



NEW YORK CITY | UKRAINIAN INSTITUTE OF AMERICA

# EUROPEAN LITERATURE NIGHT

EUNIC

OCTOBER 24TH | 2024



**Má Vlast: Smetana Pianographic – The Intertwining Lands**

October 22, 2024 | 7 PM | Bohemian National Hall

Bedřich Smetana, *Má Vlast* – for piano 4 handsPiano: Maki Namekawa and Dennis Russell Davies  
Visuals: Cori O'Leary

Selected texts by Adalbert Stifter

Moderated by Michael Beckerman

Part one, 40 min

Text from *Witiko* by Adalbert Stifter*Vyšehrad**Vlava**Šárka*

Part two, 44 min

Text from *Der Waldgänger* (The Wanderer in the Forest) by Adalbert Stifter  
*Z českých luhů a hájů* (From Bohemian Fields and Groves)*Tábor**Blaník*

**Bedřich Smetana's cycle of symphonic poems, titled *Má vlast* (My Country), is the pinnacle of Czech Romantic orchestral music and remains its most beloved work. Shortly after completing the cycle, Smetana created piano four-hands transcriptions of all six pieces. As a skilled pianist, he transformed his orchestral scores into compelling counterparts that surpass simple reductions. Smetana's virtuosic arrangements are fully capable of standing alone on stage, providing a rich and fulfilling experience for audiences.**

**Bedřich Smetana and Adalbert Stifter both dedicated their masterpieces to landscapes that are geographically, historically, and culturally intertwined in the Czech Republic, Austria, and Germany. This landscape, stretching between the Danube and the Vltava, represents a shared historical habitat and a vital cross-border ecosystem at the heart of**

Europe. In an era marked by fear and rejection of the "other," we aim to harness the unifying power of art, music, and literature.

**The 200th anniversary of Bedřich Smetana's birth and his remarkable works present a wonderful opportunity for this endeavor.** In particular, the piano version of Smetana's famous cycle *Má Vlast* evokes a nostalgic, fragile quality, as the self-assured national pride of the 19th century gives way to uncertainty about our current identities and how we define ourselves as societies and individuals today.

**Visualizations** are a key component of the *Pianographic* project, responding in real time to the music and allowing musicians to "play" the visuals, unlike traditional graphics. In *Má Vlast*, the visualizations capture the unique atmosphere of the arrangement while exploring **generative artificial intelligence**. Most images, except for a few historical drawings of Tábor, were created using AI based on Smetana and Zelený's descriptions. Stifter's landscape narratives, and historical accounts of Jan Hus's trial.

**These images are entirely imaginative, reflecting the cultural repository that informs modern AI.** They evoke interpretations—sometimes stereotypical, sometimes fantastical. Just as Smetana revives memories and myths of his era, these AI-generated visuals reinterpret their history and cultural identities.

**The Year of Czech Music** is a distinguished event that began in 1924 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Bedřich Smetana. With a few exceptions, it has been celebrated every decade since, gradually expanding to honor other notable Czech composers and musicians, including Antonín Dvořák, Josef Suk, Leoš Janáček, and Bohuslav Martinů. For the third time, the Czech Centres will actively participate in these celebrations, incorporating music into their international programming.

**This year, the Year of Czech Music will embrace a broader spectrum by not only featuring classical music but also highlighting diverse genres.** Attendees can look forward to an exciting showcase of the contemporary Czech music scene, celebrating its rich variety and vibrancy.