



Vítězslav  
**NOVAK**  
(1870-1949)

**In the Tatra Mountains**  
Lady Godiva Overture • Eternal Longing

**Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra**  
**JoAnn Falletta**

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Born into a cultured family, Vítězslav Novák began his life in music as a child with lessons on the piano and violin. By age 16 his gift for composition was manifest with piano pieces and songs. In turn, Novák pursued advanced studies in composition at the Prague Conservatory, where he became a pupil of Antonín Dvořák.

Shortly thereafter he was awarded a generous state scholarship and another from the Conservatory. But perhaps the greatest support came from Johannes Brahms who recommended his works to Simrock, Europe's most prestigious music publisher.

Given Novák's keen interest in folk idioms, his celebrity in Czechoslovakia took on cult status, for a time eclipsing even Leoš Janáček in popular appeal. However, at age 26 a profound change suddenly appeared in Novák's style: *cherchez la femme* – Novák fell deeply in love with a certain Josefina Javurkova, a lovely and gifted young singer. However, she declined to return his affections. Writing about the wounded composer-swain, biographer Miloš Schnierer notes: "From then on a strongly personal synthesis of eroticism, nature and folklore can be traced in all of Novák's works." For reference we should add that – sixteen years later – Novák found himself happily married to the singer Marie Praskova, a former Conservatory student.

Novák's full catalogue reveals a trove of inspiration, drawn especially from the gamut of European literature. Beyond his native Czech, he was fluent in English, Russian, German, French and Spanish, and often drew his picturesque motifs from those sources.

V *Tatrách* (In the Tatra Mountains) was composed in 1902, inspired by Novák's journeys in the magnificent Tatra mountain range between the border of Czechoslovakia and Poland. The music begins in the lush, mezzo-alto register of the orchestral palette, with the string choir as the underlying canvas, with winds and brass adding the needed earth-tone hues. Novák's poetic narrative about the bucolic score serves as an excellent itinerary for the sonic effects. Were the composer on the scene today he

would have doubtless had a major career in Hollywood. We note the suggestive turns of phrase in the woodwinds, with cinema-styled brass in full herald, all blended by luxurious timbres in the strings. On the title page of the score, Novák writes about the musical soundscape:

"An urgent mood before a threatening thunderstorm: Fog crawls along over the steep mountain clefts Nevertheless the sun emerges straight through the clouds. – and the serenely gloomy landscape holds itself still for a breathless short time. Then dazzling flashes of lightning flicker up and down. The storm breaks. Its rage pours over the granite cliffs of the Tatras. And after a hard battle – peace returns. The setting sun gilds the peaks of the mountains and from afar arrive the ringing tones of the evening bells.

Then over the Tatra mountains the night becomes one, blended with pearls gleaming through a veil of haze."

Completed in 1907, Novák's *Overture to Lady Godiva* was inspired by the legendary tale first noted in about A.D. 1300, then popularised by a long series of authors after about 1600. The versions by Michael Drayton, (1563-1631) and Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-92) are perhaps best known. However, for his source narrative, Novák selected an intriguing romantic version by Jaroslav Vrchlický.

The storyline of Novák's *Lady Godiva* is at once heroic with comic subtlety, and concerns the historic Earl of Coventry and his famously beautiful wife, Lady Godiva. The score for the *Overture* offers the following commentary:

"Novák was engaged to write a 'Concert Overture' for the opening of the new Prague Municipal Theatre. The occasion was marked by a new play, *Lady Godiva*, by the Czech poet, Jaroslav Vrchlický".

"Set during the 11th century, the drama concerns Lady Godiva, who rode naked through the streets of Coventry at mid-day as a protest against a tax levied by

her husband, Count Leofric of Coventry. The two protagonists are clearly contrasted in their music: Leofric makes his entry *feroce* in the key of C minor and Lady Godiva in E flat major, represented by a tender *Andante*.

"The new overture, one of Novák's most powerful works, was written in the unbelievably short space of two days, on October 9 and 10, 1907. Intended for the debut of the new theatre, It was first performed on November 24, 1907. The musicians comprised members of the Czech Philharmonic as well as players from the Orchestra of the National Theatre, conducted by Ladislav Čelanský."

Novák's evocative *Eternal Longing* was completed in 1905, based on stories by the Danish author Hans Christian Andersen (1805-75). However, as a literary source for the tone poem, Novák again relied on a setting by Jaroslav Vrchlický.

About the score, historian John Tyrrell notes: "The music proposes a simple narrative based on one of H.C. Andersen's prose poems but also allows the depiction of natural phenomena such as the 'strange forms' that lurk in the ocean or within the flight of swans. It is ravishing

music, achieved by comparatively simple means. But like much of Novák's music of the time, its simplicity and confidence is deceptive."

Gentle shimmers in the strings under enchanted colours from the oboe and harp provide an evocative opening. In ever gradual turns, orchestral timbres create a mysterious undertone. Novák reveals a decided influence from the tone poems of Dvořák and Richard Strauss, as the rhapsodic canvas beams with brazen lustre and cryptic rhythms. *Eternal Longing* concludes with a mirror of the opening ambience, like a reverie recalled.

Edward Yadzinski

\*For reference, Jaroslav Vrchlický (1853-1912) ranks among the foremost writers in Czechoslovakia, noted for his lyrical poetry, plays and diverse essays. Vrchlický worked in several languages, including Italian, German, English and French, translating the works of Dante, Goethe, Shelley, Whitman, Poe and Baudelaire.



## Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra

Photo: Enid Bloch Photography



Founded in 1935, the GRAMMY® Award-winning Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, under the direction of Music Director JoAnn Falletta, is Buffalo's leading cultural ambassador and presents more than 120 Classics, Pops and Youth Concerts each year. Since 1940, the orchestra's permanent home has been Kleinhans Music Hall, a National Historic Landmark, designed by Eiel and Eero Saarinen, one of the finest concert halls in the United States. The BPO has toured widely across the United States and Canada including the Florida Friends Tour with JoAnn Falletta in March 2010. The BPO performed at Carnegie Hall as a participant in the *Spring For Music* festival in 2013, as one of five orchestras selected from a national field. This was the orchestra's 24th appearance at Carnegie Hall and its first since its performance there under JoAnn Falletta in June 2004. Over the decades, the BPO has matured in stature under leading conductors, including William Steinberg, Josef Krips, Lukas Foss, Michael Tilson Thomas, Maximiano Valdés, Semyon Bychkov and Julius Rudel. During the tenure of JoAnn Falletta the BPO has rekindled its distinguished history of radio broadcasts and recordings, including the release of 24 new albums of a highly diverse repertoire on the Naxos and Beau Fleuve labels. The Philharmonic's Naxos recording of composer John Corigliano's *Mr. Tambourine Man: Seven Poems of Bob Dylan* (8.559331), featuring soprano Hila Plitmann, won GRAMMYs® in two categories of the three for which it was nominated: Classical Vocal Performance and Classical Contemporary Composition.

## JoAnn Falletta

Photo: Guerin Blask



JoAnn Falletta serves as Music Director of the Buffalo Philharmonic and Virginia Symphony in the United States and Principal Conductor of the Ulster Orchestra in Northern Ireland. She has guest conducted over a hundred orchestras in North America, and many of the most prominent orchestras in Europe, Asia, South America and Africa and is the Principal Guest Conductor of the Phoenix Symphony and Brevard Music Center of North Carolina. Recipient of the Seaver/National Endowment for the Arts Conductors Award, winner of the Stokowski Competition, and the Toscanini, Ditson and Bruno Walter conducting awards, Falletta has also received eleven ASCAP awards and serves on the U.S. National Council on the Arts. A champion of American music, she has presented over five hundred works by American composers including 110 world premières. Her Naxos recordings include the double GRAMMY® Award-winning disc of works by John Corigliano and GRAMMY® nominated discs of works by Tyberg, Dohnányi, Fuchs, Schubert, Respighi, Gershwin, Hailstork and Holst.

[www.joannfalletta.com](http://www.joannfalletta.com)

Emerging from the fertile background of Bohemian nationalism, Vítězslav Novák's music achieved cult status in his homeland for its richness of melody and full-blown romantic orchestral colour. The lush timbres and monumental solemnity of *In the Tatra Mountains* were inspired by the composer's journeys in this magnificent region. *Eternal Longing* is based on a poem by Hans Christian Andersen, while the dramatic *Lady Godiva Overture*, complete with tolling bells at the finale, was written by Novák in two days and is considered one of his most powerful works.

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| <b>1</b> | <b>V Tatrách (In the Tatra Mountains)<br/>– Symphonic Poem, Op. 26 (1902)</b> | <b>16:30</b> |
| <b>2</b> | <b>Lady Godiva – Overture, Op. 41 (1907)</b>                                  | <b>15:40</b> |
| <b>3</b> | <b>O věčné touze (Eternal Longing),<br/>Op. 33 (1905)</b>                     | <b>20:37</b> |

**Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra**  
**JoAnn Falletta**

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and on 18th March, 2016 (tracks 2 and 3)

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