

Oregon Symphony

CARLOS KALMAR, MUSIC DIRECTOR

Colin Currie

Saturday, September 26, 2015, 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, September 27, 2015, 7:30 p.m.

Monday, September 28, 2015, 8:00 p.m.

Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall

Carlos Kalmar, *conductor*

Colin Currie, *percussion*

LUIGI CHERUBINI

Overture to *Ali Baba, or The Forty Thieves*

JAMES MACMILLAN

Veni, Veni, Emmanuel
(Played without pause)
Introit
Heartbeats
Dance
Transition
Gaude
Transition
Dance Chorale
Coda
Colin Currie

INTERMISSION

BEDŘICH SMETANA

Má vlast (My Country)
Vysehrad
The Moldau
Sárka
From Bohemia's Fields and Groves

THE CONCERT CONVERSATION, conducted one hour before each performance, will be presented by Oregon Symphony's Carlos Kalmar, Colin Currie, and Robert McBride, host for the stations of All Classical Portland. You can also enjoy the Concert Conversation in the comfort of your own home. Visit the website allclassical.org to watch the video on demand.

{ ARTIST BIOGRAPHY }
Colin Currie



Championing new music at the highest level, Colin Currie is the soloist of choice for many of today's foremost composers, and he performs regularly with the world's leading orchestras and conductors.

He was awarded the Royal Philharmonic Society Young Artist Award in 2000, Instrumentalist of the Year in 2014, and received a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award in 2005. Currie has premiered works by composers such as Elliott Carter, Louis Andriessen, Einojuhani Rautavaara,

Jennifer Higdon, Kalevi Aho, Rolf Wallin, Kurt Schwertsik, Simon Holt, Alexander Goehr, Dave Maric, Julia Wolfe, and Nico Muhly. Looking ahead, in the coming seasons Currie will premiere new works by Steve Reich, James MacMillan, Anna Clyne, HK Gruber, Andrew Norman, and Brett Dean.

Currie is artist in residence at London's Southbank Centre, where in autumn 2014 he was the focus of a major percussion festival "Metal, Wood, Skin," featuring a number of premieres. The Festival includes the world premiere of Steve Reich's *Quartet* for two pianos and two vibraphones with the Colin Currie Group, the world premiere of Anna Clyne's *Secret Garden* for solo percussion, the U.K. premiere of James MacMillan's Percussion Concerto No. 2 with the Philharmonia Orchestra, and the U.K. premiere of Louis Andriessen's *Tapdance*.

Across the 2014/15 season, Currie was Red Sofa Artist at Rotterdam's De Doelen. The season-long residency includes performances with the Rotterdam Philharmonic, the world premiere of a new work for two percussion and two pianos by Dave Maric, a Reich programme

with the Colin Currie Group, a solo recital, and collaborations with Rotterdam Philharmonic percussionists, Doelen Kwartet, and the Codarts conservatoire ensemble.

Recent engagements include concerto performances with the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse, Sydney SO, Taipei SO, Nuremberg SO, Orquesta Sinfónica de Galicia, Columbus SO, Fort Worth Symphony, Albany Symphony. Recital and chamber music appearances include performances at Carnegie Hall, Wigmore Hall, Montreux Festival, Muziekgebouw Amsterdam, NCPA Beijing, Sound Festival Aberdeen, Cardiff, Miami, and Columbus.

Currie's dynamic percussion ensemble The Colin Currie Group was formed in 2006 to celebrate the music of Steve Reich and made its five-star debut at the BBC Proms, followed by sell-out performances at London's Southbank Centre. Since then, with Reich's personal endorsement Currie and his ensemble have taken on the role of ambassadors of *Drumming*, which they have performed at many U.K. venues and festivals and internationally at Tokyo Opera City and Concertgebouw, Amsterdam. In November 2013, the group gave its first performance of Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians* in a sold-out Royal Festival Hall in the presence of the composer. The performance was lauded as "technically impeccable and musically overwhelming" (*Guardian*). In autumn 2014, the Colin Currie Group returns to Southbank Centre to premiere a new work, *Quartet*, by Reich, followed by a busy season of touring including Paris, Cologne, Prague, Rotterdam, Amsterdam and across the Netherlands, Ghent, Glasgow, Saffron Hall, and Cardiff.

Currie has recorded many concerto, recital, and chamber works including, most recently, Alexander Goehr's *Since Brass, nor Stone* released on NMC in September 2013. His recording of Rautavaara's *Incantations* with the Helsinki Philharmonic/Storgårds (Ondine) was released to critical acclaim and won a 2012 Gramophone Award.

Previous releases by Currie include MacMillan's *Veni, Veni, Emmanuel* with the Netherlands Radio Chamber Philharmonic/MacMillan on Challenge Classics, Jennifer Higdon's Percussion Concerto with the London Philharmonic/Alsop, which won a 2010 Grammy Award, and a recital disc *Borrowed Time*, featuring music by Dave Maric (Onyx). Currie recently recorded Simon Holt's concerto *a table of noises* with the Hallé Orchestra to be released by NMC in 2015.

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Luigi Cherubini

Overture to *Ali Baba, ou Les quarante voleurs (Ali Baba, or the 40 Thieves)*

THE VITAL STATS

Composer: Born September 14, 1760, Florence; died March 15, 1842, Paris.

Work composed: 1832–33.

World premiere: July 22, 1833, at the Paris Opéra.

First Oregon Symphony performance.

Instrumentation: Piccolo, flute, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, ophecleide, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, triangle, and strings.

Estimated duration: 6 minutes

Luigi Cherubini had the misfortune of living and working, as one biographer put it, “between two great periods of Italian music.” The Baroque era, which began with the first opera—Claudio Monteverdi’s *Orfeo* of 1607—established Italy as the locus for opera for roughly the next 150 years. During Cherubini’s lifetime—his dates correspond approximately with the Classical era—Italy lost ground to Austria and Germany as the foremost centers of opera composition. Italy regained its operatic preeminence in the 19th century with the works of Gioachino Rossini, Gaetano Donizetti, Vincenzo Bellini, and Giuseppe Verdi.

In addition to over thirty operas, Cherubini also composed church music and a series of string quartets widely considered among the finest examples of that genre. Cherubini’s church music, particularly his 1816 Requiem, also met with great acclaim. The same is not true of his operas, many of which failed in spectacular fashion. *Ali Baba, or The Forty Thieves* was Cherubini’s last attempt to write a successful opera. Sadly, *Ali Baba* was panned by critics, audiences, and Cherubini’s colleagues—particularly Berlioz and Mendelssohn. The overture, however, received enthusiastic reviews. One critic hailed it as “the finest example of Cherubini’s mastery of orchestral effects.” In keeping with the opera’s Eastern locale and characters, Cherubini features exotic Turkish percussion instruments—cymbals and triangle—in his orchestra.

James MacMillan

Veni, Veni, Emmanuel

THE VITAL STATS

Composer: Born July 16, 1959, Kilwinning, Scotland.

Work composed: 1991–92. Commissioned by Christian Salvesen PLC for the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. MacMillan dedicated it to his parents.

World premiere: Jukka-Pekka Saraste led the Scottish Chamber Orchestra with soloist Evelyn Glennie at the Royal Albert Hall in London on October 8, 1992.

Most recent Oregon Symphony performance: October 20, 2003; James DePreist, conductor; Evelyn Glennie, percussion.

Instrumentation: Solo percussion: 2 tam-tams, 2 snare drums, 2 congas, 6 tom-toms, 2 timbales, pedal bass drum, 6 Chinese gongs, 6 temple blocks, log drum, 2 woodblocks, 2 cowbells, marimba, mark tree, cymbals, tubular bells, orchestra: 2 flutes (one doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (one doubling English horn), 2 clarinets (one doubling bass clarinet), 2 bassoons (one doubling contrabassoon), 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, timpani, and strings.

Estimated duration: 26 minutes

The music of Scotland’s foremost composer James MacMillan is a tapestry threaded with dramatic, political, and religious themes that express his iconoclastic artistic vision. He became internationally recognized with the 1990 premiere of *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie*. Tonight’s work, *Veni, Veni, Emmanuel*, has become MacMillan’s most performed composition since its premiere in 1992.

MacMillan provided the following program notes:

“*Veni, Veni, Emmanuel* ... is based on the Advent plainsong of the same name and was started on the first Sunday of Advent 1991 and completed on Easter Sunday 1992. These two liturgical dates are important, as will be explained later. The piece can be discussed in two ways. On one level, it is a purely abstract work in which all the musical material

is drawn from the 15th-century French Advent plainchant. On another level, it is a musical exploration of the theology behind the Advent message.

Soloist and orchestra converse throughout as two equal partners and a wide range of percussion instruments are used, covering tuned, untuned, skin, metal, and wood sounds ... It begins with a bold, fanfare-like ‘overture’ in which the soloist presents all the instrument-types used throughout. When the soloist moves to gongs and unpitched metal and wood, the music melts into the main meat of the first section—music of a more brittle, knottier quality, propelled forward by various pulse rates, evoking an ever-changing heartbeat.

... Over and over again the orchestra repeats the four chords which accompany the words ‘Gaude, Gaude,’ from the plainsong’s refrain. They are layered in different instrumental combinations and speeds, evoking a huge distant congregation murmuring a calm prayer in many voices ... The climax of the work presents the plainsong as a chorale followed by the opening fanfares, providing a backdrop for an energetic drum cadenza. In the final coda, the all-pervasive heartbeats are emphatically pounded out on drums and tims ...

The heartbeats that permeate the whole piece offer a clue to the wider spiritual priorities behind the work, representing the human presence of Christ. Advent texts proclaim the promised day of liberation from fear, anguish, and oppression, and this work is an attempt to mirror this in music, finding its initial inspiration in the following from Luke 21: ‘There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars; on earth nations in agony, bewildered by the clamour of the ocean and its waves; men dying of fear as they await what menaces the world, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. And they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand erect, hold your heads high, because your liberation is near at hand.’

At the very end of the piece, the music takes a liturgical detour from Advent to Easter—right into the Gloria of the Easter Vigil, in fact—as if the proclamation of liberation finds embodiment in the Risen Christ.”

Bedřich Smetana

Vyšehrad, The Moldau, Šárka and From Bohemia's Woods and Fields from *Má vlast*

THE VITAL STATS

Composer: Born March 2, 1824, Leitomyšl (now Litomyšl), Bohemia; died May 12, 1884, Prague.

Works composed: Smetana wrote his six patriotic symphonic poems *Má vlast* between 1872–79. They are dedicated to the city of Prague.

World premiere: Adolf Čech conducted the first performance of *Má vlast* in Prague on November 5, 1882; individual movements premiered earlier, as they were completed.

First Oregon Symphony performance of this combination.

Instrumentation: Piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, triangle, 2 harps, and strings.

Estimated duration: 15, 11, 11, and 13 minutes, respectively.

Musical nationalism reached its zenith in the 19th century. The expression of national identity through music fits perfectly into the Romantic aesthetic of individual emotion; for people whose countries had been absorbed by larger geo-political entities like the Austro-Hungarian Empire, music became an especially important outlet for voicing a connection to their homeland.

Má vlast (My Country), Bedřich Smetana's set of six symphonic poems, epitomizes the Czech national sound. He began composing the first of these, *Vyšehrad* (*The High Castle*) around 1872 and completed the cycle in 1879. *Má vlast*'s six movements portray landmarks of the Czech countryside and episodes from its history and culture. Smetana's biographer, Sir Jack Westrup, describes *Má vlast* as "Smetana's view of the ethos and greatness of his nation." Smetana originally conceived each of the movements as an independent work, but over time he came to view them as parts of a symphonic whole, each revealing a different aspect of his beloved country.

Smetana provided descriptions of each movement in a letter he wrote in May 1879 to his publisher František Augustin Urbánek. Of the first movement, *Vyšehrad*, Smetana wrote, "As the River Vltava [The Moldau in German] approaches Prague, the huge and venerable rock Vyšehrad rises sheer from the water's edge, dominating the entrance to the city. This was once the proud home of Bohemia's legendary first dynasty, the Přemyslid kings and princes. The opening harp motif, which evokes the remote and glorious past of Vyšehrad, is also the central theme uniting the cycle philosophically and musically. Recurring towards the end of *Vltava* ... it stands not only for the physical manifestation of the ancient rock, or high castle, but also as a symbol of the pride and glory of the nation."

The most famous movement of *Má vlast*, *Vltava*, (better known by its German title *The Moldau*), written in late November–early December of 1874, portrays the river Vltava, which flows through the countryside near Smetana's childhood home in Bohemia.

Smetana specified eight distinct sections of *Vltava* in the score:

- 1) Two springs (one warm, one cold) that form the source of the Vltava (two flutes), and the river itself (full orchestra, river theme first in E minor, then E major)
- 2) The forest and hunting (horn calls)
- 3) Peasant wedding (dance rhythms)
- 4) Moonlight Dance of the Nymphs (soft flute theme in thirds; slow statement in strings)
- 5) Vltava returns (full orchestra in E minor)
- 6) St. Johns Rapids (full orchestra)
- 7) The Vltava in broad stream (full orchestra)
- 8) The Vltava salutes *Vyšehrad* (the old citadel) and flows on into the Elbe (full orchestra)

In *Šárka*, Smetana explores the medieval Bohemian legend of the Maidens' War. Šárka, a warrior princess, has been deceived by her lover and vows revenge on all men in response. As a leader of an all-female army, she ties herself to a tree as bait to trap Ctirad, leader of the all-male opposing forces. He succumbs to her beauty and frees her, whereupon she

drugs him and his men with a sleeping potion. As they lie unconscious, Šárka sounds her horn to summon her army, which slaughters the slumbering men.

For *Zčeských luhů a hájů* (From Bohemia's Woods and Fields), Smetana invites each listener to form his or her own interpretation of the music: "This is a general impression of feelings on gazing at the Czech countryside. On all sides fervent singing resounds—gay and melancholy, from field and forest. The woodlands, depicted on the solo horn, and the cheerful, fertile lowlands of the Elbe valley, and other parts besides—all are remembered in a hymn of praise. Everyone may imagine what he chooses on hearing this work ..."

By the time the complete *Má vlast* premiered in 1882, Smetana had become totally deaf. Like Beethoven at the premiere of his Ninth Symphony, Smetana could not hear his own music, but he could see what one listener called the "indescribable pandemonium" of the audience's response as they cheered and threw hats into the air.

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Recordings Recommended by Michael Parsons

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These recordings are available for purchase during intermission in the lobby of the concert hall.