

# COSMOS AN HD ODYSSEY

FEATURING THE “NEW WORLD” SYMPHONY  
*with the* NASHVILLE SYMPHONY



CLASSICAL SERIES

FRIDAY & SATURDAY, JANUARY 11 & 12, AT 8 PM

SUNDAY, JANUARY 13, AT 3 PM

## NASHVILLE SYMPHONY

GIANCARLO GUERRERO, *conductor*

GIL SHAHAM, *violin*

**BEDŘICH SMETANA**

“The Moldau,” No. 2

from *Má vlast (My Fatherland)*

**ALBAN BERG**

**Concerto for Violin and Orchestra**

Andante - Allegretto

Allegro - Adagio

*Gil Shaham, violin*

– INTERMISSION –

**ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK**

**Symphony No. 9 in E Minor, Op. 95, “From the New World”**

Adagio - Allegro molto

Largo

Molto vivace

Allegro con fuoco

*This concert will last approximately 1 hour and 55 minutes,  
including a 20 minute intermission.*

CONCERT PARTNER



BMW OF NASHVILLE



## BEDŘICH SMETANA

“The Moldau,” No. 2 from *Má Vlast (My Fatherland)*

- Widely considered the “father of Czech music,” Bedřich Smetana helped pioneer the development of a distinctly authentic Czech style. But he also ruffled the feathers of some fellow Czech composers by embracing the “New German School,” a progressive style championed by Liszt and Wagner.
- Upon returning to his homeland following a brief exile, Smetana devoted himself almost entirely to writing operas centered around nationalist themes. He also took a position conducting the orchestra at Prague’s Provisional Theatre, an ensemble that included a young Antonín Dvořák on viola.
- Composed in the 1870s, while Smetana was dealing with the onset of deafness, *Má vlast (My Homeland)* is a cycle of six tone poems inspired by the landscape of his native Bohemia. The second and best known of these, “The Moldau” (or “Vltava,” as it is known in Czech) takes its title from the German name for the river that Smetana observed during a trip in 1867.



## ALBAN BERG

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra

- This concerto is the most frequently performed work by Alban Berg, an Austrian composer known for infusing atonal music with the emotional intensity of Romanticism. The piece, completed in 1935, at the end of Berg’s career, employs the 12-tone technique pioneered by Schoenberg in the decade prior.
- Berg dedicated the concerto to the memory of Manon Gropius, the daughter of Gustav Mahler’s wife Alma and her second husband, architect Walter Gropius. The composer had watched Manon develop into a promising actress before she succumbed to polio at 18, and he inscribed the score “to the memory of an angel.” The piece is also considered an unintended Requiem for Berg himself, who died shortly after completing the concerto and never heard it.
- In recent decades, scholars have discovered a fascinating array of autobiographical secrets encoded in this concerto, including references to Berg’s first love — a servant girl who gave birth to his illegitimate daughter when he was 17 — and a passionate affair the composer had in his final decade.



## ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

Symphony No. 9 in E Minor, Op. 95, “From the New World”

- This symphony was one of several works Dvořák penned during a lengthy visit to the U.S. from 1892-1895, a trip that came about as the composer was seeking relief from “certain artistic pressures in Europe,” according to biographer Michael B. Beckerman. He had been typecast as Brahms’ successor and was looking to move in a new direction musically.
- The composer himself tagged this symphony as music “from the New World,” and the score reflects the full breadth of Dvořák’s musical, social and scenic experiences in America. While featuring his trademark Bohemian flavor, the work is also strongly influenced by the Native-American music and African-American spirituals Dvořák encountered on his visit.
- Accompanying Dvořák’s symphony here is *The Cosmos – An HD Odyssey*, the final installment of Duncan Copp’s innovative film trilogy originally commissioned by the Houston Symphony in cooperation with NASA. It follows previous Nashville Symphony presentations of *The Planets* and *The Earth*, and features NASA footage of deep space for a unique program.

## BEDŘICH SMETANA



Born on March 2, 1824, in Litomyšl (now in the Czech Republic); died on May 12, 1884, in Prague

**Composed:** 1874

**First performance:** April 4, 1875, with Adolf Cech conducting the Prague Provisional Theatre Orchestra

**First Nashville Symphony performance:** November 8, 1949, with music director William Strickland

**Estimated length:** 12 minutes

“The Moldau,” No. 2 from *Má Vlast (My Fatherland)*

**A**lways be suspicious when you encounter the claim that so-and-so was “the father of” whatever it may be: the symphony, the tone poem...or, in the case of Bedřich Smetana, Czech music. The composer came of age in what was then a provincial area ruled by the Habsburg Empire, but nationalist ideologies and even Cold War politics have shaped our understanding of Smetana’s music and its imprint on what today we call the Czech Republic. The same could also be said for Antonín Dvořák, the first Czech composer to be globally enshrined in the repertoire.

There’s no question that both composers were pioneering figures who developed a language that incorporated native Czech idioms into the mainstream domination of Austro-German music. During his own lifetime, Smetana triggered controversy with peers who had conflicting ideas about how to foster an authentic Czech style. He became friends with Franz Liszt and embraced the philosophy of the so-called “New German School,” the progressive aesthetic championed by Liszt and Wagner. “Regard me as your most passionate supporter of our artistic direction who in word and deed stands for its holy truth and also works for its aims,” Smetana wrote to Liszt in 1858.

After returning to his homeland following a temporary exile (a result of his involvement in the uprisings against the Habsburg Empire in the late 1840s), Smetana went on to devote his career to writing Czech opera around nationalist themes. He also took on a post as the conductor at Prague’s Provisional Theatre (the predecessor to the city’s National Theatre), which premiered several of his operas. Under Smetana’s baton, young Dvořák played viola in the orchestra.

Despite his prolific output and devotion to

opera, outside the borders of his homeland Smetana is mostly known today as the composer of *Má vlast (My Homeland)*, a cycle of six tone poems inspired by the landscape and lore of his native Bohemia. He composed *Má vlast* over half a decade in the 1870s, during a period when he was struggling with the onset of deafness.

Each of the six tone poems comprising *Má vlast* was composed separately, and each can be played as a stand-alone piece. The second and best known of these, *Vltava* is commonly known as “The Moldau” from the German name for the river that inspired this work, though that name reflects the German-speaking hegemony of the Habsburg Empire during the composer’s lifetime. Smetana had been greatly impressed by a trip to the Bohemian border in 1867, when he witnessed the confluence of rivers from Bavaria to the west as they flowed into the origination point of the Vltava.

### WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The Vltava River serves Smetana as a potent symbol for national pride and identity. The composer prefaced his score with a description that maps the musical narrative to the course followed by the river itself, “from its beginning where two brooks, one cold, the other warm, join a stream” (the picturesque scene he had observed on his trip in 1867). In its upward surge and rhythmic swing, the Vltava melody is reminiscent of another famous piece of “water music”: the Rhine motif Wagner introduces at the beginning of his *Ring* cycle. The scholar John Walter Hill also identified it with a canzonetta tune by the Italian Renaissance composer Giuseppe Cenci that

became a popular French carol, and the Israeli national anthem (“Hatikvah”) derives from this source as well — quite an international confluence for this quintessentially “Czech national” theme.

In his preface, Smetana goes on to describe the river running through meadows and landscapes where peasant weddings are being celebrated. “Mermaids dance in the moonlight; on nearby rocks can be seen the outline of ruined castles, proudly soaring into the sky. The Vltava swirls through the St. John Rapids and widens and flows toward Prague, passing Vyšehrad [the “Upper Castle” fort located in the heart of the city] and disappearing majestically into the distance, where it joins the Elbe.”

*“The Moldau” is scored for 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle, bass drum, cymbals, harp and strings.*



## ALBAN BERG

Born on February 9, 1885,  
in Vienna;  
died on December 24, 1935,  
in Vienna

### Concerto for Violin and Orchestra

**Composed:** 1935

**First performance:** April 19, 1936, with Louis Krasner as the soloist and Hermann Scherchen conducting the Orquesta Pau Casals at the International Society for Contemporary Music Festival in Barcelona

**First Nashville Symphony performance:** October 16 & 17, 1992, with soloist Pierre Amoyal and music director Kenneth Schermerhorn

**Estimated length:** 22 minutes

Even for those convinced that “atonal music” must by nature be ugly and unpleasant, Alban Berg has a way of breaking through their defenses. That’s in part because his works exude the passion and emotional intensity associated with Romanticism, even within the framework of

uncompromising formal design. And Berg’s Violin Concerto, among other scores, encodes intricate autobiographical secrets that cannot help but fascinate.

The Violin Concerto, the most frequently performed of all his works, dates from the end of the composer’s life. By 1935, Berg was in a desperate financial situation. The Nazis, newly come to power, had condemned atonal music as a “degenerate” art, banning performances throughout Germany. The Russian-American violinist Louis Krasner convinced Berg to set aside his opera-in-progress *Lulu* with a new commission for a concerto, which would also bring in much-needed immediate income.

The project took on a sense of emotional urgency in April 1935 with the premature death of Manon Gropius, the daughter of Gustav Mahler’s widow Alma and her second husband, the pioneering architect Walter Gropius. Berg had long been a close personal friend of Alma — as well as a devoted champion of Gustav Mahler — and he had witnessed Manon grow into a promising young actress before she was struck down by polio at the age of 18. He dedicated the Violin Concerto to her as a kind of Requiem, inscribing his score “to the memory of an angel.” Since it would be the last work Berg was able to complete, the Violin Concerto has also come to be viewed as an unintended Requiem for the composer himself. Berg himself never heard the work. He died within months of completing it, before the premiere.

By the time he began working on *Lulu*, Berg had moved beyond the freely ranging atonal idiom exemplified by his earlier, expressionistic opera about an alienated soldier, *Wozzeck*. The Violin Concerto draws on the later, more tightly organized and “objective” 12-tone system that Schoenberg and his followers had adopted in the 1920s. According to this system, all the melodic and harmonic ideas for a given piece should be generated from a particular series or configuration of all 12 notes of the chromatic scale.

The Violin Concerto superimposes 12-tone composition onto the conventional concerto format, adding an additional layer of allegorical meaning. The latter, as described at length by Berg’s biographer Willi Reich, traces the vitality, catastrophic death and transcendent memory of Manon Gropius. But there’s much more. Scholars

in the last few decades have decoded a strand of autobiographical references in Berg's use of musical allusions and numerological symbolism. These include Berg's first love, a servant girl who bore his illegitimate daughter when he was only 17, and an all-consuming affair with a woman in his final decade (who, as it happens, was the sister of Alma Mahler's third husband, the novelist Franz Werfel).

## WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

**A**fter a brief, 10-bar introduction of tentative arpeggios, the soloist plays an ascending pattern which lays out the Concerto's fundamental series — its 12-tone theme. The shape of this theme is typically Berg-like in its subtle references to tonality within an atonal framework: the first three notes, for example, outline a G-minor triad, while the last three — which play a pivotal role in the Concerto's final section — are from a whole-tone scale. In other words, this is atonal music that conveys haunting echoes of familiar tonality.

The Concerto is divided into two movements, each comprising two smaller parts. After the introduction, the opening Andante unfolds with a gently lyrical poise as Berg takes the violin through extremes of register. The tempo and meter shift into a scherzo-like Allegretto for the rest of the movement. Here, references to dancelike Viennese rhythms mix earthiness with a sense of distant memories. Toward the end, with a magical voicing for trumpets, Berg quotes a Carinthian folk song, its nostalgic tonality acquiring a bittersweet tang from the atonal context.

An aura of crisis sets in with the opening of the second movement ("Allegro"), which then unfolds as a violin cadenza accompanied by the orchestra. A heavily dotted rhythm becomes part of the musical profile and is hammered home in the Concerto's focal point, a powerful climax that dies away and yields to one of the most moving passages in 20th-century music. Berg segues into his final Adagio section by matching the last four notes of his 12-tone series with Bach's setting of an old chorale in his cantata *O Ewigkeit, Du Donnerwort* ("O Eternity Thou Word of Thunder"). By citing Bach at this key moment in his Violin Concerto, he creates a musical context in which modernity collides with a vanished time of faith.

(In his score, the composer even writes out the words to the chorale, with their promise of a "heavenly home" beyond the suffering of this life.)

Against his newly harmonized variations and commentary on the tune, Berg quotes Bach's version in the clarinets. The soloist continues with a serene cantabile and is instructed to lead the ensemble of violins and violas, who join in for a cadenza-like passage. The earthy Carinthian folk song makes a last appearance before the exceptionally beautiful farewell prepared in the coda. Here, the soloist comes to rest after a stratospheric ascent to a high G, accompanied by a faint echo of the Concerto's opening gesture of striving arpeggios.

*In addition to the solo violin, the Violin Concerto is scored for 2 flutes (both doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (2nd doubling English horn), 3 clarinets (3rd doubling alto saxophone), bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, tam-tam, gong, triangle, harp and strings.*



## ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

Born on September 8, 1841, in the village of Nelahozeves, just north of Prague; died on May 1, 1904, in Prague

Symphony No. 9 in E Minor, Op. 95, "From the New World"

**Composed:** 1893

**First performance:** December 16, 1893, at Carnegie Hall in New York, with Anton Seidel conducting the New York Philharmonic

**First Nashville Symphony performance:** November 21, 1950, with music director William Strickland

**Estimated length:** 40 minutes

**B**y the 1890s, Antonín Dvořák's international fame made him among the most highly regarded of living composers. Yet despite his identification as the epitome of Czech music — not to mention a deep-seated fear of traveling

— he undertook the lengthy voyage to the New World for a sojourn in the United States that lasted from 1892 to 1895 (with one five-month interlude back home). As with Haydn's late-life visits to England, the encounter proved to be of enormous mutual significance. It inspired, among other works, the Symphony No. 9 (tagged by Dvořák himself as music "From the New World") and the Cello Concerto.

How did the preeminent Czech composer of the day end up in America? Dvořák had been invited to direct the new National Conservatory of Music, located in New York's Lower East Side. The Conservatory was the brainchild of music enthusiast and patron Jeannette Thurber. Her millionaire husband had amassed a fortune from his success in the grocery business, enabling Thurber to realize her ambitious dream of founding a national musical center to foster an authentically American art — this in a Eurocentric era when the usual course for anyone desiring a serious career in music was to head abroad for training. Even more, Thurber's progressive ideas meant that the Conservatory welcomed women, the underprivileged, African-Americans and other minorities as students.

Dvořák's American sojourn led to feelings of intense homesickness, but it also had tremendous artistic payoff and helped to expand the composer's reputation further. The composer had reached a moment in his career when it proved to his advantage to have a reprieve from "certain artistic pressures in Europe," as Michael B. Beckerman writes in *New Worlds of Dvořák*. He had become typecast as the successor to Brahms, which is to say as an exponent of "absolute" music — music understood to be self-contained, as opposed to representing images and narratives outside the musical realm.

Dvořák, observes Beckerman, was "ready to move in a different direction," and scholars continue to ponder evidence of hidden subtexts from literature and the composer's own life woven into the Symphony No. 9 and the Cello Concerto alike. His nostalgia for Bohemia and the stimulation of his new American surroundings (musical, social and scenic) thus blended together with extraordinarily fertile results. The "New World" Symphony conflates influences from Native- and African-American sources with Dvořák's

characteristic Bohemian flavors.

Soon after arriving in New York, Dvořák observed that America possessed rich raw material in its own folk idioms, remarking that "the future music of this country must be founded on what are called Negro melodies." One of his students at the Conservatory exposed him to a range of African-American spirituals, and he encountered such (admittedly spurious) sources as Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show.

At the same time, Dvořák disclaimed quoting actual American melodies in this score, whether from spirituals or ritual Native American music — gestures that today might be considered "cultural appropriation" (a charge that could also be applied to the Longfellow poem that served as one of the composer's inspirations). Instead, he pointed out, he wrote "original themes" touched by flavors specific to American music and treated them with all the "modern" resources of symphonic writing. A telling example of how tricky the issue became occurs in the Largo, which contains the Symphony's best-known tune (played by the English horn). It sounds so much like a spiritual that one of Dvořák's students later penned lyrics to it ("Goin' Home"), creating a version that then became known on its own as a latter-day spiritual. Likewise, the famous flute tune in the first movement, which seems to quote "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," is actually a cousin of the main theme.

## WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

**T**he first movement launches with hints of the epic breadth of the work to unfold, yet its gestures are at the same time concise and concentrated. After a brief introduction and a burst of almost Beethovenian fury, the main theme erupts from the horns. With an easily recognizable upward-downward direction, it will recur in each movement and even spawns the additional themes here, including the closing motif entrusted to flute (which seems to evoke a different, rustic world but is also closely related). Dvořák then develops this small store of musical material with tremendous dramatic verve.

One particularly American angle comes into play in the two middle movements. We know that Dvořák was intrigued by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's epic poem of 1854, *The Song of Hiawatha*. He even

remarked that the Largo grew from a sketch for an operatic treatment of the epic that was never realized, while the Scherzo had been inspired by a scene “where the Indians dance.” In Beckerman’s view, a host of images from *Hiawatha* pervades the score, from Longfellow’s pastoral evocations of the landscape to the tragic passage of Minnehaha’s forest funeral. Whatever the case, this is music of deeply engaging beauty, framed by magical harmonic modulations at the outset. It’s astonishing how much emotional resonance Dvořák evokes from the ultra-famous but simple English horn melody (folk-like and pentatonic), clothing it in a variety of orchestral colors.

The Scherzo boils over with Dvořák’s signature rhythmic drive. He weaves in the first-movement theme to surprising effect in the transition to the middle section and again at the close. A rousing brass fanfare launches the finale with powerful momentum. Material from the preceding

movements reappears, including the Largo tune in more dramatic guises. Dvořák makes space for his richly melodic gift while at the same time shaping a thrillingly urgent climax. Yet in the final moments, as the main themes recombine, “victory” hardly seems to be the point. Dvořák commentator David Hurwitz describes the ending as a “tragic finale,” noting that “even that very American-sounding boogie-woogie bass line and last-minute turn to the major key can’t efface the sadness that lingers as the final chord fades slowly and gently to triple *piano*.” The truly American sound of the blues is not far off.

*The Symphony No. 9 is scored for 2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (2nd doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle, cymbals and strings.*

—Thomas May is the Nashville Symphony’s program annotator.

## ABOUT THE SOLOIST



**GIL SHAHAM**  
violin

**G**il Shaham’s flawless technique, combined with his inimitable warmth and generosity of spirit, has solidified his renown as an American master. The GRAMMY® winner is sought after worldwide for concerto appearances with leading orchestras and conductors, and he regularly gives recitals and appears with ensembles on the world’s great concert stages and at the most prestigious festivals.

Recent highlights include the acclaimed recording and performances of J.S. Bach’s complete sonatas and partitas for solo violin. In the coming seasons, he will join his longtime duo partner, pianist Akira Eguchi, in recitals throughout North America, Europe and Asia.

Appearances with orchestras regularly include the Berlin Philharmonic, Boston Symphony, Chicago Symphony, Israel Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic, Orchestre de Paris and San Francisco Symphony, as well as residencies with the orchestras of Montréal, Stuttgart and Singapore. Shaham continues his exploration of violin concertos of the 1930s, including the works of Barber, Bartók, Berg, Korngold and Prokofiev.

Shaham has released more than two dozen concerto and solo CDs, earning multiple GRAMMY® Awards, a Grand Prix du Disque, Diapason d’Or and Gramophone Editor’s Choice. Many of these recordings appear on Canary Classics, the label he founded in 2004. His CDs include *1930s Violin Concertos*, *Virtuoso Violin Works*, *Elgar’s Violin Concerto*, *Hebrew Melodies*, and *The Butterfly Lovers*, and his most recent recording, *1930s Violin Concertos Vol. 2*, was nominated for a GRAMMY® Award.

Born in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, in 1971, he moved with his parents to Israel, where he began violin studies with Samuel Bernstein of the Rubin Academy of Music at age 7. In 1981, he made debuts with the Jerusalem Symphony and the Israel Philharmonic, and the following year took the first prize in Israel’s Claremont Competition. He then attended The Juilliard School and also studied at Columbia University.

Shaham was awarded an Avery Fisher Career Grant in 1990, and in 2008 he received the coveted Avery Fisher Prize. In 2012, he was named Instrumentalist of the Year by *Musical America*. He plays the 1699 “Countess Polignac” Stradivarius and lives in New York with his wife, violinist Adele Anthony, and their three children.