occupying Czechoslovakia and shipping Schulhoff—and so many other great and promising artists who, being Jewish, were utterly disposable to the fascists—to a concentration camp in Bavaria where tuberculosis took his life.

Dvořák, though a composer of spectacular symphonies and operas, is probably best known as the author of energetic and yet refined chamber works, and the *Piano Quintet in A Major, Op. 81* resounds among them. Perhaps because the group edges on being a larger, more symphonic ensemble than, say, a string quartet, it is considered, for composers, an important milestone in their work. And at the time when it was composed in 1887-1888 (and as hard as this is to imagine), chamber music was a far more lucrative venture than larger works, so composers were encouraged to write it by the ream.

The piece, written in a mere seven weeks by a composer of vast achievement and no small amount of fame—and lying between symphonies seven and eight—is itself a reworking of an unsatisfactory (to Dvořák) withdrawn work, an Opus 5 of some fifteen years prior. But while the earlier work stumbles and falls, this one bolts headlong with brio and cause, the work of a more technically adroit composer. The four movements together—a near-violent set of thematic peregrinations in which the opening theme is put through its paces; the wistful "dumka" of the second movement, a nod to the Ukrainian ballad rife with nostalgia and regret; the Bohemian (and not "furious") "furiant" dance of the third, with its unbridled *scherzo*-like energy; and the ebullient and often open-throttle sonata of the finale—create a kind of "symphony in a bottle" effect, careening in the roller-coaster delight of a powerful and wide-ranging symphony – in the way that only the best chamber music of this period can do.

—Daniel Felsenfeld

MEET THE ARTISTS

Praised by the *Baltimore Sun* for combining “smoothly meshed technique with a sense of spontaneity and discovery,” the **Aeolus Quartet** is committed to presenting both time-seasoned masterworks and new cutting-edge works to widely diverse audiences with equal freshness, dedication, and fervor. Formed in 2008, the Quartet is comprised of violinists Nicholas Tavani and Rachel Shapiro, violist Caitlin Lynch, and cellist Alan Richardson. The Aeolus Quartet has been awarded prizes at nearly every major competition in the United States and performed across the globe with showings “worthy of a major-league quartet” (Scott Cantrell, *Dallas Morning News*). Mark Satola of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* writes, “The quartet has a rich and warm tone combined with precise ensemble playing (that managed also to come across as fluid and natural), and an impressive musical intelligence guided every technical and dramatic turn.” They were the 2013-2015 Graduate Resident String Quartet at the Juilliard School, and they currently make their home in New York City.

In addition to extensive touring throughout the United States in the 2019-2020 season, the Quartet will be featured at the Artosphere Festival hosted by the Walton Arts Center, as well as in the premiere of a new chamber opera at NYC’s Prototype Festival. They will appear in concert at Cornell University, the Austin Chamber Music Festival, the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, and NYC’s Bohemian National Hall, among others.

The Aeolus Quartet has released two critically acclaimed albums of classical and contemporary works through the Longhorn/Naxos label which are available on iTunes, Amazon, and major retailers worldwide. Part of an ongoing series entitled *Many-Sided Music*, these albums promote the diversity and breadth of works by American composers. The next album in the *Many-Sided Music* series is slated for release in Spring 2020.

Esteemed conductor and pianist **Dr. Alejandro Hernandez-Valdez** was named Artistic Director of Musica Viva NY and Director of Music of the historic Unitarian Church of All Souls in Manhattan in 2015. He is also Co-Founder of the New Orchestra of Washington and Artistic Director of the Victoria Bach Festival. He has earned accolades from *The Washington Post* as a conductor “with the incisive clarity of someone born to the idiom,” as well as praise from *The New York Times* for leading “a stirring performance” of Brahms’ *Ein deutsches Requiem*. At a concert commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the WWI Armistice (featuring the world premiere of Joseph Turrin’s cantata *And Crimson Rose Once Again Be Fair*) *Oberon’s Grove* wrote: “Maestro Alejandro Hernandez-Valdez drew rich, warm sounds from the musicians” in “a beautiful and deeply moving program.” He is featured

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MEET THE ARTISTS

in *El mundo en las manos/Creadores mexicanos en el extranjero* (The World in Their Hands/Creative Mexicans Abroad), a book by the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs honoring Mexican nationals who are leading figures in diverse artistic fields. He is the recipient of a 2016 Shenandoah Conservatory Alumni of Excellence Award for his exemplary contribution to his profession, national level of prominence, and exceptional integrity. He resides in New York City and Washington, D.C.

CO-PRESENTERS

Founded in 1977, **Musica Viva NY** is a chamber choir of thirty professionals and highly skilled volunteers, based in Manhattan's historic All Souls Church. Its mission is to bring world-class music to a widening community through its annual concert series, outreach programs, and an ambitious artistic vision. Under the baton of Alejandro Hernandez-Valdez since 2015, Musica Viva NY has been praised by *The New York Times* as an "excellent chorus." Musica Viva NY has toured in France (2004), Germany (2006) and Italy (2012).

Founded in 1990, the **Dvořák American Heritage Association** (DAHA) commemorates, celebrates, and continues to explore composer Antonin Dvořák's extraordinary musical contributions, with a special emphasis on his influential American residency in the years 1892 to 1895. From its home in the beautifully restored Bohemian National Hall, DAHA offers concerts, lectures, and educational programs that highlight the music of Dvořák and his American students and followers, as well as the broad scope of Czech musical culture. At the heart of these activities is the Dvořák Room, a recently created exhibition and study space with adjacent performance venues, that serves to inspire present and future generations by preserving the composer's American legacy.

SAVE THE DATES FOR THE REST OF MUSICA VIVA NY'S 2019-20 SEASON

Sunday March 8, 2020 at 5pm

The Brick Church, 1140 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10128

GREAT ROMANTIC COMPOSERS: Mahler, Mendelssohn, & Rheinberger

Musica Viva NY and the Aeolus Quartet

Sunday May 17, 2020 at 5pm

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BACHMANINOFF: Spirituality and Beauty in Bach & Rachmaninoff

Musica Viva NY and cello soloist

Tickets available at www.musicaviva.org/tickets

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- Underwriting an appearance by the Aeolus Quartet
- Underwriting an intimate post-concert reception with the artists

Naming opportunities are available for sponsors.
Contact **Danielle Buonaiuto**, Executive Director
at dbuonaiuto@musicaviva.org.

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- Acknowledgment in program at all levels

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www.dvoraknyc.org

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Bohemian National Hall

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MUSICA VIVA NY

Alejandro Hernandez-Valdez
Artistic Director

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