



## ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

**Born** September 8, 1841, Nelahozeves, Czechia

**Died** May 1, 1904, Prague, Czechia

### Serenade in E major, op. 22

As long as he could remember, Antonín Dvořák had lived hand-to-mouth. He survived in Prague as a gigging violist and music teacher, living alongside six roommates.

During this time, he was teaching himself to compose. Rising early, staying up late, he scribbled like mad, producing mountains of music never intended to see the light of day.

The Serenade for Strings came at a time of hope. Dvořák's financial clouds parted, thanks to a government grant. His new wife gave birth to their first child. And his hard work resulted in a unique musical voice, gently touched by the folk music of his native Bohemia (modern-day Czechia).

By Dvořák's time, "serenade" was a catch-all label for a collection of lighter pieces. Composers could remove their heavy musical coats, revealing all of their charm, wit, and creativity.

The Serenade seems to drift through village life. Here is the warmth of hearth and home, the curves of a river, the games of a playground, the quiet rapture of church, the dances of a town square.

Dvořák's music cleanses like a springtime breeze. Open the doors—feel the sun's warmth on your cheek. Leave the concert with a spring in your step.

**First performance:** December 10, 1876, in Prague, Adolf Čech conducting

**First SLSO performance:** November 13, 1982, Philippe Entremont conducting

**Most recent SLSO performance:** February 6, 2016, Anthony Marwood conducting

**Scoring:** Strings

**Approximate performance time:** 27 minutes

*Tim Munro is the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra's Creative Partner. A writer, broadcaster, and Grammy-winning flutist, he lives in Chicago with his wife, son, and badly-behaved orange cat.*



St. Louis Symphony  
Orchestra

stéphane denève : music director

20  
21

141st season

Stephanie Childress, conductor

Friday, April 9, 2021 at 7:30pm

Saturday, April 10, 2021 at 7:30pm

Sunday, April 11, 2021 at 3:00pm

### BENJAMIN BRITTEN

(1913–1976)

### *Simple Symphony*, op. 4 (1934)

Boisterous Bourrée

Playful Pizzicato

Sentimental Saraband

Frolicsome Finale

### SALLY BEAMISH

(b. 1956)

### *The Day Dawn* (1999)

### ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

(1841–1904)

### Serenade in E major, op. 22 (1875)

Moderato

Tempo di Valse

Scherzo: Vivace

Larghetto

Finale: Allegro vivace

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# Program Notes By Tim Munro

## Stephanie Childress on this program

*From an interview with Stephanie Childress, the SLSO's new Assistant Conductor and Music Director of the Youth Orchestra. Stephanie's responses have been edited for length and clarity, and questions have been removed.*

This program is centered around the reawakening of nature and, therefore, life. It's very fitting now, as we try to start anew.

Benjamin Britten's *Simple Symphony* presents melodies he composed as a child, and develops them into a coherent whole. There is something so refreshing about this piece and how he expresses and develops these juvenile themes through the medium of a string orchestra. The first movement is especially cheeky thanks to its light articulation.

Sally Beamish's *The Day Dawn* presents a cyclical reawakening. The music starts very calmly, then blows into a frenzied storm before quickly dying down; the birds return and the sun comes out.

Antonín Dvořák's *Serenade for Strings* was written at a blissfully happy time for the Czech composer. It is music of great contentment, full of long, almost infinite phrases. Everything feels like one ray of sunshine.

The string orchestra repertoire is very close to my heart as it hearkens back to my teenage years, when I started exploring this amazing music with my friends. We were discovering something new together—learning how to play without a conductor and how to truly listen to one another.

This program reminds me of that fresh beginning, and there is something poignant about finding new life right now.



### BENJAMIN BRITTEN

**Born** November 22, 1913, Lowestoft, England

**Died** December 4, 1976, Aldeburgh, England

## Simple Symphony, op. 4

*Once upon a time there was a prep-school boy. He was quite an ordinary little boy; he took his snake-belt to bed with him; he liked cricket; he adored mathematics, got on alright with history. There was one curious thing about this boy: he wrote music.*

So begins Benjamin Britten's own program note for his *Simple Symphony*.

As a child, growing up middle class on the English coast, Britten had an unquenchable need to create. He filled cupboards with music. By age twenty, skills honed, he was on the cusp of professional success.

That year, Britten looked back to his dusty youthful cupboards. He found them heaving with piano suites and sonatas, with songs galore. He took eight short pieces, rejigging them into his *Simple Symphony*.

This work for string orchestra bursts with the freshness, curiosity, and joy of youth. Britten takes newly sharpened compositional skills and sets them to work on his own childlike self.

But why look backwards for inspiration? Throughout his life, Britten would again and again escape in a world of childhood ideas, sayings, and routines. He was stuck in a curious in-between state: not quite a child, yet not quite an adult.

**First performance:** 1934, Norwich, England, Britten conducting an amateur orchestra

**First SLSO performance:** September 12, 1974, Gerhardt Zimmermann conducting

**Most recent SLSO performance:** October 19, 2017, Lee Mills conducting

**Scoring:** Strings

**Approximate performance time:** 16 minutes



### SALLY BEAMISH

**Born** August 26, 1956, London, England

## The Day Dawn

As soon as her mother taught her to read music, Sally Beamish was desperate to create her own. "I always thought I wanted to make things myself," she said later. "Whether it was cakes or clothes or music."

Born in London, Beamish began her career as a freelance violist. Then she took a leap. A small grant gave her the motivation to move to Scotland. To live out a childhood dream. To become a composer.

Beamish immediately noticed something. "Music was part of daily life," she says. "You couldn't get away from it. At the *ceilidh* [a social gathering in Scotland, filled with dancing, singing, and storytelling], the whole community is there."

Scottish folk music soon found its way into the fabric of her music.

The composer writes:

*The Day Dawn is based on an old Shetland fiddle tune of the same name, which was traditionally played at the Winter Solstice to mark the dawn of lengthening days. Dedicated to my friend Christine McKemmie, who was living in Shetland when her young daughter Zoe died, the piece symbolizes new beginnings, recalling the sense of calm Chris felt on the day of the funeral, dawning bright after a week of rain.*

**First performance:** 1999, in Hong Kong, by the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Joseph Swensen conducting

**First SLSO performance:** These concerts

**Scoring:** Strings

**Approximate performance time:** 6 minutes

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