Overture to *The Bartered Bride*

Instrumentation: piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, strings

Duration: 7 minutes.

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**THE COMPOSER** – BEDRICH SMETANA (1824-1884) – Smetana was known mostly in the 1850s for his successful piano institute and nationalistic Czech fervor. His moment as a composer, particularly of operas, came later in 1866 when *The Brandenburgers in Bohemia* premiered to great success in Prague. The work won Smetana the Harrach’s Opera Competition that year and made it possible to start new projects but, sadly, the music of *Brandenburgers* is largely forgotten today.

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**THE HISTORY** – No so, for his next project. *The Bartered Bride*, written during the same three-year span as *Brandenburgers* and also premiered in Prague during 1866, has remained in the repertoire ever since. Where *Brandenburgers* was serious, historical and a bit revolutionary politically, *The Bartered Bride* was all comedy. The story proceeds as follows. A young woman is set to be given to the son of a rich man, but she loves another so the local marriage broker is forced to bribe her lover. He refuses but no matter, all ends well enough anyhow when it is discovered that he is rich as well. Thank goodness! Her parents won’t need to suffer after all! The overture of the opera is a common concert piece these days. It draws mostly from the music at the end of Act II and presents a persuasive and charming look at the Bohemian national character. Rustic and sophisticated and very proud, all of the elements coexist in perfect balance. Smetana was, whether he knew it or not at that moment, lighting a flame that would feed the patriotic torches of Dvorak and Janacek in later years and he still deserves credit for establishing an identity for his people during some particularly troubling continental stress.

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**THE WORLD** – 1866 saw the passing of the Civil Rights Act in America and the beginning of the Austro-Prussian War. Also that year, Venetia was annexed by Italy, the Royal Aeronautical Society was formed in London and Dostoyevsky published *Crime and Punishment*.

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**THE CONNECTION** – *The Bartered Bride* Overture was last performed by the CCSO in 2016 under the direction of Maestro John Giordano.