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Slavic Rhapsody

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Ciconia Consort *The Hague String Orchestra*

Dick van Gasteren *conductor*

Slavic Rhapsody

Antonín Leopold Dvořák 1841-1904
Serenade for Strings in E B.52 (1876)

1.	Moderato	4'04
2.	Tempo di Valse	6'06
3.	Scherzo: Vivace	5'40
4.	Larghetto	5'52
5.	Finale: Allegro Vivace	5'48

Leoš Janáček 1854-1928
Suite for String Orchestra JW6 No.2 (1877)

6.	Moderato	4'03
7.	Adagio	3'56
8.	Andante con moto	1'01
9.	Presto	2'53
10.	Adagio	3'36
11.	Andante	3'52

Josef Suk 1874-1935

12.	**Meditace na staročeský 'Svatý Václave'** Op.35a (1914) *(Meditation on the Old Czech Chorale St. Wenceslas)*	6'19

Bohuslav Martinů 1890-1959
Suite No.1 for String Orchestra 'Partita' H212 (1931)

13.	Poco Allegro	3'12
14.	Moderato	2'57
15.	Andante Moderato	2'37
16.	Poco Allegretto	3'30

Bedřich Smetana 1824-1884

17.	**Rybář** [The Fisherman] JB1:97 *for harmonium, harp and strings*	4'18

CICONIA CONSORT

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In **Slavic Rhapsody** Ciconia Consort presents both known and unknown works for string ensemble by the five most famous Czech composers of the 19th and 20th centuries: Dvořák, Janáček, Smetana, Martinů and Suk. Partly due to an increased interest in its own folk-music, the rhapsody became an important musical form for Slavic composers from the middle of the 19th century. The word 'rhapsody' is derived from the Greek 'rhapsōidos' (ῥαψῳδός), a predecessor of epic poetry. At first, the musical rhapsody manifested itself as a song form, though later, in the middle of the 19th century, an instrumental form also appeared in the grand symphonic rhapsody. Rhapsodic music (in either form or subject) is made up of contrasting styles and moods, often with a theme common to folk melodies, or recurring in different forms, whereby the free episodic form nevertheless forms a unity. The rhapsody became especially popular in Romanticism due to its great variety in moods as well as an appearance of spontaneous inspiration and improvisation and manifests itself particularly in the Slavic cultures. This is not only reflected in the titles of the works, but also in the way the composers interweave the improvisational rhapsodic elements within pre-existing musical forms. As such, these rhapsodic elements in form, contrasting moods, and folk music influences are also clearly recognisable in the serenade and suites on this CD.

Antonín Leopold Dvořák 1841- 1904
The Czech/Bohemian composer, conductor, violinist, violist, organist, and pedagogue, Antonín Dvořák studied at the Prague Organ School between 1857 and 1859. In the years that followed he struggled to support himself as a viola player, teacher, and composer, performing in cafés, marketplaces, and newsstands. In 1874 his situation changed when he won the Austrian State Prize for Composition, which was specially set up for disadvantaged musicians, and to which a considerable sum of money was attached. A leading jury, which included Johannes Brahms and with whom a lifelong friendship developed, recognised Dvořák's "genuine and original gifts". This resulted

in the composition of the *Serenade for Strings*, one of his most popular works.

The atmosphere of the work reflects happy times: his young marriage, the birth of his son, and the growing recognition of his talent. Dvořák composed the *Serenade* in just 12 days, and it was premiered in Prague in 1876 by an orchestra comprised of Czech and German theatres and conducted by Adolf Čech. The work's premiere in Prague was such a success that it was immediately programmed by the Vienna Philharmonic for a so-called 'Slavic Concert'. Shortly after it was also conducted by Leoš Janáček.

A serenade was originally a semi-improvised song accompanied by lute or guitar; a musical love letter performed by men at night under the window of their beloved. In the 18th century the serenade developed into an instrumental, multi-movement musical work, comparable to a small symphony, lightly romantic in its nature, but without exaggerated dramatic gestures. In the 19th century the serenade lost its romantic associations but retained its idyllic character. With the exception of the finale, which is written in free sonata form, all movements of Dvořák's *Serenade for Strings* are in a three-part song form (A-B-A), the form that most appeals in folk music. The piece combines a 'cantabile' style in the first movement, with a waltz in the second, a humorous third, a lyrical fourth, and an exuberant fifth movement. Nonetheless the music turns out to be more complicated than this simple format suggests. Throughout the work erratic rhapsodic elements appear. This is recognisable from the opening movement.

Without further introduction, the piece opens with a lyrical, unpretentious first theme in E major. Just as the opening theme begins abruptly, a strongly contrasting second theme in G major quickly follows, dotted and with a rhythmic dance character. This theme culminates in a quasi-improvised cadence that quite suddenly brings us back to the lyrical opening theme in E major.

The second movement opens with a lyrical and nostalgic waltz in C-sharp minor. The ever-present syncopated accompanying material, with striking and remarkable accents, gives the lyricism of this movement a distinctly Slavic characteristic. A transition passage in the relative major of E leads with a strong dominant effect to a capriciously dotted second theme in A major, followed by a conclusion of the first theme in C-sharp minor. The connected trio is quite surprisingly in the enharmonic parallel key of D-flat major. Dvořák's instruction to play the melody in the violins high on the G string, combined with the 'pizzicati' in the double basses fully reflects the Slavic character. The return of the A section closes the movement with a Picardy cadence in C-sharp major.

The third movement is a lively Scherzo in F major. The theme is, just as the main theme of the first and fifth movements, imitative and is developed in varying tempi and contrasting moods. The lyricism in the trio part again has a striking rhythmic syncopated accompaniment which is characteristic of Slavic folk music and capricious rhapsodic style. The movement ends with a retrospective coda in which material from both the scherzo and trio is used.

The fourth movement is a lyrical and wistful Larghetto. The flowing melodies form a buffer between the powerful third and fifth movements. From bar 34 we can recognise the characteristic Slavic Dumka rhythm in the celli and double basses as an accompaniment to a broad melody in the violas, imitated by the first violins. The Larghetto is interrupted in a rhapsodic manner by a strongly contrasting theme with 'staccato' notes and strong 'sforzandi' above which a thin melodic line appears in the violins. The movement returns to the opening theme, which seems to be seeking more and more stillness and resignation, until the last syncopated pulse stops as a heartbeat in the double basses, and the movement evaporates into a thin, 'pianissisimo' A major chord.

The Allegro vivace is a lively finale in free sonata form, in the spirit of a Bohemian village dance. Just like the first and third movements, the main theme is imitative, again with the strong accents on the weaker beats. Once again, a dotted transitionary passage leads to a contrasting second theme with a strong Bohemian dance character.

A melancholy melody from the previous Larghetto appears in the celli and leads to the reprise. A passage based on material from the first theme leads to a reprise of the beginning of the serenade, the first theme of the first movement, completing the circle. A presto coda concludes the serenade.

Leoš (Eugen) Janáček 1854-1928
After studying in Prague, Vienna, and Leipzig, the composer, pedagogue, and music theorist, Leoš Janáček returned to Brno. In 1881 Janáček founded and was appointed director of the organ school in Brno. He held this post until 1919 when the school became the Brno Conservatory. His works are inspired by the Moravian and Slavic folk music of his country, including Eastern European folk music, creating an original and modern musical style.

The *Suite for String Orchestra* is an early work, composed when he was just 23 years old, in a period when he lived in relative poverty. In 1876, towards the end of his studies at the Prague Organ School, Janáček was appointed choirmaster and conductor of the Beseda brněnská Philharmonic Society (Brno). One year later he conducted the premiere of this composition. Formally, the Suite falls in between a collection of sketches, like Grieg's Holberg Suite, and a more symphonic suite such as the Serenade for Strings by Tchaikovsky. Originally Janáček had named the six movements Prelude, Allemande, Sarabande, Scherzo, Air and Finale, but the composer dropped these baroque titles because the music did not relate to the old dance forms.

In the first movement, Moderato, his continually contrasting moods can be heard. The opening of the piece is a powerful unison theme in the low registers. The long, drawn-out melody line rises gradually from the double basses and cellos to higher and higher registers in the first violins. The character of the music transforms from raw to esoteric and in the accompaniment a similar transformation is heard, but in the opposite direction. The nervous triplets in the descant make space for the eighth-notes

in the second violins, followed by broken chords with sixteenth-notes in the even lower register of the violas. The second theme in the subdominant is a static march that recalls the Marche des pèlerins from Harold en Italie by Berlioz, after which the movement finishes with a rudimentary but triumphant reprise. The second movement, Adagio, is, without celli and double basses, thin yet extraordinarily elevated in its theatrical expression. Here we hear Janáček as an opera composer. The following Andante con moto contrasts that with simple and pastoral melodies, almost childish in its simplicity. Janáček seems to want to reference an authentic bourrée.

In the Presto we can recognise a scherzo that in form and character is reminiscent of Beethoven or even Bruckner, where the trio section seems to recall the theme from the second movement. The fifth movement, Adagio, has a strong religious and meditative character. A melodious and sonorous introduction in the lower strings is followed by a chorale-like setting in the descant, alternated with a cello solo that seems to bear the character of a cantor. The movement finishes with the same introduction melody in the low strings. Finally, a charming and melancholic Andante completes the suite.

Josef Suk 1874-1935
The Czech composer, pedagogue, and violinist, Josef Suk, studied at the Conservatory of Prague. Suk's greatest inspiration came from his teacher, Antonín Dvořák. As Suk's career as a composer took off, he was expected to be Dvořák's successor. As the second violinist in the Bohemian Quartet he also received international recognition. In 1892 he was awarded professorship at the Conservatory of Prague, where he would one day also become the director. One of his students was Bohuslav Martinů.

His composition *Meditace na staročeský choral "Svatý Václave"* was originally written for string quartet. Dedicated to Ferdinand Pečírka, this meditative work is based on an old Czech hymn "St. Wenceslas", which is considered the oldest preserved poetic word in the Czech language (13th century):

Saint Wenceslas, Duke of the Parduvian Lands,
our prince, pray for us God, the Holy Spirit!
Christ, eleison.

You are the heir of the Parduvian land, remember your nation,
Don't let the future perish, Saint Wenceslas!
Christ, eleison.

Suk wrote the composition in August 1914 after the outbreak of the First World War. With the Bohemian Quartet he played the premiere, as the Czech counterpart to the Austrian national anthem that would open the concert. He wrote it to "strengthen the hope of the return of power to the Czech people, after the storms of wrath have passed". With the establishment of the first Czechoslovakian Republic in 1918, Svatý Václave was considered as a possible candidate for the national anthem.

The meditation starts slowly and pensively, with different instruments quoting the hymn. The music builds purposefully to a climax that begs for God's forgiveness and consequently finds resigned comfort. Suk himself transcribed the piece for string orchestra.

Bohuslav Jan Martinů 1890-1959
The Czech composer, pedagogue, and violinist, Bohuslav Martinů, studied at the Conservatory of Prague, but was dismissed due to "incorrigible lack of attention". He decided to teach himself the profession and after several years he passed the state exams. In 1923 he went on to study with Albert Roussel in Paris. Here he became one of the central figures in the School of Paris, which was made up of expat artists from all over the world and who were the centre of artistic activity in the city between 1900 and 1940.

In Paris, in 1931, Martinů composed his *Suite No.1*, also called *Partita*. In the

16th and 17th centuries a 'partita' was a work for one solo instrument, but Johann Kuhnau and later German composers used the term for a collection of movements or suite; a series of variations or dances based on one theme, often preceded by a prelude. However, the term partita also stands for a musical form: the so-called *forma bipartita* or a 'two-part form' (A-A or A-B). With the emerging interest in the baroque forms during the 20th century, Martinů also felt inspired by this old musical form of the partita. Vítězslava Kaprálová, who in 1938 also wrote a partita while being coached by Martinů, wrote in a letter that partita doesn't mean two-part form but counterpoint or 'continuous contrast'. This remark is clearly based on Martinů's Partita.

The thematic material in this work, with its typical fourth intervals, is derived from and modelled on traditional Slavic folk music, which Martinů develops in a modern style reminiscent of Béla Bartók. Despite the work having several movements, the music flows in 'the same spirit'. Without slow movements, intimacy, or a poetic character, it is spicy, tough, joyful, and sometimes even a tad raw.

Bedřich Smetana 1824-1884
The Czech composer, pianist, and conductor, Bedřich Smetana, studied at the Conservatory of Prague. Between 1856 and 1861 he lived and worked in Gothenburg, primarily as a piano teacher but also as a concert pianist and choir and orchestra conductor. When he returned to Prague in his homeland, he came to have great significance for Czech art music. He started a music school to promote Czech music and became the conductor of the National Theatre, primarily to perform Czech operas.

Rybář (The Fisherman), for harmonium, harp, and strings, can be regarded as a musical 'tableau vivant' after Goethe's poem *Der Fischer*. Smetana composed the work in 1869 for several performances organised by Czech noblemen to complete the construction of St. Vitus Cathedral.

The ballad is about a fisherman who is overpowered by the mysterious and magical

pull of the water. A mermaid appears in his imagination who lures him into the depths with song. The hypnotic allure of the moving water reflects the fisherman's inner desire for relief from earthly pain. Goethe himself said of his ballad: "In this ballad only the feeling of water is expressed, the grace that tempts us to bathe in the summer; there is nothing else in it."

The short piece, *Rybář*, is unmistakably reminiscent of *De Moldau, Vltava*, which Smetana composed in 1874. Perhaps *Rybář* can regarded as a preliminary study. The instrumentation with harmonium is special as this instrument is only seldomly chosen by composers. For the recording, a French Debain harmonium from 1880 has been used.

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Translation: Madelin Luimstra

The Fisherman
By Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
(translation: John Storer Cobb)

The water rushed, the water swelled,
A fisherman sat by,
And gazed upon his dancing float
With tranquil-dreaming eye.
And as he sits, and as he looks,
The gurgling waves arise;
A maid, all bright with water drops,
Stands straight before his eyes.

She sang to him, she spake to him:
"My fish why dost thou snare,
With human wit and human guile,
Into the killing air?
Couldst see how happy fishes live
Under the stream so clear,
Thyself would plunge into the stream,
And live for ever there.

"Bathe not the lovely sun and moon
Within the cool, deep sea,
And with wave-breathing faces rise
In twofold witchery?
Lure not the misty heaven-deeps,
So beautiful and blue?
Lures not thine image, mirrored in
The Fresh eternal dew?

The water rushed, the water swelled,
It clasped his feet, I wis'
A thrill went through his yearning heart,
As when two lovers kiss!
She spake to him, she sang to him:
Resistless was her strain;
Half drew him in, half lured him in;
He ne'er was seen again.

Ciconia Consort, The Hague String Orchestra founded in 2012, is a Dutch string orchestra consisting of twenty young musicians under the leadership of Dick van Gasteren. Their concerts are predominately of a thematic nature and often combined with other disciplines such as theatre, literature, and science. Concert programs regularly touch upon contemporary social issues.

The orchestra has built up an extensive repertoire and performs music from all style periods (with an emphasis in late-romantic and modern works). Aside from the well-known works for strings, the orchestra has also revived quite a few forgotten masterpieces, which led to Dutch premieres and world premieres (such as Willem Mengelberg's *Sinfonietta for String Orchestra* and Willem van Otterloo's *Prelude, Dance and Epilogue* for clarinet and string orchestra). Little known compositions like *Symphonie n° 1 pour orchestre à cordes* by Jaques Castérède, *Sur les flots lointain* by Charles Koechlin and *Serenade for string orchestra* by George Antheil have also been recorded on CD, released on the 'Brilliant Classics' label. All CDs (*French Music for String Orchestra, American Pioneers*, and *Rheingold*) have received worldwide critical acclaim.

Ciconia Consort has enjoyed collaborations with soloists such as Lavinia Meijer, Isabelle van Keulen, Paolo Giacometti, Pieter Wispelwey, as well as scientists and writers such as Pieter Waterdrinker, Maarten van Rossem, Rosita Steenbeek and Willem Otterspeer. The orchestra can often be heard on Dutch radio and television, in addition to also receiving international airtime on radio stations in Australia, the United Kingdom, Germany, United States and Taiwan, among others.

Since its founding in 2012, **Dick van Gasteren** has been Ciconia Consort's conductor and artistic director. Between 2014 and 2021 Van Gasteren was guest conductor of the Orquesta Simón Bolívar in Venezuela, where he was invited by José Antonio Abreu. There he conducted symphonies by Schumann, Bruckner, and Mahler, amongst others. In addition to this, he regularly conducted other Venezuelan orchestras from 'El Sistema' such as Juan José Landaete and Teresa Carreño. As professor at the Conservatorio Inocente Careño de Venezuela, he gives lessons and masterclasses in orchestral conducting to talented young students.

Dick van Gasteren studied cello, orchestra conducting, art history, and law. He received cello lessons from Anner Bijlsma at the Royal Conservatoire, The Hague, and studied orchestral conducting with Jan Stulen. He continued his studies with Bernard Haitink in London, whom he later assisted during the 'Mahler Festival Amsterdam' in 1995. Amongst his awards, Van Gasteren was a Laureate for the conducting masterclass of both the Accademia Musicale Chigiana in Siena and the Wiener Meisterkurs. His concert programme conducting credits include the Limburgs Symfonie Orkest, Noordhollands Philharmonisch Orkest, Nürnberger Symphoniker and Wiener Klangforum Orchester. He has also earned a reputation as an opera conductor, performing operas such as *Othello, Don Pasquale, Elektra*, and *Die Fledermaus* with the Oldenburgisches Staatstheater. At the Royal Theatre in The Hague, he has conducted Constant van de Wall's Dutch-Indonesian opera, *Attima*.

Dick van Gasteren presented two episodes of the popular Dutch children's educational television series 'Het Klokhuis' where he focussed on the profession of conducting. His book *Over jeugdorkesten en de didactiek van het dirigeren* (On Youth Orchestras and the Didactics of Conducting) was published by Walburg Pers in 2010. It has subsequently been translated into Spanish for 'El Sistema' in Venezuela. In 2022 his book '*La Musica Notturna delle Strade di Madrid' van Luigi Boccherini* was published by Prominent.

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