

Programme Notes

***Sur les berges du Saint-Laurent*, Victor Herbiet**

ORIGINAL PROGRAMME NOTES WRITTEN BY DAVID GARDNER

In our last concert we performed a new work by a long time member of the cello section of the OSO – Jan Jarvlepp. Now we have the pleasure of introducing you to the music of another member of the OSO – Victor Herbiet. He has been the OSO's saxophone soloist since 2007. He studied saxophone with Noël Samyn and the late Peter Smith and composition with Steven Gellman. He graduated from the University of Ottawa School of Music with a Bachelor's and Master's degree. After serving over a decade with the Canadian Forces music branch he is currently an adjunct professor at the University of Ottawa's School of Music. His musical language is an eclectic mix of twelve-tone music, French impressionism, Canadian folk, American jazz and Latin music which produces sounds that keeps the ear alert to every new colour in his musical palette. His music has been performed and well received in North and South America, Europe and East Asia.

The composer has provided the following programme note:

“Sur les berges du Saint-Laurent was commissioned by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, at the behest of Dr. Bernard W. Andrews, Professor at the Faculty of Education of the University of Ottawa. The initiative was called *The Genesis Project: An investigation of contemporary music composition* and its goal was to document the

Programme Notes

Sur les berges du Saint-Laurent, Victor Herbert

ORIGINAL PROGRAMME NOTES WRITTEN BY DAVID GARDNER

compositional process of a new work as it was being composed. During the 18 months it took me to compose the piece, I had to keep a journal of my progress and answer many questions about my identity (age, gender, minority group) and how everything affects the music I write. A few years prior to receiving the offer to participate in the Genesis project, I had envisioned composing a piece for symphony orchestra that would be a Canadian-themed symphonic poem akin to Smetana's *Moldau*. Since I hadn't developed my Canadian symphonic poem idea beyond the conceptual stage, the Genesis project was the perfect opportunity for me to move forward with this project and see it to completion.

"The piece depicts four scenes that can be imagined on the St. Lawrence River: the dawn, a nautical adventure, French-Canadian folkloric celebrations and the flight of migratory birds. In a sense these four sections depict the four elements of Antiquity: Earth (the shore), Water (the boat ride), Fire (festivities) and Air (the birds).

"To begin the piece, I attempt to transport the audience members outside of the concert hall and onto the shores of the St. Lawrence. To do this, the string section holds long notes in superimposed perfect fifths while the woodwinds take turns playing musical phrases and imitating bird calls. As the piece goes on, we see the sun rise above the water

Programme Notes

Sur les berges du Saint-Laurent, Victor Herbert

ORIGINAL PROGRAMME NOTES WRITTEN BY DAVID GARDNER

and we set off on a nautical adventure. Here, the brass and percussion sections are used to illustrate the excitement of the boaters and the crashing of the waves. We eventually end up in what could be a music festival in the province of Quebec. This section is built like a Rondo where an Irish-style reel is used as the refrain while diverse French-Canadian folk tunes are used in the intervening episodes. All the musical material of this section is blended together and gives way to the final section in which we hear the depiction of a large flock of migratory birds flying overhead accompanied by the musical theme heard in the first section.”

Programme Notes

Ma Vlast [My Country], Bedřich Smetana

ORIGINAL PROGRAMME NOTES WRITTEN BY DAVID GARDNER

Born in 1824 in north-eastern Bohemia, Bedřich Smetana revealed his musical talent early. By his teens he was a gifted pianist and had begun to compose. Like many others of his age, the Prague Revolution of 1848 against the Habsburgs left a deep impression, promoting a sense of nationalism among Bohemians who, after the failure of the revolution, felt immured as second-class citizens, along with the Serbs and Croats, in the outer reaches of the autocratic Austro-Hungarian Empire. Yet, Smetana's fame as a nationalist composer was to come much later, in 1874, when, despite the agonizing loss of hearing in both ears, the result of tertiary syphilis (he finally died insane in 1884), he began a series of symphonic poems on various aspects of Bohemian national life. Initially planned as a series of four works to be played sequentially (the version we will hear this evening) he eventually expanded the work, now called *Ma Vlast*, to six movements.

Smetana describes the movement of *Ma Vlast* we will hear this evening as follows: ***Vltava, The Moldau*** – “This composition depicts the course of the river Vltava, beginning with its two sources, cold (flutes) and warm (clarinets); the two combine to form a gradually widening stream which flows through woods and meadows, past villages where countryfolk are celebrating; by moonlight water nymphs dance in its depths - in the background proud

Programme Notes

Ma Vlast [My Country], Bedřich Smetana

ORIGINAL PROGRAMME NOTES WRITTEN BY DAVID GARDNER

castles, mansions and ruined masonry break up the skyline; the Vltava rushes through the St. John rapids, then, as a broad and noble river, it approaches Prague. Vysehrad looms up – and streaming past it majestically, the river passes out of sight, flowing into the Elbe.” The orchestration is sumptuous and wide ranging. There are the surgings of harps and woodwinds as the mighty river flows past Prague in *Vltava*. The symphonic poem we hear this evening was premièred individually to great acclaim – an enthusiasm the Czechs have retained for it ever since. Indeed, it is to Smetana's *Ma Vlast* and his nationalistic opera *Libuse* (which he completed immediately before *Ma Vlast*) that the Czech nation still turns in times of national crisis.