# The Berliner Philharmoniker Will Open the Celebration of The Year of Czech Music for Prague Spring Festival

The 79th Prague Spring International Music Festival will feature 50 concerts between 12 May and 3 June 2024. It will be a spectacular celebration of the Year of Czech Music and the bicentenary of the birth of Bedřich Smetana. The Berliner Philharmoniker will open the festival, which will also feature two of Italy’s finest orchestras – the Orchestra dell’Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia Roma and the Filarmonica della Scala with Riccardo Chailly. Other visiting orchestras include the unique Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France from Paris, the Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra from the Netherlands, and the legendary Collegium Vocale Gent from Belgium. New features of this year’s festival include an all-day programme for young audiences called SpringTEEN, and a spectacular concert with 50 pianos playing simultaneously at Forum Karlín. Tickets are available online at www.festival.cz.

# The Berliner Philharmoniker will perform Smetana’s My Country at the opening concert

Every opening of the Prague Spring International Music Festival is awaited with excitement, each one special in its own way. “However, the opening concert on 12 and 13 May 2024 will go down in the history of the festival as one of the milestones,” says festival director Pavel Trojan. “Smetana’s My Country will be performed by the Berliner Philharmoniker under the baton of chief conductor Kirill Petrenko, who has proven his warm affection for Czech music many times during his rich career,” adds Trojan.

One of the best orchestras in the world has a rich history with Prague Spring. With the exception of two concerts, the **Berliner Philharmoniker** has always been a guest in the Czech (Czechoslovak) Republic exclusively at the invitation of the festival, seven times in total. The first time was in 1966 with the legendary Herbert von Karajan, the last time in 2014 with Sir Simon Rattle.

With a reputation as a tireless artist who routinely works long hours after rehearsals, **Kirill Petrenko** said in one of his few interviews: “The awakening of emotions is always connected with a story. There are ideas embodied in the music that draw on historical and social contexts, and you have to evoke those again if you want to interpret the music properly.” On 12 and 13 May 2024 at the Municipal House, Petrenko will tell “his” story of My Country with the Berliner Philharmoniker.

# Jakub Hrůša will be the Prague Spring Ambassador of the Year of Czech Music

Conductor **Jakub Hrůša**, who is one of the most respected Czech musicians in the world today, will be the ambassador of the Year of Czech Music at the Prague Spring Festival in 2024. Thanks to him, Czech music is increasingly making its way onto world stages, played by the finest orchestras and in renowned opera houses. This will also be the case with his concert on 18 May with the **Orchestra dell’Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia** from Rome, where he has been the principal guest conductor since 2021. Together they will play, among other pieces, The Frescoes of Piero della Francesca, Bohuslav Martinů’s homage to the art of Arezzo, Italy.

Jakub Hrůša will also lead a concert performance of Smetana’s opera Libuše. On two gala evenings on 28 and 30 May, he will conduct an ensemble of top soloists led by **Kateřina Kněžíková** and **Adam Plachetka**, accompanied by the Prague Philharmonic Choir and Czech Philharmonic. Hrůša will also be one of the main speakers at a conference that Prague Spring is preparing for the Year of Czech Music. With participation by leading representatives of the state as well as economists, philosophers and businessmen, a discussion will take place on the phenomenon of the Czech Republic as a superpower of classical music.

# Prague Spring will present nine world, one European and five Czech premieres

Prague Spring will not only celebrate the Year of Czech Music through composers from music history. “The festival is proud of contemporary Czech composers whose names are perhaps better-known abroad than in this country, just as it was with now-famous names in earlier times,” says festival director Pavel Trojan. The final concert on 3 June will feature the European premiere of Superorganisms, a piece composed by **Miroslav Srnka** on a joint commission from the Berliner Philharmoniker, NHK Symphony Orchestra Tokyo, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Orchestre de Paris, and the Czech Philharmonic. Expat Czech composer **Kryštof Mařatka** is very successful in France. Prague Spring has therefore invited the **Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France** to present the world premiere of his violin concerto along with French music at its concert on 27 May. The concerto bears the cryptic title SANCTUARIES – In the Depths of Cave Paintings, a reference to prehistoric images preserved deep in caves for tens of thousands of years.

One of the most important contributions of the Prague Spring Festival to the Czech concert scene is hosting first-class foreign orchestras. That will also be the case in the coming year. The legendary conductor **Riccardo Chailly** will return to Prague Spring after almost a quarter of a century to lead one of Italy’s most renowned ensembles, the **Filarmonica della Scala**, as its chief conductor. For the concert on 20 May, he has invited rising piano star **Alexander Malofeev** to join him for a performance of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky’s beautiful Piano Concerto in B-flat minor.

# Icons of early music Bach, Monteverdi and Rejcha are featured on the programme

The broadly conceived dramaturgy of Prague Spring naturally includes early music, with two icons of historically informed interpretation on the 2024 programme. The first of these is the Belgian ensemble **Collegium Vocale Gent**, which, under the direction of its founder, choirmaster and conductor **Philippe Herreweghe**, will present on 17 May a programme titled “Madrigals in Arcadia” that brings together secular works by Italian masters from the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries who drew inspiration from classical mythology. The other legend of historically informed performance on the festival programme is **Ton Koopman**, who will visit Prague Spring on 2 June with his **Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra and Choir** to perform three cantatas by Johann Sebastian Bach, masterpieces full of melodic invention, polyphony, impressive choruses and moving arias. In addition, flautist **Alexis Kossenko** and his colleagues will play period instruments in a chamber concert on 26 May at St. Agnes Convent dedicated to Antonín Rejcha, whom French musicians still regard as their own.

# Prague Offspring returns for a third appearance

For the third time, **Klangforum Wien** will be the resident ensemble of the Prague Offspring project, which will bring fresh sounds from the world of contemporary music over the course of one weekend. Under the direction of conductor and composer **Enno Poppe**, this Austrian ensemble will give world premieres of six new works commissioned by the Prague Spring Festival from Czech and Slovak composers. The ensemble will also commemorate Finnish composer **Kaija Saariaho** on the one-year anniversary of her death this year on 2 June. Members of the Vienna group will pass on their experience to young instrumentalists and composers in workshops and masterclasses. **Rebecca Saunders**, a British composer living in Berlin who shapes sound like a sculptor, will come to Prague as composer-in-residence. British soprano **Juliet Fraser** will appear as the soloist in Saunders’ composition Nether.

# A tribute to the piano in all its forms – even some hard to imagine

Do you know how many strings **50 pianos** have in total? Eleven thousand! And can you imagine what they would sound like if you arranged them in a circle, had them all play at the same time, and you sat in the middle? You can turn your imagination loose at two unique concerts at Forum Karlín, where on 2 June Klangforum Wien will continue its residency along with 50 pianists giving the Czech premiere of a spectacular new work by composer **Georg Friedrich Haas**, last year’s Prague Offspring composer-in-residence.

The Pianofonia Project by **Michal Rataj** and **Jan Trojan** offers another unusual look at the piano on 20 May at the National Technical Museum. They will explore the sounds made by individual parts of the piano in a tailor-made tribute to this technical marvel.

# SpringTEEN

For the first time, the 2024 Prague Spring Festival is devoting an entire day to programming for young audiences and families with children. On Saturday, 19 May, SpringTEEN will offer an enriching variety of concerts and creative workshops in the impressive spaces of St. Agnes Convent and its gardens. Live performances feature not only classical, but also jazz, pop, and electronic music. The British vocal ensemble **Apollo5** and Czech star **Milan Peroutka** will perform. Music technology will also have a place, as young spectators try their hand at making musical instruments from vegetables or pizza boxes in **workshops**. The concerts will be full of interactive moments, and with the help of QR codes we will definitely prove that “every Czech is a musician.” Listeners will also be treated to an open-air concert drawing inspiration from the surrounding Stínadla. All of this is complemented by a rich accompanying programme where participants will create a band using tablets and simple apps or make their own musical logo. The dramaturgy of this unusual programme was prepared by Klára Boudalová for Prague Spring.

Prague Spring has always used its artistic prestige to present debuts and young talents. The matinee concert will feature cellist **Vilém Vlček**, and conductor **Jiří Habart** will also be in the spotlight in the Prague Spring Debut performance on 21 May. This will be complemented by the traditional Prague Spring International Music Competition with its masterclasses and “duels” – new format showing different approaches to music interpretation.

# The Jubilee Edition of the Prague Spring Competition will showcase emerging violin and horn talents and introduce a new format for artistic duels

Traditionally, the festival is preceded by the Prague Spring International Music Competition, which will take place from 6–14 May 2024 with horn and violin players. The competition’s **75th anniversary** will be celebrated with a festival concert on 15 May featuring now-famous laureates **Gábor Boldoczki**, **Kateřina Javůrková**, **Victor Julien-Laferrière**, the **Pavel Haas Quartet** and others, accompanied by the **Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra**.

In the horn competition, the jury will be chaired by **André Cazalet**, teacher at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse in Paris and longtime horn soloist with the Orchestre de Paris. The Czech Republic will be represented in the jury by **Jindřich Petráš**, vice-dean and teacher of the Janáček Academy of Music and Performing Arts (JAMU) in Brno and **Zuzana Rzounková**, solohornist of the Prague Symphony Orchestra. She is also a teacher at the JAMU in Brno. The violin jury will be led by **Ida Kavafian**, pedagogue, chamber musician and member of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center in New York. The Czech representatives on the jury will be **Hana Kotková**, a member of the Trio des Alpes and a teacher at the Conservatorio della Svizzera italiana in Lugano, and **Josef Špaček**, former concertmaster of the Czech Philharmonic, who is now fully dedicated to his solo career.

Each year the competition repertoire includes a new contemporary work in the second round commissioned by Prague Spring from Czech composers. For 2024, one of the most successful Czech contemporary composers, Miroslav Srnka, has written a piece for the violin section titled Apprivoise-moi, while Kryštof Marek has composed a piece for the horn section titled Three Prague Paintings.

New in the 2024 competition are “duels” between Czech and foreign artists. Under the title “**Two Artists, Two Views**,” Czech compositions of the first round will be interpreted by two competition judges. In the horn section, Jindřich Petráš and Will Sanders will take part in this duel, and in the violin section, Josef Špaček and Ida Kavafian. Masterclasses with members of the jury have also become an integral part of the competition in recent years, and this time they will be led by the chairman of the horn jury, André Cazalet, and violinist Liviu Prunaru.

# Long-term support from partners

Prague Spring enjoys longstanding and enduring support from generous sponsors. The main supporters are the **Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic** and the **City of Prague**. Individual donors in the **Friends of Prague Spring** patronage club are also making increasingly significant contributions. The festival partners are **innogy Czech Republic**, the technology partner is **CETIN a.s.**, the concert partner is **Subterra a.s.** and the official car is **Mercedes-Benz PRAHA s.r.o.** The general media partner is **Czech Television**, the main media partner is **Czech Radio,** and the media partner is **Hospodářské noviny**.

Thanks to their support, the 79th Prague Spring Festival will be a spectacular celebration of the Year of Czech Music.

**Download photos**: <https://www.flickr.com/gp/prague-spring/0mbkeC20wp>
**Illustrational festival’s photos:** <https://flic.kr/s/aHsmVzw7KA>
**Link to the complete programme**: <https://festival.cz/en/koncerty/>
**Contact**: Kateřina Koutná, koutna@festival.cz, +420 776 257 390