

There are few works of art that literally everybody knows, but Smetana's opera *The Bartered Bride* is undoubtedly one of them. Like the national anthem, it is part of our national and cultural identity. And so it is no accident that we find this opera among the few works performed on festive state occasions.

*The Bartered Bride* still speaks to us despite the accretions of time, through its humanity and through its story, which is comprehensible and in essence still valid today. This is no faded musical number that we only dust off for some important anniversary. After more than a hundred forty years, *The Bartered Bride* is still with us – with the Czech nation, as a witness to and reflection of its life, its historical upheavals, its times of prosperity and times of decline, its freedom and its bondage. It fortifies us in times of threat, and in happy times sounds forth with sincere merriment.

It is an honour and a pleasure for me that I was able to accept the role of patron for the gala performance of *The Bartered Bride* on the occasion of celebrations of Czech Statehood Day. Bedřich Smetana has a place among the heroes of the Czech nation – heroes who at the same time link us with Europe, with its culture and tradition, establishing a connection that is more than symbolic.

Jan Fischer  
Prime Minister of the Czech Republic