



Prague Spring

The International Music Festival in the capital of Bohemia

15–21 May 2023 (MJ 720)

7 days • £3,540

(including tickets to 6 performances)

Lecturer: Dr Michael Downes

Prague's celebrated Spring Festival remains one of the most illustrious in Europe and in May the city is at its loveliest.

Two staged operas bookend the tour: Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*, the iconic Czech opera, at the sumptuous 19th-century National Theatre; and Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, at the beautiful and intimate Estates Theatre, where both *Don Giovanni* and *La clemenza di Tito* premiered.

We include three great orchestral concerts at the Rudolfinum and the Obecní dům with the Czech Philharmonic, Essen Philharmonic and Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra.

Soloists include violist Antoine Tamestit and violinists Jan Mráček and Frank Peter Zimmermann.

Czech mezzo-soprano Bella Adamova performs with pianist Malte Schäfer in a morning recital at St Agnes Convent.

Daily talks on the music by Dr Michael Downes, Director of Music at the University of St Andrews.

Visits and walks led by Martina Hinks-Edwards with free time before performances.

Itinerary

Day 1. Fly at c. 10.15am from London Heathrow to Prague (British Airways). After settling in to the hotel there is a private visit to the Obecní dům ('Municipal House') to see the glorious suite of assembly rooms created 1904–12.

Day 2. Begin with a lecture on today's performance. Walk through the Old Town, a dense maze of streets and squares with buildings of all ages and an exceptionally lovely main square. The 13th-century convent of St Agnes houses one of the worlds greatest collections of medieval painting. Some free time before an early dinner. *Evening opera at the National Theatre: The Bartered Bride* (Smetana): Alice Nellis (director) (cast to be confirmed).

Day 3. Morning lecture. Drive up to Prague Castle, the extensive hilltop complex, long-time



Prague, Cathedral of St Vitus, watercolour by B. Granville Baker, publ. 1923.

residence of the Dukes and Kings of Bohemia and now the seat of the President. Visit the medieval Old Royal Palace, within it the largest stone hall in Europe with incredible late-Gothic vaulting, and the Cathedral of St Vitus, a pioneering monument of High Gothic, richly embellished with chapels, tombs, altarpieces and stained glass. Much of the afternoon is free. Dinner before the *evening concert at the Rudolfinum: Czech Philharmonic, Klaus Mäkelä (conductor), Antoine Tamestit (viola), Schnittke, Concerto for Viola and Orchestra; Mahler, Symphony No.1 in D.*

Day 4. Morning lecture. Visit the Veletržní (Trade Fair) Palace of 1928 which now houses fascinating Czech art of the 19th and 20th centuries and a remarkable holding of modern French art. Free afternoon followed by dinner. *Evening concert at the Obecní dům: Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, Cornelius Meister (conductor), Jan Mráček (violin), Marschner, Hans Heiling – overture; Dvořák, Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in A minor Op.53; Martinů, Symphony No.1.*

Day 5. Walk across the 14th-century Charles Bridge, the greatest such structure in Europe, wonderfully adorned with sculptures. In the Lesser Town visits include St Nicholas, one of the finest Baroque churches in Central Europe. Lunch is included in the Lesser Town. *Lecture before the evening concert at the Rudolfinum:*

Essen Philharmonic, Tomáš Netopil (conductor), Frank Peter Zimmermann (violin), Elgar, Violin Concerto, Op.61; Dvořák, Symphony No.5 in F.

Day 6. Morning lecture followed by a *recital at the Convent of St Agnes: Bella Adamova (mezzo-soprano), Malte Schäfer (piano): works by Robert Schumann, Miroslav Srnka, György Kurtág, Janáček, Stefan Wolpe, Mahler.* Lunch is included after the concert. Free afternoon. *Evening opera at the Estates Theatre: The Magic Flute* (W.A. Mozart): (cast to be confirmed).

Day 7. Strahov Monastery has commanding views over Prague and two magnificent library halls, which by special arrangement we enter. Then walk down the hill, passing the formidable bulk of the Černín Palace and the delightful façade of the Loreto Church. The flight returns to London Heathrow at c. 4.00pm.

Lecturer

Dr Michael Downes. Director of Music at the University of St Andrews, musical director of St Andrews Chorus, Scotland's largest choral society, and founding artistic director of Byre Opera. He has lectured for most of the UK's leading opera companies and writes programme notes for Wigmore Hall and Aldeburgh Music. Publications include books written with and about contemporary British composer Jonathan Harvey, and a collaboration

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with Nike Wagner, great-granddaughter of Richard; he is currently working on a new biography of Elgar for Oxford University Press.

Guide & tour manager

Martina Hinks-Edwards. Specialist guide living in Prague. She studied English at Charles University, Prague. She began working for MRT while still at university, as an interpreter for groups visiting the Czech Republic, and from 2004 as an expert guide with a wide breadth of knowledge of the country's cultural history. She has led tours throughout the Czech Republic and has a particular interest in 20th-century Czech history and architecture.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £3,540 or £3,350 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £3,990 or £3,800 without flights.

Included: flights (Euro Traveller) with British Airways (Airbus A320); private coach for airport transfers and excursions; some use of tram; hotel accommodation as described below; 5 dinners including 1 sandwich supper, 2 lunches with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and Czech guide-tour manager.

Music: tickets (top category) to 4 concerts and 2 operas are included, costing c. £350.

Accommodation. Grand Hotel Bohemia Prague (grandhotelbohemia.cz): excellently located in the Old Town beside the Obecní dům, the Grand Bohemia was built in 1923 and retains some original features. Bedrooms are modern, with pleasantly understated decor and comfortable furnishings. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? There is quite a lot of walking, much of it on roughly paved, cobbled and steep streets. In order to participate fully, the tour would not be suitable for anyone with difficulties with everyday walking and stair-climbing. Some late evenings.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.

Combine this tour with: *Tuscan Gardens*, 8–13 May 2023; *Walking Hadrian's Wall*, 8–14 May 2023; *Great Private Houses in Norfolk*, 22–26 May 2023; *The Medieval Pyrenees*, 23 May–1 June 2023.